

Name _____

Date _____

Vladimir Lenin (1870 - 1924)

Russian Revolutionary

"There is no other man who is absorbed by the Revolution twenty-four hours a day, who has no other thoughts but the thoughts of revolution, and who even when he sleeps, dreams of nothing but revolution." – Communist speaking of Lenin

Vladimir Lenin was one of the century's most important leaders. Unhappy and disillusioned with the Russian monarchy, he led a group called the Bolsheviks in a revolution that gave him control of the largest nation in the world.

Born in 1870, Lenin was raised by two educated parents in a happy family. In school he proved himself to be very bright though he suffered alienation because of it. However, he excelled in his studies. While in his teens, two shocks jolted his world. First, his father was threatened with losing his job by the government. Second, his brother, Alexander, was hanged for plotting to assassinate Tsar Alexander III. Lenin renounced religion and the political system. He was inspired by the work of Karl Marx and believed that Russia needed a Communist revolution.



"I don't care what becomes of Russia. To hell with it. All this is only the road to a World Revolution."

Lenin moved to St. Petersburg in 1893 and began to write and recruit new followers. He was arrested for passing out illegal pamphlets and starting a revolutionary paper. He served fifteen months in prison and three years of exile in Siberia. In 1900, he traveled abroad and sharpened his Marxist ideology for the next 17 years.

Marxism said that industrial workers, called the proletariat, were in a struggle against capitalists; the people who owned businesses. Eventually, Marx said, the workers would overthrow the capitalists and form a new communist society. However, Russia consisted mainly of peasant farmers and some Marxists wondered how a workers' revolution could occur in a non-industrial society.

Lenin saw the role of the party as essential, and his group became known as the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks, he said, would lead the people to the

revolution they needed. However, many Marxists who disagreed with Lenin's iron rule were forced out of the party.

In 1905, after the Bloody Sunday massacre, Lenin advocated violent action against the Czar. This event led to several uprisings in Russia. Lenin returned to Russia for two years but the promised revolution did not happen as the Tsar made enough concessions to calm the people. Lenin went abroad again.

World War I brought another crisis. Communists all over Europe ignored class loyalty and chose to fight for their country instead. They joined their nation's armies to fight each other – not the capitalists. Lenin said that the war would help capitalists profit while the workers suffered. He urged that Communists to "transform the imperialist war into a civil war."

In March 1917, hungry, angry workers and soldiers went on strike and marched in the streets. The

Tsar's power collapsed and the Duma, led by Alexander Kerensky, took power. Lenin said the new government was not revolutionary enough. He urged that power go to the soviets, which were

councils of workers set up in many cities. He was considered dangerous, branded a German agent, and was forced into hiding in Finland. From there, he urged immediate Russian withdrawal from the war and for the government to give land and bread to the people. As the horror of war continued, Lenin's cries gained popularity. Lenin made a deal with the Germans; if they could get him safely back to Russia, he would take power and pull Russia out of the war. Kerensky refused to take Russia out of the war and, as a result, the Bolsheviks overthrew the temporary government in November 1917. Lenin came to power after a nearly bloodless coup.

Lenin quickly made peace with Germany, giving up large chunks of Russian land (his battle cry had been "Peace, Land, Bread"). Land was redistributed, some as collective farms. Factories, mines, banks and utilities were all taken over by the state and the Russian Orthodox Church was dissolved.

A civil war, though, still raged in Russia between the Bolsheviks (Reds) and their opponents, the Mensheviks (Whites). Despite being supported by Britain and the U.S.A. the Whites were defeated after a bitter struggle. With peace came the question of how to rule. He renamed the country the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and the Bolsheviks renamed themselves the communist party.

From 1919 to 1921 famine and typhus ravaged Russia and left over 27 million people dead.

To counter these disasters Lenin put into effect the New Economic Plan. This plan embraced some capitalist ideas (limited private industry and ownership of land) in order to revitalize the poor economy. However he was never to see the full effect of his measures

In May 1922 Lenin suffered the first of a series of strokes, less than a year later he suffered a second one. In his two remaining years he tried correct some of the excesses of the regime. He saw that it would be necessary to learn coexistence with capitalist countries and eliminate the inefficiency of his bureaucracy. He also tried to ensure that Leon Trotsky and not Joseph Stalin succeeded him. In this endeavour he failed. Stalin was far too clever and astute even for Lenin. Lenin never fully recovered and died in January 1924.

Questions:

1. What people and events helped to shape Lenin's communist ideology? Was he a great leader?
2. Why did the Germans make a deal with Lenin and help him return to Russia?
3. Using the **Bold** terms throughout the reading, write a summary paragraph about the life of Vladimir Lenin.