



Leader of the Bolshevik Revolution, in Russia, Vladimir I. Lenin became the first head of the Soviet Union. He believed that a Tsar should not rule Russia—even if the Romanov family had been in power for three centuries—and he believed the only way to bring-about political change was to have a revolution. In Swiss exile, because he feared arrest by Tsarist forces, Vladimir Lenin was biding his time until he could return to his country.

After Russia's "February Revolution" occurred, in 1917, Lenin believed he could end his exile and return to his homeland. He made a plan to come back during April of that year.

World War I was still going on, so Lenin needed to negotiate a "safe passage" from Switzerland (which was neutral) to Russia (which was fighting the war against Germany).

German officials agreed to Lenin's safe passage:

- They were hopeful that Russian revolutionaries, returning to their homeland, would encourage more rebellion.
- Rebellion, the Germans believed, could lead to Russia's exit from the war.
- Russia's exit from the war might give Germany a better chance to win the war.

On the train, returning to Russia, Lenin finalized a document known as "The April Theses." It contained Lenin's thoughts on "The Task of the Proletariat In the Current Revolution." In short, it laid-out how Bolsheviks in Russia, and in exile, should play a role in changing the political structure of their country.

Lenin did not try to soften his approach to Revolution. He also made clear he did not support the form of government in place after the "February Revolution." He used words like this about the existing power structure:

No support for the provisional Government; the utter falsities of all its promises shall be made clear...

Lenin had his "April Theses" published in *Pravda*, the Bolshevik's newspaper. Then Lenin read the document during his presentation at the All-Russia Conference of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies during April of 1917.

This image, from the Russian State Archives, depicts Lenin addressing those Conference attendees.

Anyone who read the document, or heard Lenin's presentation, would have understood Lenin's revolutionary objectives. Some of his fellow revolutionaries, who wanted to work with the Provisional Government, disagreed with his approach.

At the end of the day, however, it was the members of the Petrograd Soviet who agreed with Lenin and gave him, and the Bolsheviks, the power base Lenin needed to take over the government.

With Russians (including fighting troops initially inspired by their Tsar) exhausted by the demands of World War I, and demonstrations occurring—like the massive Nevsky Prospect gathering in St Petersburg (Petrograd) during July of 1917—Lenin and his comrades were able to persuade enough individuals to follow the Bolshevik political ideology. This led to the "October Revolution" in 1917.

One of the first things which the Bolsheviks did, when they assumed power, was to end Russia's involvement in WWI. No longer would the Tsar ever lead troops or have his soldiers support the status quo (as they did during the February Revolution of 1917).

During Lenin's time in power, the Last Tsar—Nicholas II—together with his wife and children—were executed in July of 1918.

Lenin was not-quite 54 years old when he had a massive stroke, and died, on the 21st of January, 1924. To this day, his death puzzles doctors, and who he was - as a man - is still somewhat of a mystery.

Very few recordings of Lenin's voice survive. Although he introduced sweeping changes, and those changes caused misery for many people, Lenin was still widely mourned when he died.

Credits:

Image, described above, online via the Russian State Archives.

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