

‘All Power to the Soviets’

The Eve of the October Revolution

In This Lesson

- How and why public opinion in Petrograd shifted toward the Bolsheviks from **August of 1917**.
- Lenin's campaign for a Bolshevik-led insurrection versus popular support for giving 'all power to the Soviets' under the direction of the Petrograd Soviet
- The Garrison Crisis and the formation of the Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC)
- Trotsky and the MRC's rejection of the authority of the Provisional Government
- Kerensky's countermove

April Theses (April 1917)

○ Returning from Exile, Lenin calls for:

1. Withdrawal from war
2. Move to second stage of revolution (socialism)
3. No support for Provisional Government
4. Transfer of power to the soviets
5. Abolition of police, army and bureaucracy and equal salaries
6. Nationalization of all land
7. Consolidation of all banks into one national bank
8. Control of production by soviets
9. A party congress for a 'commune state'
10. A new International

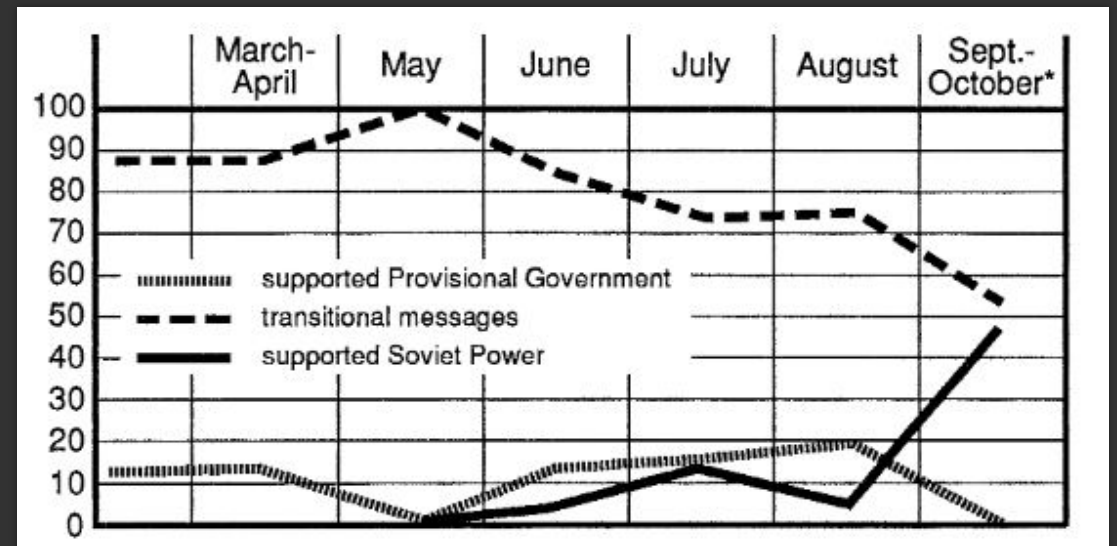
Democratic Revolution or Coup?

- Melancon: Russia's lower orders:
 1. Suspicious of dual power from the outset
 2. Scant affection for Provisional Government
 3. Tended to view the soviets as the sole defenders of their interests.
- Historical revision: a reflection of democratic mass aspirations or a coup?



The Shift in Popular Support

- Melancon:
- Both the Duma Committee and the Petrograd Soviet were self-appointed; neither had firm authority.
- Messages in support of the Provisional Government end once Kerensky's regime was implicated in the Kornilov affair.
- 'All power to the soviets' seen as path to 'a true people's government'
- Entire bourgeoisie seen as 'counterrevolutionary'
- 'wait-and-see' attitude ends after Kornilov affair



Source: Melancon

February 2017: a 'bourgeois revolution'?

- Melancon: Early histories tended to sharply contrast the February and October Revolutions.
- But the working masses in Russia saw 'the revolution' as leading to socialism from February on: 'From the beginning, a socialist government ... was the main goal of most mass organizations.'
- [However] 'One-party dictatorship played no role in the thinking of workers, soldiers and peasants.'
- Support for an 'all-socialist government from the Bolsheviks to the Popular Socialists' indicates the limitations of 'Bolshevization'

Lenin blasts his own party



Source: wsws.org

- **27 Sept:** From Exile, Lenin writes 'Heroes of Fraud and the Mistakes of the Bolsheviks' and 'The Crisis has matured':
 - We would be 'miserable traitors to the proletarian cause' if we delayed any longer. Resigns from BCC.
 - Bolshevik Central Committee ignores these letters and his resignation, publishes earlier letters suggesting willingness to compromise.
 - BCC members concerned:
 - Whether army will support them
 - Whether delay will cost them support

Pre-Parliament: the Bolsheviks walk out

- **7 Oct:** Pre-Parliament meeting in Mariinsky Palace features speeches by:
 - Kerensky
 - Breshko-Breshkovskaia
 - Trotsky: 'The revolution and the people are in danger'
- Bolsheviks walking out sparks sensation and speculation



