Second All-Russian Congress of Soviet

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Summer Conference of Bright Dream Model United Nations Conference 2017
Historical Background

Introduction to the Provisional Government

After the February Revolution which saw the fall of the Tsar, a provisional government was set up. Formed from the Duma or the representative assembly, which had existed under the Tsar, the new government was a weak and unstable grouping of politicians trying desperately to gain some control over events. Led initially by Prince Lvov and after July 1917 by Kerensky, the Provisional Government faced the same problems as the Tsar did and was unable to offer any effective solutions. From the start, it lacked both authority and support.

The Dual Power

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provisional Government</th>
<th>Petrograd Soviet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● The Provisional Committee of the Duma took over as the Provisional Government led by Prince Lvov.</td>
<td>● The Petrograd Soviet was made up of workers elected by their factories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● The government was mainly made of Kadets and other Liberal parties.</td>
<td>● It aimed to look after worker’s interests and to protect their rights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● The only socialist in the government was the Socialist Revolutionary Alexander Kerensky.</td>
<td>● Workers’ and soldiers’ soviets were also set up in other towns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● The Provisional Government had no lawful authority. It hadn’t been appointed by the Tsar or elected by the Russian people.</td>
<td>● At first the soviets were dominated by Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries, but the Bolsheviks became more influential.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● It announced that it would govern until a Constituent Assembly was elected which would draw up a new constitution for the country.</td>
<td>● The Petrograd Soviet was worried that the army might use to crush the revolution, so it passed Soviet Order Number 1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● During the first weeks in power the government had some popular support and its authority was respected in the larger cities. However, it had little power in the provinces.</td>
<td>● Soldiers could only obey military orders if they had been approved by the Petrograd Soviet. This gave the soviet military power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Local politicians decided that they would rule without interference from the government.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet agreed on some early reforms:
1) Free speech and freedom of the press.
2) The Constituent Assembly should be democratically elected.
3) The abolition of the Okhrana (the secret police created by Alexander II).
4) All political prisoners were freed.
5) Trade unions were legally recognised.
6) The abolition of the death penalty (although it was brought back for the armed forces later in the year) (Charques, 1958).

Although these reforms were impressive, they didn’t tackle the main problems the country then faced. Both sides wanted the war to go on. The Provisional Government wanted to leave the problem of land reform to the Constituent Assembly.

Problems faced by the Provisional Government

The First World War
The war was the most pressing problem for the Provisional Government, who took the unpopular decision to continue the campaign against the Germans and gain land. They also felt that by honouring the alliance with France and Britain, Russia would get important financial support. There were conflicting attitudes towards the War:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socialist Parties</th>
<th>Kadets and Liberals</th>
<th>Bolsheviks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Wanted a defensive war.</td>
<td>• Wanted to continue fighting.</td>
<td>• Wanted a defensive war until Lenin came back.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Thought the army shouldn’t advance against the enemy but should prevent the Germans from advancing into Russia.</td>
<td>• Believed that Russia had an obligation towards is allies.</td>
<td>• Lenin demanded an immediate end to the war.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Peace with Germany would mean loss of land and national humiliation.</td>
<td>• This policy became very popular between April and October 1917.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Provisional Government was dominated by the Kadets and Liberals, so it decided to continue the war. Ministers also knew the Russian economy depended on allied loans, so they’d lose money if they pulled out of the war.

Kerensky believed that an offensive campaign against the Germans would unite the country behind the war and increase support for the Provisional Government. The June Offensive of 1917 was an attack led by Brusilov against Austro-Hungarian and German forces. It was Russia’s last great effort in the war and was a complete disaster. Official figures suggested that 400,000 soldiers died and 170,000 deserted—the real figures are probably much higher. The army was beginning to disintegrate, troops mutinied and desertions were widespread. Many soldiers were influenced by Bolshevik agitators and had lost the will to fight. This decision to continue the war severely weakened the
capacity of the Provisional Government to consolidate its position and deal with the other problems it faced. It also showed just how out of touch the government was with the concerns of those suffering the hardships of the war: rank and file soldiers, the industrial workers and the peasantry (Wildman, 1980).

