

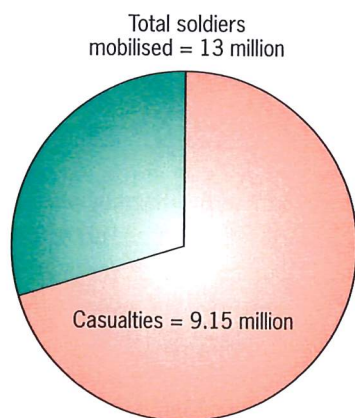
**FOCUS TASK****How did the First World War weaken the Tsar's government?**

The First World War had a massive impact on Russia. Your task is to use the material on pages 108–110 to present an overview of how the war affected four different groups of people in Russian society. The groups are:

- the army
- the workers
- the middle classes
- the aristocracy.

- 1 As you read through pages 108–110 you will find out about the impact of the war on each group. Write a paragraph or series of notes summarising the impact of war on each group.
- 2 Organise your work as a presentation. You could use OHT acetates or computer presentation software. Do some research to locate pictures that support your presentation.

- 1 Was the Tsar's decision to take command of the army evidence that he was out of touch with the situation? Explain your answer.
- 2 Why were the Bolsheviks successful at gaining recruits in the army?

**SOURCE 24**

Russian casualties in the First World War.

**SOURCE 25**

*Again that cursed question of shortage of artillery and rifle ammunition stands in the way of an energetic advance. If we should have three days of serious fighting, we might run out of ammunition altogether. Without new rifles, it is impossible to fill up the gaps.*

Tsar Nicholas to his wife Alexandra, July 1915.

# War and revolution

In August 1914 Russia entered the First World War. Tensions in the country seemed to disappear. The Tsar seemed genuinely popular with his people and there was an instant display of patriotism. The Tsar's action was applauded. Workers, peasants and aristocrats all joined in the patriotic enthusiasm. Anti-government strikes and demonstrations were abandoned. The good feeling, however, was very short-lived. As the war continued, the Tsar began to lose the support of key sectors of Russian society.

## The army

The Russian army was a huge army of conscripts. At first, the soldiers were enthusiastic, as was the rest of society. Even so, many peasants felt that they were fighting to defend their country against the Germans rather than showing any loyalty to the Tsar. You can read about the Russian campaigns in the war on page 42. Russian soldiers fought bravely, but they stood little chance against the German army. They were badly led and treated appallingly by their aristocrat officers. They were also poorly supported by the industries at home. They were short of rifles, ammunition, artillery and shells. Many did not even have boots.

The Tsar took personal command of the armed forces in September 1915. This made little difference to the war, since Nicholas was not a particularly able commander. However, it did mean that people held Nicholas personally responsible for the defeats and the blunders. The defeats and huge losses continued throughout 1916. It is not surprising that by 1917 there was deep discontent in the army and that many soldiers were supporters of the revolutionary Bolshevik Party.

**SOURCE 23**

*The army had neither wagons nor horses nor first aid supplies . . . We visited the Warsaw station where there were about 17,000 men wounded in battle. At the station we found a terrible scene: on the platform in dirt, filth and cold, on the ground, even without straw, wounded men, who filled the air with heart-rending cries, dolefully asked: 'For God's sake order them to dress our wounds. For five days we have not been attended to.'*

From a report by Michael Rodzianko, President of the Duma.

## Peasants, workers and the ethnic minorities

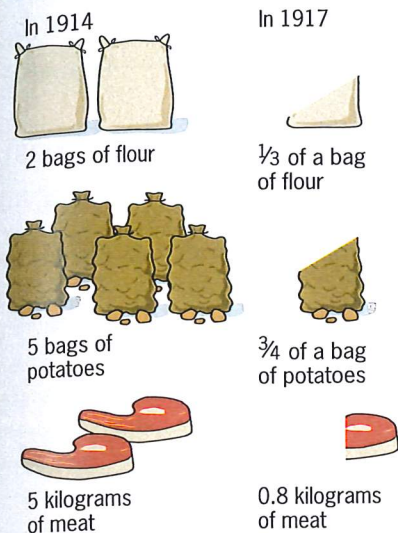
It did not take long for the strain of war to alienate the peasants and the workers. The huge casualty figures took their toll. In August 1916, the local governor of the village of Grushevka reported that the war had killed 13 per cent of the population of the village. This left many widows and orphans needing state war pensions which they did not always receive.

