

The charismatic Bolshevik leader, born Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, helped to overthrow three hundred years of tsarist rule in Russia. When he took power, in 1917, he and his revolutionary movement introduced communism to the Russian people.

Introducing communism, to Russia, included far more than replacing the Tsar. The Tsar, and his ancestors, were *political* rulers. Communism is an *economic* system in which the state (or government)—instead of individuals and corporations—owns the means of production (such as factories, businesses and agricultural lands).

What did Lenin (and the Bolsheviks) need to do, beyond overthrowing the Tsar, to transform Russia from its existing economic system (based on capitalism) to a different economic system (based on communism)?

According to Lenin, one way to destroy the capitalistic underpinning of Russia was to destroy the value of Russia's ruble (the Russian equivalent of the American dollar). In 1919, he made this statement (translated from Russian into English):

Hundreds of thousands of ruble notes are being issued daily by our treasury. This is done, not in order to fill the coffers of the State with practically worthless paper, but with the deliberate intention of destroying the value of money as a means of payment. There is no justification for the existence of money in the Bolshevik state, where the necessities of life shall be paid for by work alone.

Experience has taught us it is impossible to root out the evils of capitalism merely by confiscation and expropriation, for however ruthlessly such measures may be applied, astute speculators and obstinate survivors of the capitalist classes will always manage to evade them and continue to corrupt the life of the community. The simplest way to exterminate the very spirit of capitalism is therefore to flood the country with notes of a high face-value without financial guarantees of any sort.

Already even a hundred-ruble note is almost valueless in Russia. Soon even the simplest peasant will realize that it is only a scrap of paper, not worth more than the rags from which it is manufactured. Men will cease to covet and hoard it so soon as they discover it will not buy anything, and the great illusion of the value and power of money, on which the capitalist state is based will have been definitely destroyed.

This is the real reason why our presses are printing ruble bills day and night, without rest. But this simple process must, like all measures of Bolshevism, be applied all over the world in order to render it effective. Fortunately, the frantic financial debauch in which all the Governments have indulged during the war [that is, the First World War] has paved the way everywhere for its application. (Quoted in the 1920 Annual Report of the Director of the Mint, by the United States Bureau of the Mint, at page 225.)

Put differently ... according to Lenin, one way to damage (or destroy) a capitalist system (in which money is used as a method of buying and selling goods and services) is to “debauch” (as Lenin says) the very currency (money) which the people in that country use to buy and sell goods and services.

Because ... if the money used by a capitalist-based country is “debauched”—meaning that it is no-longer any good—then the entire economic system is at risk of failing.

For Lenin, destroying the economic base of a capitalistic system would be a good thing. To him, if capitalism is completely destroyed—so the ability of anyone to make a profit on anything is totally eliminated—then communism, as an economic system, could replace capitalism. His goal was for this to happen throughout the entire world.

For communism to flourish, in Russia—as a starting point—Lenin and his political party (the Bolsheviks) also needed to establish a form of government which would support a communist-based economic system. That need is what led to the Bolsheviks' use of soviets (councils) throughout the country.

Russia's first soviet (council) was organized during 1905 in the city of Ivanovo-Voznesensk. At that time, the Russian textile industry was largely centered in that part of the country and workers were fed-up with very bad working conditions. Around 30,000 people went on strike, then formed a council (soviet) to negotiate with employers.

This council (soviet) was not just a strike committee. It consisted of 110 delegates elected by roughly 30,000 striking workers. And ... the Ivanovo-Voznesensk soviet had power:

The Soviet made free use of the public meeting halls, without asking for permission from anyone, for its assemblies and meetings. This right had been conquered by force, and nothing and no one could prevent the working class from exercising it, not even the massacre carried out on July 3 [1905] by the Czarist authorities.

Naturally, it was the Soviet that led the strike. It allowed no separate negotiations; no one could return to work without the Soviet's agreement... (See "The Soviets: Their Origin, Development and Functions," a 1932 essay by Andreu Nin, co-founder of POUM, the Workers Party of Marxist Unification, a Spanish political party which had influence—particularly in Catalonia—during the 1930s).

The Bolsheviks recognized how they could use these worker-created councils (soviets) to create sweeping change in Russia. When they started the October Revolution, in 1917, the Bolsheviks seized control of the Petrograd (St Petersburg) council (changing its name to the Petrograd Soviet).

Similar councils (soviets) were organized throughout Russia—in the villages, in the towns, in the cities. The Supreme Soviet was the supreme council designed to act like a parliament.

When Lenin said "All power to the Soviets," he meant that the power of governing Russia—after the Bolshevik Revolution—would be given to the various soviets located throughout the country.

Events, however, did not quite turn-out that way. The greatest amount of power, during and after the October Revolution, was vested in Lenin and his closest associates.

Some people welcomed Lenin and his ideas; others reviled him and his methods. History will ultimately judge whether his changes—including replacing capitalism with communism—were best for the country.

Winston Churchill, writing of Lenin in *The Aftermath - Being a Sequel to The World Crisis*, observed a paradox about the man who transformed the ideas of Karl Marx into real-life events:

[Lenin] alone could have led Russia into the enchanted quagmire; he alone could have found the way back to the causeway. He saw; he turned; he perished ... The Russian people were left floundering in the bog. Their worst misfortune was his birth, their next-worst - his death. (Churchill, quoted by Richard Langworth in *The Definitive Wit of Winston Churchill*, at page 113.)

This video clip—from *Lenin: Revolutionary*—includes considerable historical footage about the background, and impact, of Vladimir Lenin.

See, also:

Vladimir Lenin and the Bolshevik Revolution

Lenin: Rare Recording of His Voice

Credits:

From *Lenin: Revolutionary*.

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