The Petrograd Soviet
What also weakened the government from the start was its lack of credibility and authority. It had not been elected and had no programme for government. The Petrograd Soviet had a better claim to legitimacy having been formed from representatives of the workers. It then expanded its base to include soldiers. The Soviet had considerable power, with its control over the postal service and railways in Petrograd, to the extent that it was difficult for the Provisional Government to do anything without its support. This point was illustrated by the Petrograd Soviet’s Order No.1, which urged the soldiers to only obey the orders of the Government if they did not contradict its own decrees. Kerensky failed to gain and real level of trust form the Soviet and had little choice but to tolerate it. This system of ‘dual power’ between the Government and the Petrograd Soviet added to the chaos of the situation but neither side was in a position to deal effectively with the other.

Economic and Agricultural Problems
In July Prince Lvov resigned as leader of the Provisional Government and a second government was formed. Alexander Kerensky became Prime Minister, heading a government of SRs, Kadets, Progressives and Mensheviks. His Government faced some serious economic and agricultural problems:

Inflation got worse. Rises in workers’ wages didn’t match the rise in prices. Workers started to strike. The government couldn’t provide enough food and fuel to the towns and cities. The peasants refused to sell their grains because money was essentially worthless. As a result, the daily allowance of bread in Petrograd fell between July and November 1917.

The peasants believed that the Tsar’s land would be given to them. They were angered by the Provisional Government’s decision to ignore the issue until the Constituent Assembly was elected. The grievances over land had long been a concern to peasants and many were unwilling to wait any longer. Many of those peasants who deserted the army and returned home had done so in order to seize some land for themselves. The Government’s failure to take a lead on reform lost it valuable support from the peasantry. Disorder spread to the countryside with many landowners finding themselves on the receiving end of the peasants’ anger. The Government was clearly unable to control what was happening (Phillips, 2000).

The ‘July Days’
For many industrial workers, the months following the February Revolution were a time of great excitement and those based on in Petrograd and Moscow were quickly becoming
not only more radical but also more organised. This development posed a danger for the Provisional Government. Sailors at the naval base of Kronstadt organised their own armed demonstration under Bolshevik slogans ‘All Power to the Soviets’ and marched into Petrograd in what became known as the ‘July Days’. This posed a dilemma for the Bolsheviks. Middle-ranking Bolsheviks were happy to encourage the rising but the Bolshevik leadership hesitated and refused to endorse this attempt to overthrow the government. Lenin preferred to ‘wait and see’. With support from the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, the Provisional Government was able to crush the rising.

The importance of the ‘July Days’ was that it led, in the short term, to the discrediting of the Bolsheviks, who were blamed by many for the bloodshed. Kerensky also used this as an opportunity to attack Lenin personally by claiming he was a German spy working to undermine the Russian war effort. Bolshevik offices were closed, as was their newspaper Pravda. Leading Bolsheviks were forced into hiding, Lenin fled to Finland; Kamenev and Trotsky were arrested. Some Bolsheviks thought that the events of July were a massive defeat and the party wouldn’t be able to recover. The ‘July Days’ weakened the Bolsheviks, but not fatally. Bolshevik support was increasing, especially among the army and the peasants. Although the government weakened the Bolsheviks in the short term, they didn’t attempt to destroy the Bolsheviks altogether. For the Provisional Government, the crushing of the rising gave them temporary relief from the threat of the Left though this was to be followed by a serious threat from the Right (Phillips, 2000).

The Kornilov ‘Coup’
The position of the Provisional Government was severely undermined by what became known as the Kornilov coup. After the ‘July Days’, Kerensky made an attempt to assert control over events and appointed Kornilov as Commander in Chief to reassert discipline in the army. This measure was too reactionary for the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, who were now part of the Government, but Kerensky was hailed as a hero by the Right.