Despite the losses, food production remained high until 1916. By then, the government could not always be relied on to pay for the food produced. The government planned to take food by force but abandoned the idea because it feared it might spark a widespread revolt. There actually was a revolt in central Asian Russia when the Tsar tried to conscript Muslims into the army. It was brutally suppressed by the army.

By 1916 there was much discontent in the cities. War contracts created an extra 3.5 million industrial jobs between 1914 and 1916. The workers got little in the way of extra wages. They also had to cope with even worse overcrowding than before the war. There were fuel shortages. There were also food shortages. What made it worse was that there was enough food and fuel, but it could not be transported to the cities. The rail network could not cope with the needs of the army, industry and the populations of the cities. As 1916 turned into 1917, many working men and women stood and shivered in bread queues and cursed the Tsar.

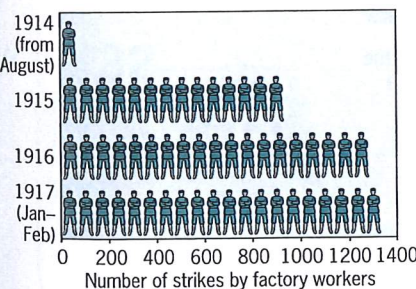
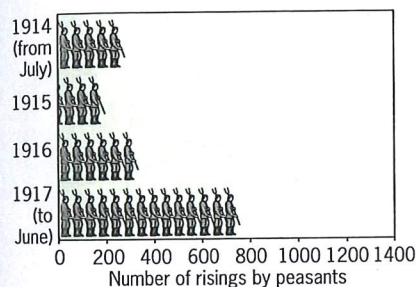
**SOURCE 26**

The average worker's wage in 1917 was 5 roubles a day. This would buy you:



Prices in Russia, 1914–17.

**SOURCE 27**



Peasant risings and strikes, 1914–17.

**SOURCE 28**

*Everybody was fed up with the Tsar because they felt he was weak. When he abdicated, there was great rejoicing. Everybody thought things would be much better.*

Margot Tracey, the daughter of wealthy Russian capitalists, describing feelings towards the Tsar in 1917.

**The middle classes**

The middle classes did not suffer in the same way as the peasants and workers, but they too were unhappy with the Tsar by the end of 1916. Many middle-class activists in the *zemstva* were appalled by reports such as Source 23. They set up their own medical organisations along the lines of the modern Red Cross, or joined war committees to send other supplies to the troops. These organisations were generally far more effective than the government agencies. By 1916 many industrialists were complaining that they could not fulfil their war contracts because of a shortage of raw materials (especially metals) and fuel. In 1915 an alliance of Duma politicians, the Progressive Bloc, had urged the Tsar to work with them in a more representative style of government that would unite the people. The Tsar dismissed the Duma a month later.

**The aristocracy**

The situation was so bad by late 1916 that the Council of the United Nobility was calling for the Tsar to step down. The junior officers in the army had suffered devastating losses in the war. Many of these officers were the future of the aristocrat class. The conscription of 13 million peasants also threatened aristocrats' livelihoods, because they had no workers for their estates. Most of all, many of the leading aristocrats were appalled by the influence of Rasputin over the government of Russia. When the Tsar left Petrograd (the new Russian version of the Germanic name St Petersburg) to take charge of the army, he left his wife in control of the country. The fact that she was German started rumours flying in the capital. There were also rumours of an affair between her and Rasputin. Ministers were dismissed and then replaced. The concerns were so serious that a group of leading aristocrats murdered Rasputin in December 1916.

**SOURCE 29**

*I asked for an audience and was received by him [the Tsar] on March 8th. 'I must tell Your Majesty that this cannot continue much longer. No one opens your eyes to the true role which this man is playing. His presence in Your Majesty's court undermines confidence in the Supreme Power and may have an evil effect on the fate of the dynasty and turn the hearts of the people from their Emperor' . . . My report did some good. On March 11th an order was issued sending Rasputin to Tobolsk; but a few days later, at the demand of the Empress, this order was cancelled.*

M Rodzianko, President of the Duma, March 1916.

