

[These Bitesize notes are from 2015 and have been taken down.]

Lenin and the Bolshevik revolution

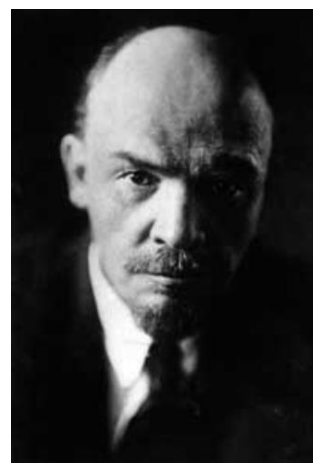
'The February revolution was spontaneous; the October revolution was planned.' You may well have heard or read other statements like this about the two Russian revolutions of 1917, but what is the evidence?

The story of the October revolution

	<p>Peace, land, bread</p> <p>April: the German government helps the Bolshevik leader Lenin return to Russia. He publishes the 'April Theses', offering people: 'Peace, bread, land', and proclaims: 'All power to the Soviets'.</p> <p>July: the Bolsheviks try to take power in a revolution called the July Days, but are defeated.</p>
	<p>Bolsheviks</p> <p>August: a pro-tsarist, General Kornilov, leads a revolt against the Provisional Government. The government has to ask the Bolsheviks for help to defeat him. As a result, the Bolsheviks become so popular that:</p> <p>September: the Bolsheviks take control of the Petrograd Soviet, and the prominent Bolshevik Leon Trotsky, leader of the Red Guards, becomes its president.</p>
	<p>Kronstadt sailors</p> <p>6th November: late at night, Trotsky's Red Guards helped by the Kronstadt sailors move quickly to take over the bridges and the telephone exchange. They cut off Petrograd from the rest of Russia.</p>
<p>AURORA</p>	<p>Aurora fires a shell</p> <p>7 November: next, the Red Guards take over government buildings, the banks and the railway station. Finally, at 9.40pm, signalled by a shell fired from the cruiser Aurora, they move in and take over the Winter Palace, the headquarters of the Provisional Government. There is no resistance.</p>

Why did the Bolsheviks succeed in November 1917?

1. **The failure of the Provisional Government** - the Provisional Government had lost all support. When it was attacked, no one lifted a finger to help it.
2. **Appeal of the Bolsheviks** - Lenin's message of Peace, bread, land' was **just** what the people - who were sick of war, hunger and hardship - wanted. Also, the Bolsheviks were popular because they had defeated Kornilov.
3. **Organisation** - the Red Guards, organised by the brilliant Trotsky, were well-trained and ruthless. They took over the government almost bloodlessly and almost without anyone noticing.



Bolshevik leader - Vladimir Lenin

Source analysis

What was the nature of the Bolshevik takeover?

Communist writers - and Soviet film-makers such as Eisenstein - always tried to suggest that the Bolsheviks were swept to power in a huge wave of popular enthusiasm:

Source A

The revolution of 1917 was a proletarian revolution; it was the shining proof of the proletariat's political capacity to constitute itself as a ruling class and to move towards the organisation of a communist society... Workers of the world, unite!

Manifesto of the Communist Left to the workers of Europe, 1944

Historians nowadays, however, think that the Bolshevik revolution was the work of a small group of fanatical revolutionaries who succeeded mainly because the Provisional Government was so unpopular:

Source B

October was the result of one man, Lenin, who had to drag not merely the toilers but his own party into a battle that few had enthusiasm for. The masses did not take action for themselves. The October revolution was a con.

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