Even some of the Liberals now talked of the advantages of military rule. With continued strikes and unrest in Petrograd the Government edged towards the imposition of martial law. General Kornilov ordered troops to march on the capital, where it was believed he wanted to overthrow the government and rule as a military dictator. Kerensky panicked and joined forces with the Petrograd Soviet in an attempt to resist Kornilov and defend the revolution. Arms and ammunition were issued to workers and the capital prepared for Kornilov’s attack. The rebellion collapsed, and Kornilov was dismissed and arrested. The army was left demoralised and confused with little sense of direction.

The affair led to an upsurge in the support for the Bolsheviks, leading figures were released from prison and given weapons to defend the city from Kornilov. In September, they gained control of the Petrograd Soviet, which strengthened their position. Army officers believed that Kerensky was a weak leader who had given to revolutionary groups. As result they refused to support the Government during the October Revolution. The
Kornilov Affair showed the Bolsheviks that the Government now had little support and could be easily overthrown. Support for the Bolsheviks grew, they gained majorities in the Petrograd and Moscow Soviets. Kerensky and the Provisional Government were now dangerously isolated and drifting towards final collapse (Fitzpatrick, 1994)

The October Revolution

Lenin learnt from the July Days that a premature and unplanned attempt to overthrow the Provisional Government would only end in failure. But by October he was convinced that a second, well-planned rising would succeed. Lenin returned in October and convinced the Bolsheviks Central Committee to begin an immediate armed uprising. He wanted to seize power in the name of the Soviets when the All-Russian Congress of the Soviets met in October. The Provisional Government announced that elections for the Constituent Assembly would held in November. Lenin feared the SRs would gain the most seats, and he didn’t want to share power with any other political party. Leon Trotsky led the Soviet’s Military Revolutionary Committee which carried out the rising.

On the 24th of October, Trotsky ordered the Bolshevik Red Guards to seize key positions within Petrograd. They took over the railway stations, and the post and telegraph offices. On the following day, Kerensky fled to try and organise a counter-attack using loyal troops. His attempt at resistance failed, and he left the country. The Bolsheviks stormed the Winter palace where the government was meeting and arrested the ministers without a fight (Fitzpatrick, 1994). Before the dawn of 26th, Lenin announced to the All-Russian Congress of Soviets that the Provisional Government had been overthrown and that power was transformed to the Congress, and it is the start of our story.

Marxism and Leninism

Introduction

The development of Bolshevik ideology and the tactics used to promote it were based on the idea of Karl Marx. Marx had developed his ideas whilst observing the progress of capitalism during the enormous industrial growth of the early nineteenth century in Western Europe. His theories were based upon the trends evident in the most advanced industrial nations of his time. It is, therefore, not surprising that when applied to less-developed economies, such as Russia in the early twentieth century, modifications and adaptations of his principles were needed. Lenin was to take the ideas of Marx and adapt them to the reality of the situation facing the Bolsheviks in Russia.

Main Principles of Marxist Theory

Although born to a Jewish family in Germany in 1818, Karl Marx spent most of his life
in exile in Britain. His idea was put forward in two key books: *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) and *Das Kapital* (1867-90). Much of his later work was written in collaboration with his friend Friedrich Engels. In attempting to describe capitalism and the exploitation it produced, both Marx and Engels based their work on natural consequence of their own experiences, yet it did not mean that their observations were equally applicable to other countries at different stages of development (Callaghan, 2011).

The main principles of Marxism were:

**The idea of class struggle**

Marx explained social and political relationships in terms of material needs. Humans require food, goods and services in order to survive. According to Marx, history was a series of struggles by one class against another to obtain these material needs and it was this that produced change in history. Those without power were seen by Marx as alienated from society and politics; as they were forced into an economic position (performing labour for others) which took away their freedom. It was in the interests of those with power to maintain their position and privileges in society; therefore, they would not give up power without a struggle. Thus, classes were always hostile to each other and this affected the nature of change when it occurred.