**The March revolution**

As 1917 dawned, few people had great hopes for the survival of the Tsar's regime. In January strikes broke out all over Russia. In February the strikes spread. They were supported and even joined by members of the army. The Tsar's best troops lay dead on the battlefields. These soldiers were recent conscripts and had more in common with the strikers than their officers. On 7 March workers at the Putilov steelworks in Petrograd went on strike. They joined with thousands of women – it was International Women's Day – and other discontented workers demanding that the government provide bread. From 7 to 10 March the number of striking workers rose to 250,000. Industry came to a standstill. The Duma set up a Provisional Committee to take over the government. The Tsar ordered them to disband. They refused. On 12 March the Tsar ordered his army to put down the revolt by force. They refused. This was the decisive moment. Some soldiers even shot their own officers and joined the demonstrators. They marched to the Duma demanding that they take over the government. Reluctantly, the Duma leaders accepted – they had always wanted reform rather than revolution, but now there seemed no choice.

On the same day, revolutionaries set up the Petrograd Soviet again, and began taking control of food supplies to the city. They set up soldiers' committees, undermining the authority of the officers. It was not clear who was in charge of Russia, but it was obvious that the Tsar was not! On 15 March he issued a statement that he was abdicating. There was an initial plan for his brother Michael to take over, but Michael refused: Russia had finished with Tsars.

**3** Imagine you are an adviser to the Tsar in 1916. Which of the sources on pages 108–109 would give you most concern? Explain your answer.

**FOCUS TASK A**

**How important was the war in the collapse of the Tsarist regime?**

Historians have furiously debated this question since the revolution took place. There are two main views:

**View 1**

The Tsar's regime was basically stable up to 1914, even if it had some important problems to deal with. It was making steady progress towards becoming a modern state, but this progress was destroyed by the coming of war. Don't forget that this war was so severe that it also brought Germany, Austria-Hungary and Turkey to their knees as well.



**View 2**

The regime in Russia was cursed with a weak Tsar, a backward economy and a class of aristocrats who were not prepared to share their power and privileges with the millions of ordinary Russians. Revolution was only a matter of time. The war did not cause it, although it may have speeded up the process.

Divide the class into two groups.

One group has to find evidence and arguments to support View 1, the other for View 2.

You could compare notes in a class discussion or organise a formal debate. You may even be able to compare your views with students in other schools using email conferencing.

**SOURCE 30**

*One company of the Pavlousky Regiment's reserve battalion had declared on 26 February that it would not fire on people . . . We have just received a telegram from the Minister of War stating that the rebels have seized the most important buildings in all parts of the city. Due to fatigue and propaganda the troops have laid down their arms, passed to the side of the rebels or become neutral . . .*

General Alekseyev, February 1917.

**FOCUS TASK B**

**Why was the March 1917 revolution successful?**

The Tsar faced a major revolution in 1905 but he survived. Why was 1917 different? Why was he not able to survive in 1917?

**The Tsar's regime collapses**



Failures in the war



The mutiny in the army



Duma setting up alternative government



Discontent in the countryside



Formation of soviets



Strikes



Food shortages



The Tsarina and Rasputin

**Stage 1**

- 1 Copy the headings in this diagram. They show eight reasons why the Tsar was forced to abdicate in March 1917.
- 2 For each of the factors, write one or two sentences explaining how it contributed to the fall of the Tsar.
- 3 Draw lines between any of the factors that seem to be connected. Label your line explaining what the link is.

**Stage 2**

- 4 In pairs or small groups, discuss the following points:
  - a) Which factors were present in 1905?
  - b) Were these same factors more or less serious than in 1905?
  - c) Which factors were not present in 1905?
  - d) Were the new factors decisive in making the March 1917 revolution successful?

# The Provisional Government

Russia's problems were not solved by the abdication of the Tsar. The Duma's Provisional Committee took over government. It faced three overwhelmingly urgent decisions:

- to continue the war or make peace
- to distribute land to the peasants (who had already started taking it) or ask them to wait until elections had been held
- how best to get food to the starving workers in the cities.

The Provisional Government was a mixed group. While it included men such as the lawyer Alexander Kerensky – Justice Minister in the Provisional Government but also a respected member of the Petrograd Soviet – it also included angry revolutionaries who had no experience of government at all. The Provisional Government promised Russia's allies that it would continue the war, while trying to settle the situation in Russia. It also urged the peasants to be restrained and wait for elections before taking any land. The idea was that the Provisional Government could then stand down and allow free elections to take place to elect a new Constituent Assembly that would fairly and democratically represent the people of Russia. It was a very cautious message for a people who had just gone through a revolution.

