

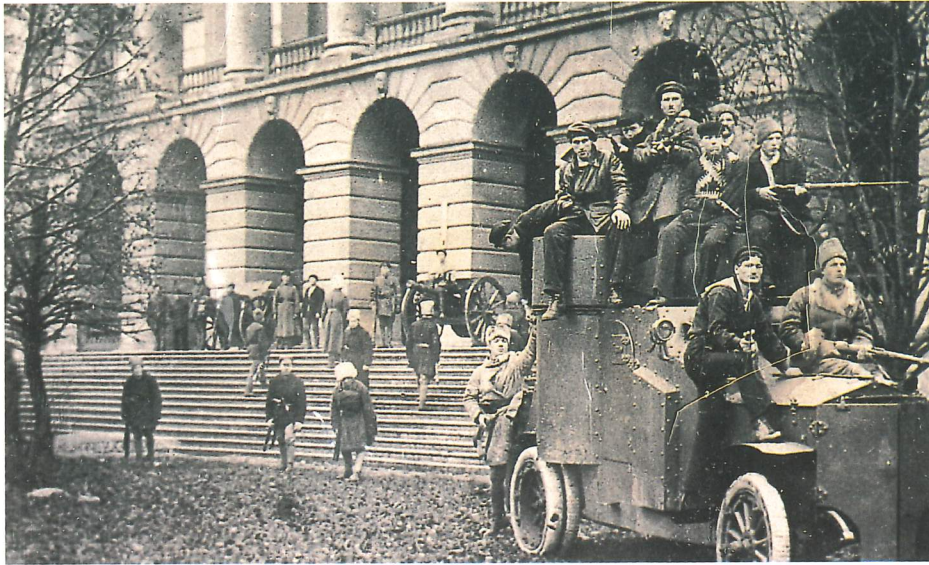
## The Bolsheviks seize power

The Bolsheviks had their headquarters in the Smolny Institute, a former girls' school. It was from here that Trotsky organised the takeover of the city, planned for 7 November. It was no secret – the newspapers carried articles about it and the Bolsheviks distributed leaflets saying it was going to happen. Kerensky, dosing himself on brandy and morphine, desperately rushed round the city trying to find troops to help him.

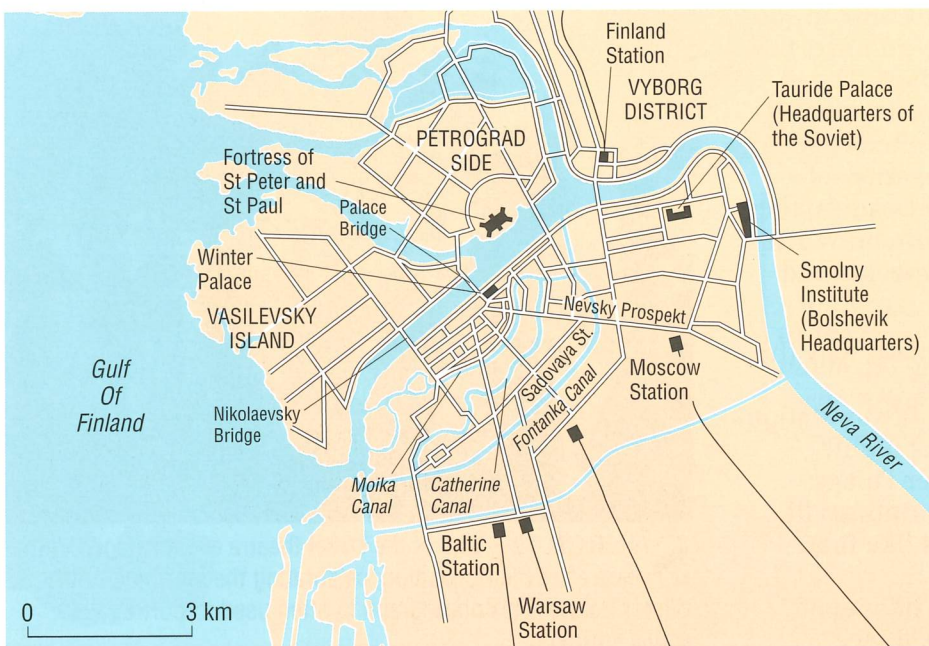
Trotsky made his first moves in the early hours of 7 November. As the city slept, small groups of Bolshevik Red Guards moved out. Lenin and Trotsky were gloomy, realising that they were finished if

Kerensky could get enough troops together. The Red Guards took control of the bridges, the main telegraph office, the railway stations and the power stations. In most cases, other troops just melted away as the Red Guards arrived.