**The inevitability of historical change**

Marx saw historical change as passing through various stages driven by socio-economic forces. These stages were as follows:

1. **Primitive communism.** Human lived in primitive communities where there were no social classes and no concept of private property. This stage can be seen in many Stone Age groups, where humans lived in collective groups. This phase would give way to one based on ownership of land and the development of social classes.

2. **Feudalism.** In this phase, society would be controlled by the land-owning aristocracy. Their power would be based on their ownership of land and would be exercised over the peasantry, those who worked the land. Land produced food, a basic requirement to support a pre-industrial population. A surplus of food would enable a section of society to engage in other activities. As trade and industry grew feudalism would be replaced by capitalism.

3. **Capitalism.** The growth of trade and industry produced two new classes: the bourgeoisie (factory owners and merchants) and the proletariat (industrial workers). The bourgeoisie became powerful because they owned the means of production (i.e. factories), the means of distribution (e.g. railways, shops) and the means of exchange (banks). The proletariat had to rely on selling themselves as labour to the bourgeoisie to gain enough money to survive. Marx saw this relationship as one of exploitation; the proletariat being deprived of a fair wage by the bourgeoisie who pocketed the profit made from goods and services. The proletariat were forced to live and work in appalling conditions as powerless cogs in a vast industrial process. Thus, the
bourgeoisie grew rich at the expense of the proletariat, who were cheated of their just rewards. As capitalism progressed, this exploitation would become more and more obvious and unacceptable to the proletariat, who would rise up by their own efforts and get rid of the bourgeoisie in order to get a fair share of the goods and services they helped produce. This would lead to a new phase in historical development.

4. **Socialism.** In this phase workers’ organisations would form a Dictatorship of the Proletariat to rule on their own behalf. Food, goods and services would be distributed fairly according to the need. In this respect, socialism would enable humans to enjoy the level of material production achieved by capitalism. As material needs were met there would be no need for competition. As competition faded mankind would reach its ultimate destiny.

5. **Communism.** With no shortage of goods there would be less to regulate the society. Government would be unnecessary and would gradually ‘wither away’. Co-operation would replace competition in a classless society based on the economic principle of ‘From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs’. The result would be a class-less and state-less society.

The key principle behind this process of historical change was, according to Marx, its inevitability. Change was governed by a series of historical laws, much like scientific laws, which could not be altered. This idea that history is shaped by socio-economic forces outside our control is often referred to as determinism. Thus, to Marx, the collapse of capitalism was inevitable. However, Marx’s vision of the transitional socialist phase and the communist ideal was vague. This provided his followers with the opportunity to interpret his ideas in different ways (Callinicos, 1980).

**Leninism in Russia**

Marx had seen the proletarian revolution occurring in those countries where capitalism was at its most advanced. Those countries that second ripe for revolution were therefore to be found in Western Europe, such as Britain and Germany. In the early twentieth century Russia was still semi-feudal with little industrial development. For those who wished to see revolution in Russia, according to Marx’s theory, the signs were not good, for the following reasons:

- **The lack of capitalist development.** The bourgeoisie seemed incapable of carrying out their own revolution. Power remained in the hands of the Tsar and his supporters from the landed aristocracy. How could a socialist revolution be expected before capitalism had developed?

- **The limited size of the proletariat.** Small-scale industrial development had failed to produce an industrial workforce if a size sufficient to have the potential for the revolution.
• **The lack of an organised proletariat.** The industrial workforce that did exist lacked those elements Marx saw as necessary to drive themselves into action, e.g. education at a level that would raise awareness of their own position. The repressive measures of the Tsarist regime made the formation of workers’ organisations extremely difficult.