However, the Provisional Government was not the only possible government. Most workers also paid close attention to the Petrograd Soviet. The Soviet had the support of workers in key industries such as coal mining and water, and the support of much of the army. During the crisis months of spring 1917, the Soviet and Provisional Government worked together.

One man was determined to push the revolution further. He was Lenin, leader of the Bolsheviks (see page 115). When he heard of the March revolution he immediately returned to Russia from exile in Europe. The Germans even provided him with a special train, hoping that he might cause more chaos in Russia!

When Lenin arrived at Petrograd station, he set out the Bolshevik programme in his APRIL THESES. He urged the people to support the Bolsheviks in a second revolution. Lenin's slogans 'Peace, Land and Bread' and 'All power to the soviets' contrasted sharply with the cautious message of the Provisional Government. Support for the Bolsheviks increased quickly (see Sources 32 and 33), particularly in the soviets and in the army.

## SOURCE 32

*The Bolshevik speaker would ask the crowd 'Do you need more land?'*

*Do you have as much land as the landlords do?'*

*'But will the Kerensky government give you land? No, never. It protects the interests of the landlords. Only our party, the Bolsheviks, will immediately give you land . . .'*

*Several times I tried to take the floor and explain that the Bolsheviks make promises which they can never fulfil. I used figures from farming statistics to prove my point; but I saw that the crowded square was unsuitable for this kind of discussion.*

A Menshevik writer, summer 1917.

In the second half of 1917, the Provisional Government's authority steadily collapsed.

- The war effort was failing. Soldiers had been deserting in thousands from the army. Kerensky became Minister for War and rallied the army for a great offensive in June. It was a disaster. The army began to fall apart in the face of a German counter-attack (see Source 34 on page 112). The deserters decided to come home.
- Desertions were made worse because another element of the Provisional Government's policy had failed. The peasants ignored the orders of the government to wait. They were simply taking control of the countryside. The soldiers, who were mostly peasants, did not want to miss their turn when the land was shared out.

- 1 Read Source 31. How popular do you think the Provisional Government's policies on
- a) the war
  - b) land
- would be with the peasants and the soldiers?

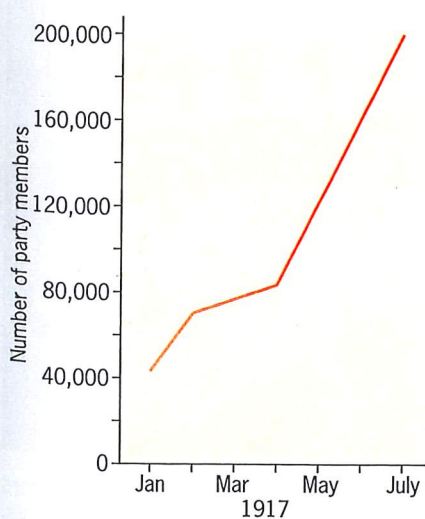
## SOURCE 31

*The Provisional Government should do nothing now which would break our ties with the allies. The worst thing that could happen to us would be separate peace. It would be ruinous for the Russian revolution, ruinous for international democracy . . .*

*As to the land question, we regard it as our duty at the present to prepare the ground for a just solution of the problem by the Constituent Assembly.*

A Provisional Government Minister explains why Russia should stay in the war, 1917.

## SOURCE 33



Growth of Bolshevik support, 1917.

## SOURCE 34

*The German offensive, which began on 6 July, is turning into an immense catastrophe which may threaten revolutionary Russia with ruin. A sudden and disastrous change has occurred in the attitude of the troops . . . Authority and obedience no longer exist . . . for hundreds of miles one can see deserters, armed and unarmed, in good health and in high spirits, certain they will not be punished.*

A Russian officer reporting back to the Provisional Government, 1917.

## SOURCE 36

*The Provisional Government possesses no real power and its orders are executed only in so far as this is permitted by the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, which holds in its hands the most important elements of actual power, such as troops, railroads, postal and telegraph service . . .*

A letter from Guchkov, Minister for War in the Provisional Government, to General Alekseyev, 22 March 1917.

## SOURCE 35



A still from the 1960s film *Doctor Zhivago* showing Russian deserters from the First World War. By the autumn of 1917 discipline among the Russian soldiers who had been fighting the Germans was beginning to collapse.