Kerensky Addressing the Pre-Parliament on
October 24 (Nov 6), 1917

Source: [gettyimages.com](https://www.gettyimages.com)

The Garrison Crisis

- **Aug 20:** Germans seize Riga, Latvia
- **Mid-Oct:** Germany seizes islands north of Riga; entire Russia fleet blocked in Gulf of Finland.
- Kerensky blames 'Kronstadters': announces plans to move most garrisoned soldiers in Petrograd to front.
- Garrison units respond with antigovernment resolutions inviting the Petrograd Soviet to seize power.
- Bolsheviks concerned that troops at front, resenting garrisoned troops, could be used to attack revolutionaries in Petrograd and begin to spread fears of a second Kornilov Affair.





Source: alamy.com

Creation of the Military Revolutionary Committee

A large crowd of men, many in military uniforms, gathered in a hall for a meeting. The men are seated in rows, filling the room. Some are standing, and the atmosphere appears serious and organized.

Oct 9 (22) Petrograd Soviet Meeting

- ⑥ **Menshevik-SR Resolution:** intended to foster cooperation with the Provisional Government in preparing garrison for troops and plan defenses of Petrograd.
- ⑥ **Bolshevik Resolution:** calls for a 'Revolutionary Defense Committee'. Trotsky says Kerensky may be ready to sacrifice Petrograd to the Germans.
- ⑥ Menshevik-SR resolution passes, reflecting concern that the Bolshevik resolution could undermine war efforts.
- ⑥ Result: a '**Military Revolutionary Committee**' would be formed on Oct 11 (24) and would meet on Oct 20 (Nov 2).

Oct 10: Lenin vs. Kamenev and Zinoviev

LENIN



Source: tvtropes.org

- 'The majority is with us now' ...
- 'the political situation is fully ripe for the transfer of power'
- Lenin scratches out a call for an insurrection (now a historic document)

KAMENEV and ZINOVIEV

- Seeking a nonviolent political course
- a 'defensive posture'



Source: mas.org.ar

Ц. К. признает, что как между-
народное положение русской револю-
ции (возражение в пользу в Гер-
мании, как крайнее проявление
национализма в мировой социалисти-
ческой революции, застав угрожа-
ющая империализму с целью
удержания революции в России)
— так и военное положение
(несомненное решение русской
буржуазии и Керенского к сдаче
Питера немцам), — так и
пробуждение болюшевизма
пролетарской партии в Совет-
ском, — все это в связи с
кредитными возмущениями
и с новым народным
и в вост. Европе

Lenin's Oct 10 (23) Resolution

- 1st page of Lenin's resolution calling for an immediate insurrection, adopted by the Bolshevik Central Committee on Oct 10 (23), 1917, it reads:

'The Central Committee acknowledges that the international situation as it affects the Russian revolution ... as well as the military situation ... and the fact that the proletarian party has gained majorities in the soviets—all this, coupled with the peasant insurrection and the swing of popular confidence to our party, and finally, the obvious preparations for a second Kornilovshchina ... makes armed insurrection the order of the day.

'Recognizing that an armed uprising is inevitable and the time fully ripe, the Central Committee instructs all party organizations to be guided accordingly and to consider and decide all practical questions from this standpoint (the Northern Region Congress of Soviets, the withdrawal of troops from Petrograd, the action of [comrades] in Moscow and Minsk, etc.)'

'Bolsheviks: What is your purpose?'

- Speculation about an imminent Bolshevik uprising spreading across Russia.
- At the **Oct 14 (27)** plenary of the Petrograd Soviet, Fedor Dan, a Menshevik, asks:
- *'We must ask the comrade Bolsheviks candidly, what is the purpose of their politics? ... The Bolsheviks must announce from this podium whether or not they are calling upon the revolutionary proletariat to come out ... I want a yes-or-no answer.'*
- Riazanoff answers simply: 'We want peace and land.'



Fedor Dan

Source: wikipedia.org

To seize or not to seize [power]? That is the question.

- Lenin and supporters campaign for an insurrection while Kamenev and Zinoviev campaign just as vigorously against.
- **Oct 15 (28)** Bolshevik Central Committee Meeting: Nevsky reports the party is not prepared for an insurrection.
- **Oct 16 (29)** Lenin gives his 'best address':
 - Cooperation with Mensheviks and SRs has already failed
 - The mood of the masses is hard to gauge
 - 'Power must be seized immediately'
- Zinoviev doubts that success is assured.
- Kamenev resigns, publishes statement in Gorky's *Novaia Zhizn'* paper. Lenin furious, calls for his dismissal. Bolsheviks sharply divided.

Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1917

<http://marxists.org/>



Y. Sverdlov 1881-1938
Soviet Premier
Shot



N. Bukharin 1888-1938
Politburo
Shot



Y. Sverdlov 1885-1919
President CC
Typhoid



J. Stalin 1879-1953
General Secretary
Cerebral Hemorrhage



G. Zinoviev 1883-1936
Politburo
Shot



M. Uritsky 1873-1937
NKVD
Civil War



L. Kamenev 1883-1936
Chairman CC
Shot



V. Lenin 1870-1924
Soviet Premier
Stroke



A. Kollantai 1872-1952
Ambassador Norway
Heart Attack



I. Smilga 1892-1938
Military Rev. Comm.
Shot



A. Joffe 1883-1937
Commissar Foreign Affairs
Suicide



A. Joffe 1883-1937
Commissar Foreign Affairs
Suicide



A. Bubnov 1883-1940
Directorate Red Army
Died in prison



F. Dzerzhinsky 1877-1926
Comm. NKVD
Heart Attack



M.K. Muranov 1873-1959
CC
Natural Causes



G. Lomov 1888-1938
VSNKh
Shot



S. Shaumyan 1871-1937
Baku CPC
Civil War



S. Shaumyan 1871-1937
Baku CPC
Civil War



E. S. Artem 1883-1921
Comm. NKVD
Train Crash



V. Milyutin 1884-1937
VSNKh
Shot



E. Stassova 1873-1966
Secretary CC
Natural Causes



N. Krestinsky 1883-1938
Comm. Intl. Affairs
Shot



P. Dzhabardze 1879-1937
Baku CPC
Civil War



P. Dzhabardze 1879-1937
Baku CPC
Civil War



G. Sokolnikov 1886-1939
Commissar for Finances
Died in prison



A.S. Kiselev 1879-1937
VSNKh
Shot

Source: marxists.org

Lenin's Evolving Agenda

- The Oct 9 (22) Menshevik-SR resolution leading to the creation of the Military Revolutionary Committee not intended to lead to overthrow of Provisional Government.
- Lenin: insurrection must happen before the next meeting of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets, now rescheduled from Oct 18 to 25.
- Bolshevik Military Organization asks Lenin for primacy in the insurrection; he demurs.
- Lenin beginning to see the Military Revolutionary Committee's importance.



Source: Jacobinmag.com

The Bolshevik Military Organization

A black and white photograph showing a massive crowd of men, many in military uniforms, gathered in a large hall for a meeting. The men are seated in rows, filling the room from the foreground to the back. Some are standing, and the atmosphere appears to be one of a significant historical event.

Oct 16 (29) Petrograd Soviet Meeting

- ⑥ 'Coming Out' (insurrection) debated.
- ⑥ Consensus: 'coming out' only supported if it is organized by and through the Petrograd Soviet / Congress of Soviets.
- ⑥ **Fedor Dan:** Soldiers need to prepare for:
 1. German Invasion
 2. Counterrevolution; OR
 3. Insurrection
- ⑥ **Trotsky:** Receives broad support in call for:
 1. Transfer of power to the soviets
 2. An immediate armistice
 3. Land for the peasants

'We don't recognize your commissars'

- Oct 20 (Nov 2): Military Revolutionary Committee's first meeting to plan defenses of Petrograd.
- Oct 21 (Nov 3): MRC leader Sadovsky visits Winter Palace.
 - Commander Polkovnikov for the Provisional Government: 'orders not signed by us are invalid'
 - Sadovsky: 'We don't recognize your commissars ... if they break the law we will arrest them'
 - Upon MRC leaders' return to Smolny, Trotsky drafts a categorical repudiation of the Provisional Government's authority over garrison troops.
 - By any standards, these actions amounted to mutiny and insurrection.



Oct 22 (Nov 4) Petrograd Soviet Meeting

- Held in the House of the People Opera House
- Ecstatic mood
- **Trotsky** urges vote for soldiers to prepare defenses of Petrograd against Germans or the Provisional Government: 'Let this vote of yours be your vow with all your strength and at any sacrifice to support the Soviet that has taken on itself the glorious burden of bringing victory of the revolution to a conclusion and of giving land, bread and peace!'
- 'We swear it!' responded the crowd



Source: Google

Source: Vancouver Sun

- When Military Revolution Committee rescinds resolution repudiating the authority of the Provisional Government, Kerensky sees it as a tactical delay and urges the arrest of the entire Committee.

His advisors suggest arresting only the leaders as well as freed Bolshevik leaders (including Trotsky and Kamenev) and the shutting down of Bolshevik (and far right wing) newspapers.

Trotsky responds with 'Directive No. 1'.

Kerensky Makes the First Move



Summary

- Kerensky's plans for moving garrison soldiers to the front seen as plans for another counterrevolutionary attack on Petrograd
- As support for Kerensky's Provisional Government crumbled, popular support for the Bolsheviks and for giving 'all power to the soviets' steadily increased.
- 'All power to the soviets' understood as support for the Petrograd Soviet not as 'all power to the Bolsheviks'
- Kerensky overestimated his support when he called for arrest of revolutionary leaders and shutting down of newspapers