Lenin was to make adaptations to Marxist theory in the light of these factors. In practice, the application of Marxism to the Russian experience was to divide revolutionary groups. These divisions were often widened by the way in which ideas from other radical groups were incorporated into debates. There were arguments over whether capitalist development should be aided in order to speed up the process of historical change or whether the circumstances could be used to promote proletarian revolution without further delay. Lenin’s interpretation of Marxist theory was as follows:

1. **Do not delay the Revolution.** Lenin believed that the Revolution need not be delayed until capitalism had developed. This was a direct attack on the view of other revolutionary groups, such as the Mensheviks, who believed that the way forward was to work with the bourgeoisie to improve workers’ conditions, whilst waiting for capitalism to collapse. There was, Lenin argued, little point in using the democratic process to promote the interests of the industrial workers when, under the Tsarist regime, there were no real democratic institutions to use.

2. **The role of the peasantry.** To Marx, the idea of revolution was based firmly around the proletariat, rejecting those who saw revolutionary potential in the peasantry, and Lenin’s early writings echoed this view. Yet in Russia the lack of an organised proletariat posed a particular problem. The vast majority of the population were peasants and Russian radicals had long since debated their role in revolution. Some revolutionaries, such as the SRs, believed the peasantry could be harnessed to cause of proletarian revolution, although Marxists rejected this notion. The harsh conditions under which the peasantry worked and lived gave them some common ground with the industrial workers. Both the peasants and the industrial workers could be seen as oppressed classes. It was not until 1917 that Lenin’s writings show a change in his view towards the peasantry. Sometimes he used the term ‘proletariat’ to include poorer peasants and during the summer of 1917 Bolsheviks propaganda was often targeted at the peasantry when their interests coincided with those of the industrial workforce.

3. **The Party as the vanguard of the Revolution.** If the proletariat was unable to carry out its own revolution, it could be achieved by the organisation of a highly centralised and disciplined party on their behalf. To Lenin, this was best achieved by a group of intellectuals dedicated to furthering the interests of the industrial workers. This group would be small enough to maintain the secrecy
necessary against the Tsar’s secret police. It would be the role of this party to speed up the process of historical change by direct intervention, i.e. by organising revolution. The Revolutionary Party would act as the vanguard of the Revolution, steering it to a successful conclusion. This view, first outlined in What is to be done? in 1902, differed from Marx’s opinion that the Revolution would be passed on the proletariat’s own efforts. Very few Marxists believed that a small elite of revolutionaries would ever be able to carry out a successful revolution. To Lenin, it was the only way of overcoming the limitations of the Russian proletariat. This difference over tactics was to lead to the split between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in 1903.

4. Russia as the weakest link in the capitalist system. Whereas Marx had seen the potential for revolution as greater in the more advanced capitalist countries, Lenin saw the possibilities for attacking capitalism’s weakest link. In Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism (1916) Lenin had developed Marx’s idea on the capitalist system’s use of foreign expansion to further its own existence. Marx had stated that capitalism would seize foreign territories in order to exploit their economic resources. Lenin believed that these resources had been used to buy off the workers by enabling the capitalist countries to improve working conditions and, therefore, reduce the revolutionary tendencies of the workforce. In this respect, Russia was a weak link in the capitalist system because it had failed to exploit foreign territories as effectively as Britain, France and Germany.

5. The Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Lenin saw this phase as a seizure of power by the party on behalf of the industrial workers. The party would form a dictatorship in order to ensure the Revolution survived in the face of counter-attacks by the bourgeoisie. Given the power of the bourgeoisie, this would require violence to be used and the party should not flinch from this. The use of violent action divided Lenin from other Marxists, such as Plekhanov, but it had been notable feature of the Russian Populist movement of the nineteenth century. The Dictatorship of the Proletariat would also promote socialism by removing private ownership and by the state taking over the economy to be run in the interests of the workers. When the risk of counter-revolution was dealt with Lenin believed that the state would wither away and communism would develop. The result would be as Marx indicated but the role to be played by the Dictatorship of the Proletariat was very much Lenin’ own view (Phillips, 2000).