The Provisional Government's problems got worse in the summer. In July (the 'July Days'), Bolshevik-led protests against the war turned into a rebellion. However, when Kerensky produced evidence that Lenin had been helped by the Germans, support for the rebellion fell. Lenin, in disguise, fled to Finland. Kerensky used troops to crush the rebellion and took over the government.

## SOURCE 37



Troops loyal to the Provisional Government fire on Bolshevik demonstrators during the July Days.

Kerensky was in a very difficult situation. The upper and middle classes expected him to restore order. By this time, however, real power lay with the soviets, especially the Petrograd Soviet. It had a Bolshevik majority and a Bolshevik chairman – Leon Trotsky. It also had the support of much of the army and all industrial workers.

Meanwhile, there was little reason for the ordinary people of Russia to be grateful to the Provisional Government (see Sources 38 and 39).

**SOURCE 38**

*Cabs and horse-drawn carriages began to disappear. Street-car service was erratic. The railway stations filled with tramps and deserting soldiers, often drunk, sometimes threatening. The police force had vanished in the first days of the Revolution. Now 'revolutionary order' was over. Hold-ups and robberies became the order of the day. Politically, signs of chaos were everywhere.*

HE Salisbury, *Russia in Revolution*.

**SOURCE 39**

*Week by week food became scarcer . . . one had to queue for long hours in the chill rain . . . Think of the poorly clad people standing on the streets of Petrograd for whole days in the Russian winter! I have listened in the bread-lines, hearing the bitter discontent which from time to time burst through the miraculous good nature of the Russian crowd.*

John Reed, an American writer who lived in Petrograd in 1917.

Others were also fed up with the Provisional Government. In September 1917, the army leader Kornilov marched his troops towards Moscow, intending to get rid of the Bolsheviks and the Provisional Government, and restore order. Kerensky was in an impossible situation. He had some troops who supported him but they were no match for Kornilov's. Kerensky turned to the only group which could save him: his Bolshevik opponents, who dominated the Petrograd Soviet. The Bolsheviks organised themselves into an army which they called the Red Guards. Kornilov's troops refused to fight members of the Soviet so Kornilov's plans collapsed.

But it was hardly a victory for Kerensky. In fact, by October Kerensky's government was doomed. It had tried to carry on the war and failed. It had therefore lost the army's support. It had tried to stop the peasants from taking over the land and so lost their support too. Without peasant support it had failed to bring food into the towns and food prices had spiralled upwards. This had lost the government any support it had from the urban workers.

In contrast, the Bolsheviks were promising what the people wanted most (bread, peace, land). It was the Bolsheviks who had removed the threat of Kornilov. By the end of September 1917, there were Bolshevik majorities in the Petrograd and Moscow soviets, and in most of Russia's other major towns and cities.

What do you think happened next?

**FOCUS TASK****How effective was the Provisional Government?**

- 1 Here is a list of some decisions that faced the Provisional Government when it took over in March 1917:
  - a) what to do about the war
  - b) what to do about land
  - c) what to do about food.
 For each one, say how the government dealt with it, and what the result of the action was.
- 2 Based on your answers to question 1, how effective do you think the Provisional Government was? Give it a mark out of ten.
- 3 Read through pages 111–13 again. Look for evidence of how the actions of its opponents harmed the Provisional Government:
  - members of the soviets
  - Bolsheviks
  - General Kornilov.
- 4 Based on your answers to question 3, would you revise the score you gave the government in question 2?
- 5 Now reach an overview score. Out of 10, how effective was the Provisional Government? Write a paragraph to explain your score.

**SOURCE 40**

*The Provisional Government has been overthrown. The cause for which the people have fought has been made safe: the immediate proposal of a democratic peace, the end of land owners' rights, workers' control over production, the creation of a Soviet government. Long live the revolution of workers, soldiers and peasants.*

Proclamation of the Petrograd Soviet,  
8 November 1917.

- 1 When the Bolsheviks stormed the Winter Palace, they actually faced very little resistance. Why do you think the artist who painted Source 41 suggests that they did?

## Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolshevik Revolution

You have seen how Bolshevik support increased throughout 1917. By the end of October 1917, Lenin was convinced that the time was right for the Bolsheviks to seize power. Lenin convinced the other Bolsheviks to act swiftly. It was not easy – leading Bolsheviks like Bukharin felt that Russia was not ready, but neither he nor any other Bolshevik could match Lenin in an argument.