During the morning of the next day, the Bolsheviks carried on seizing key places, such as the State Bank. But otherwise all seemed normal. The shops and factories were open and the trams were running. Nobody seemed to be taking much notice, and many people thought the Bolsheviks would be defeated as soon as Kerensky arrived with troops. But Kerensky had left the city in a car lent by the American Embassy and did not return.



**SOURCE 9** Bolsheviks outside the Smolny Institute



**SOURCE 10** A map of Petrograd, showing the key points taken over by the Bolsheviks

## Storming the Winter Palace



The Bolsheviks now moved in on the Winter Palace, where the Provisional Government was meeting. But morale among the defenders of the Winter Palace was very low. During the afternoon, most of the Cossacks had slipped out of the palace, leaving some military cadets and the Women's Death Battalion.

At 9.00 p.m. the *Aurora* (a ship whose sailors supported the Bolsheviks) fired a blank shot to start the attack. There was a little machine-gun fire, but very little damage was done to the Palace. The Women's Death Battalion offered no resistance, came out and went back to camp. The Red Guards entered and made their way along the miles of corridors. When they did meet military cadets, they gave up, as did the Provisional Government when the Red Guards found them. The Bolsheviks had control of Petrograd.

1. Looking at the map, Source 10, explain why the bridges were particularly important.
2. Why did the Bolsheviks seize the railway stations and telephone exchange on the first night?
3. How was the storming of the Winter Palace represented by the Bolsheviks in paintings like Source 11 and street theatre events like that shown in Source 12?
4. How does this compare with what happened?
5. How useful are these sources as evidence?

**SOURCE 11** (above) A painting made in Russia in the 1930s by Sokolov-Skalya, showing the storming of the Winter Palace



**SOURCE 12** One of the street theatre events staged in the years after the Revolution, celebrating the storming of the Winter Palace. This photograph is often used to portray the actual storming

■ ACTIVITY

You have been working in the British Embassy in Petrograd throughout 1917. The British Government have asked you to tell them how Lenin has been able to seize control. You talk to your colleagues, who have different views.

Use these views to help you write your report explaining how the Bolsheviks were able to seize power. At the end, you should describe what happened on the day of the Revolution. Ask your teacher for a worksheet to help you.



*The Provisional Government made mistakes. It did not end the war and it did not give the land to the peasants. If it had done these things, it would have got the people on its side.*

*No, it was the war. Even after the Tsar had gone, things did not get better. There was still no food and fuel because of the war. It was this that brought the people to desperation point. It also caused the collapse of the Russian army which would not support the Provisional Government.*



*The Provisional Government was to blame. It was weak and never had any real power.*

*I think it was more to do with the Bolsheviks and their leader Lenin. He knew what he wanted right from the beginning.*

*The Bolsheviks were very determined, it is true. They were the only ones who had a clear plan and were well organised. Everybody else was not sure what to do.*



*They certainly knew what the people wanted – bread, peace and land. They promised the land to the peasants and were the only group who wanted to end the war.*

*Mind you, they had some luck. That Kornilov fellow came along at the right moment – helped them no end.*



# Did Lenin make a difference?



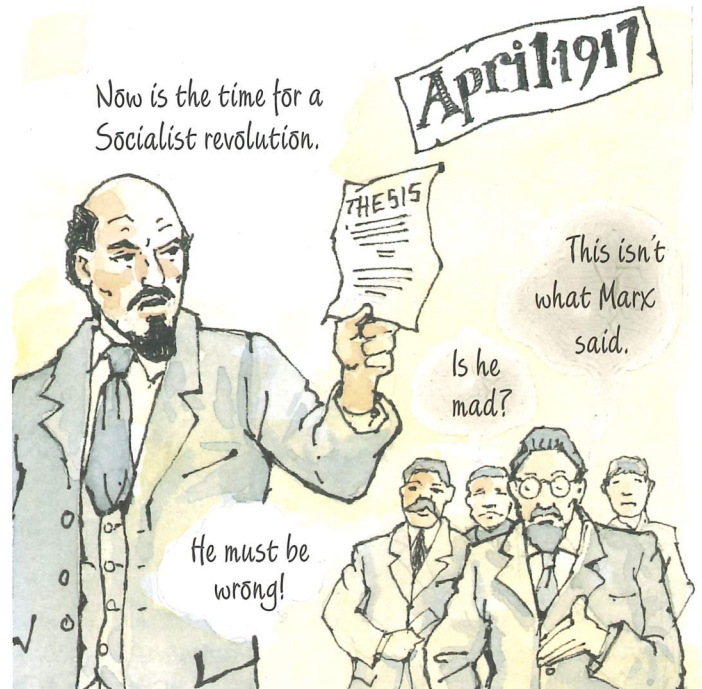
**SOURCE 1** A painting of Lenin returning to Petrograd in April 1917, made in the USSR in the 1930s. Trotsky called Lenin the 'engine driver of the Revolution'

**SOURCE 2** From V. Serge's book *From Lenin to Stalin*, 1937. Serge was a Bolshevik supporter in Petrograd in 1917

*"Hardly off the train, Lenin asked the Party comrades, 'Why didn't you seize power?' And at once he comes out with his April Theses . . . He is called mad and delirious . . . But suddenly it becomes apparent that he has the ear of the man in the street, and of the man in the factory and barracks! His whole genius consists in his ability to say what these people want to say, but do not know how to say."*

## ■ SOURCE INVESTIGATION

**WOULD THERE** have been a revolution in November 1917 if Lenin had not returned to Russia? Look back over pages 38–47 and study the evidence below. What conclusions can you reach?