There would be a question for every delegate in the committee that how we are able to adapt the basic principles of Marxist theory to the situation in Russia after the October Revolution. Certain modifications should be reflected to the awareness of the peculiarities of the Russian context: both the reality of circumstances as well as the traditions of Russia radicalism.
Conflicts and Bloc Position

Bolsheviks

Lenin believed the party should be run by a small number of highly disciplined professional revolutionaries. They could be vanguards for the revolution. The job of the party should be to bring socialist conciseness to the workers and lead them through revolution. Critically, Lenin believed that Marx’s historical process could be speeded up. His critics argued Russia simply wasn’t for Communist revolution.

Mensheviks

Mensheviks believed party should be democratic, allowing it members to have a say in policy-making. They supported trade unions to improve working conditions. Also, they believed Russia would need a long period of bourgeoise democratic government during which the workers should develop class consciousness and the number of urban workers (proletarians) would grow.

The Socialist Revolutionaries

SRs placed their central hope for revolution with the peasants who would provide the main support a popular rising in which could form a democratic republic. Land would be taken from landlords and divided up amongst the peasants. They accepted that the development of capitalism was a fact that would promote the growth of a proletariat who would rise against their masters. But there is no need for the peasants to pass through capitalism, which they could move straight to a form of rural socialism based on the peasant commune that already existed.

Democracy vs. Dictatorship

The development of Lenin’s ideas about a vanguard party leading the proletarian revolution developed into the notion of a centralised governing party, a communist party, which would rule on behalf of the working classes. Instead of Marx’s ideals of a ‘dictatorship of the proletariat,’ Lenin’s Russia was led by a dictatorship pf the communist party, whose leaders simply assumed they knew what was best for the working classes. After Lenin’s death, Joseph Stalin carried this even further, developing a totalitarian dictatorship (Orlando Figes, 1997)

Additionally, the Bolsheviks and SRs were divided within each party, individual people
Position Paper

In order to thoroughly prepare for our committee, a position paper for each delegate is required to elaborate your understanding of the topics as well as the delegation assigned individually. Because the delegates in our committee represent individual politicians who belonged to different parties, the requirements for position paper are as follows:

1. Each position paper should be one and a half pages, single-spaced, twelve-point Times New Roman font (approximately 750 words). Your names, delegation name, school, and committee name should be in the upper left-hand corner. The paper should be outlined in three paragraphs.

2. The first two paragraphs should make up about half of the paper; the third and final paragraph should make up the remainder, and bulk, of your paper. These paragraphs are in a logical procession, and each paragraph should build analytically on the last.

3. The first paragraph should consist of your delegation’s personal experience related to our committee or brief introduction. For instance, how has your delegation been involved in both Revolutions?

4. The second paragraph should discuss your delegation’s policy on the issues, as supported by relevant articles or speeches. This differs from the first paragraph because it should also include a short description of opinions, statements, and lessons learned from your history and choices in the past.

5. The third, final, and most important paragraph is your delegation’s plan going forward. Given your history and your policy, what does your position believe is the best course of action to pursue? For example, given risk factors and past experiences, what is the most logical and effective way to address war problems? What priorities does your position assign to different matters, and why?

We highly encourage you to conduct your investigations and learning with vigour and curiosity. Please cite all your sources with endnotes. And of course absolutely do not hesitate to contact us with any question.

Please finish your position paper and send to arcs@bdmunc.org before 2017/07/19 23:59:59.
Bibliography

1. Peter Callaghan, (2011) *Russia in Revolution (1881-1924) From Autocracy to Dictatorship*, CGP


3. Richard Charques, (1958) *The Twilight of Imperial Russia*, OUP