During the night of 6 November, the Red Guards led by Leon Trotsky took control of post offices, bridges and the State Bank. On 7 November, Kerensky awoke to find the Bolsheviks were in control of most of Petrograd. Through the day, with almost no opposition, the Red Guards continued to take over railway stations and other important targets. On the evening of 7 November, they stormed the Winter Palace (again, without much opposition) and arrested the ministers of the Provisional Government. Kerensky managed to escape and tried to rally loyal troops. When this failed, he fled into exile. On 8 November an announcement was made to the Russian people (see Source 40).

**SOURCE 41**

The Bolsheviks storm the Winter Palace. A painting from 1937.

## An analysis of the Bolshevik Revolution

Despite what they claimed, the Bolsheviks did not have the support of the majority of the Russian people. So how were they able to carry out their takeover in November 1917? The unpopularity of the Provisional Government was a critical factor – there were no massive demonstrations demanding the return of Kerensky!

A second factor was that the Bolsheviks were a disciplined party dedicated to revolution, even though not all the Bolshevik leaders believed this was the right way to change Russia. The Bolsheviks had some 800,000 members, and their supporters were also in the right places. At least half of the army supported them, as did the sailors at the important naval base at Kronstadt near Petrograd. (The Bolsheviks were still the only party demanding that Russia should pull out of the war.) The major industrial centres, and the Petrograd and Moscow soviets especially, were also pro-Bolshevik. The Bolsheviks also had some outstanding personalities in their ranks, particularly Trotsky and their leader Lenin.

### ACTIVITY

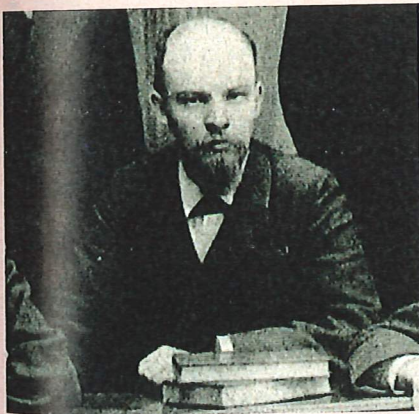
#### Lenin and Trotsky

Work individually or in pairs, taking one personality each.

- Using Sources 42–44, add extra details to the profile of Lenin:
  - why Lenin appealed to people
  - his personal qualities
  - his strengths as a leader.
- Now do the same for Trotsky (see page 116).
- Finally, write a short report on the contribution of each individual to the Bolsheviks' success in 1917.

### PROFILE

#### Vladimir Ilich Lenin



- ★ Born 1870 into a respectable Russian family.
- ★ Brother hanged in 1887 for plotting against the Tsar.
- ★ Graduated from St Petersburg University after being thrown out of Kazan University for his political beliefs.
- ★ One of the largest Okhrana files was about him!
- ★ Exiled to Siberia 1897–1900.
- ★ 1900–1905 lived in various countries writing the revolutionary newspaper *Iskra* ('The Spark').
- ★ Took part in the 1905 revolution but was forced to flee.
- ★ Returned to Russia after the first revolution in 1917.
- ★ Led the Bolsheviks to power in November 1917.

### SOURCE 42

*This extraordinary figure was first and foremost a professional revolutionary. He had no other occupation. A man of iron will and inflexible ambition, he was absolutely ruthless and used human beings as mere material for his purpose. Short and sturdy with a bald head, small beard and deep set eyes, Lenin looked like a small tradesman. When he spoke at meetings his ill-fitting suit, his crooked tie, his ordinary appearance disposed the crowd in his favour. 'He is not one of the gentlefolk, he is one of us', they would say.*

*The Times*, writing about Lenin after his death, 1924.

### SOURCE 43

*Lenin . . . was the overall planner of the revolution: he also dealt with internal divisions within the party and provided tight control, and a degree of discipline and unity which the other parties lacked.*

SJ Lee, *The European Dictatorships*, 1987.

### SOURCE 44

*The struggle was headed by Lenin who guided the Party's Central Committee, the editorial board of Pravda, and who kept in touch with the Party organisations in the provinces . . . He frequently addressed mass rallies and meetings. Lenin's appearance on the platform inevitably triggered off the cheers of the audience. Lenin's brilliant speeches inspired the workers and soldiers to a determined struggle.*

Soviet historian Y Kukulshkin, *History of the USSR*, 1981.