**SOURCE 3** Sukanov, a non-Bolshevik Socialist journalist describes reactions to Lenin's speech on his return to Russia in April 1917

*"Dear Comrades, soldiers, sailors and workers! [said Lenin]. I am happy to greet in your persons the victorious Russian Revolution, and greet you as vanguard [leaders] of the worldwide proletarian army . . . Long live the worldwide Socialist revolution!"*

*. . . Suddenly, before the eyes of all of us, completely swallowed up by the routine drudgery of the Revolution, there was presented a bright, blinding, exotic beacon . . . Lenin's voice heard straight from the train, was a 'voice from outside'."*

Look back at page 42 before answering these two questions.

1. What, according to Sources 2 and 3, was Lenin saying that was so different?
2. Why did Lenin's arrival have such an impact on the Bolshevik Party and the workers and soldiers?

There was an argument between Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders about whether they should seize power at the end of October. Lenin sent a letter to the Bolshevik Central Committee, written on 6 October from his hiding place in Finland.

#### SOURCE 4

*“Having obtained the majority in the Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies in both capitals, the Bolsheviks can and must take state power into their hands.”*

But when the Committee met, Lenin’s proposal was defeated by 4 votes to 6 with 6 abstaining. On 23 October, Lenin returned secretly to Petrograd and persuaded the Bolshevik Central Committee to agree to his plans. He talked to them through the entire night until they gave in. However, Trotsky persuaded Lenin to wait until 7 November. The next day, Zinoviev and Kamenev, leading Bolsheviks, sent a letter to the Bolshevik Party opposing the uprising.

*“To call at present for an armed uprising means to stake on one card not only the fate of our party, but also the fate of the Russian and international revolution . . . A majority of workers and a significant part of the army in Russia is for us. But all the rest are in question. We are convinced [that] . . . the majority of peasants will vote for the Socialist Revolutionaries . . . If we take power now and are forced to wage a revolutionary war, the mass of the soldiers will not support us.”*

Lenin had to continue to urge leading Bolsheviks to be active in supporting the seizure of power. He sent this letter to the other Bolshevik leaders on the evening before the Revolution.

*“The situation is extremely critical. Delaying the uprising now really means death . . . We must at any price, tonight, arrest the Ministers, having disarmed the military cadets, etc.*

*We must not wait! We may lose everything! . . . The government is tottering. We must deal it the death blow at any cost.”*

## What do historians say?

**SOURCE 5** From *1917, the Russian Revolutions* by Leonard Schapiro

*“In the actual organisation of the final stages of the Bolshevik Revolution, Lenin’s role fell far short of Trotsky’s . . . Yet there is no doubt that without Lenin the Bolshevik coup would have been postponed and might have failed . . .”*

**SOURCE 6** From *The Russian Revolution*, by Robert Service, 1986

*“He had limitless capacity to persuade, cajole and goad. On 23 October, the Central Committee debated the question of state power. Lenin returned clandestinely [secretly] from Finland to participate, and the consequent decision came from his pen. Still he had to be restrained. He wanted power seized immediately. Trotsky’s view was preferred, that the uprising would be . . . on the opening day of the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets.”*

**SOURCE 7** A view of Lenin by a Soviet writer, Y. Kukushkin, in *History of the USSR*, published in the USSR in 1981

*“The Bolshevik party was waging a determined struggle to win over the masses. The struggle was headed by Lenin, who led and guided the Party’s Central Committee . . . He frequently addressed mass rallies and meetings. Lenin’s speeches, noted for their profound content and brilliant delivery, inspired workers and soldiers . . . The Bolshevik Party’s membership began to grow rapidly.”*

- Does Source 4 show that it was mainly Lenin who was pushing the Bolsheviks to seize power? Explain your answer by referring to different parts of Source 4.
- Why did Zinoviev and Kamenev not want to seize power in October?
- Write a paragraph summing up what Sources 2–4 tell us about Lenin’s role in 1917.
- a) Do the historians in Sources 5, 6 and 7 support this view?  
b) What else do they tell us?
- Do you think that one man – Lenin – really made a difference in 1917?