

The Provisional Government

After the abdication of the Tsar in March 1917 the Duma's Provisional Committee took over the running of the government. The idea was that they would rule temporarily until elections were held for a new constituent assembly that would fairly represent the people of Russia. From the moment they took power important decisions needed to be made:

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



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The provisional government was mainly made up of influential elites who were previously in favour of the Tsar, like the Kadets. They were liberal in their outlook and their main priority was to set up the elections rather than making big decisions. Many workers, soldiers and peasants thought that the Provisional Government were self-appointed and for them the Petrograd Soviet was the more democratic organisation. The Petrograd **soviet** was dominated by Mensheviks, SRs and a small number of Bolsheviks and claimed to be more democratic as their members had been elected. It was made up of radical intellectuals but had the support of workers in key industries like coal mining and the support of much of the army. Alexander Kerensky was part of the provisional government but was also a respected member of the Petrograd soviet he negotiated an agreement for the two to work together to rule Russia and led to a period of **dual power**.

Going back to the problems facing Russia, the provisional government decided that Russia would continue to fight in the war until a new elected government had been elected and could make an official decision. They also urged peasants to restrain themselves and wait for elections before taking land for themselves. They saw themselves as temporary and thought it appropriate that the big decisions be made by the new elected government. The Soviets worked hard to get food into the cities for the workers. In July 1917 Kerensky was put in charge of the provisional government



Constituent assembly: a group of people who are elected in to create a new constitution for a country.

Constitution: fundamental rules/principles a country follows

Soviet: Council of workers and soldiers, set up after February revolution in most big cities. Extreme and revolutionary they shared power with Provisional Government

Dual power: Russia was governed by an alliance of the Provisional government and the Soviet

Lenin and the growth of the Bolsheviks

When Lenin arrived at the Finland station in Petrograd he set out the Bolshevik programme in the April Thesis. This stated that people should support the Bolsheviks in a second revolution. Lenin's slogans 'peace, land and bread' and 'all power to the Soviets' contrasted greatly with the cautious methods of the provisional government. As a result support for the Bolsheviks increased quickly particularly in the soviets and the army. These ideas were published in the official Bolshevik newspaper 'Pravda'. Essentially the April thesis demanded:

1. Power should be transferred to the Soviets
2. The war should be brought to an immediate end
3. All land should be taken over by the state and re-allocated to peasants by local soviets

He also stressed the fact that they should not be working with the provisional government

Events of April-November 1917

In the second half of 1917 the Provisional Government's authority started to collapse. The war effort was failing and soldiers were deserting in thousands from the army. Kerensky became minister for war and rallied the army for a great German counter-attack. The deserters decided they still wanted to go home. Lots of peasant soldiers were particularly keen to desert as they heard news that peasants all over Russia had ignored government orders to wait until decisions about land had been made. Instead peasants were taking control of the countryside and seizing land for themselves. The soldiers who were also peasants did not want to miss out on the opportunity to get land, hence more incentive to leave the war.

Problems became worse for the Provisional Government in the summer of 1917. In July ('the July Days') the Bolsheviks led protests against the war, these 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, was forced to flee to Finland. Kerensky used troops to crush the rebellion and took over the government.

Other in Russia began to get fed up of the Provisional government too. In September 1917 Kornilov, the army leader, marched his troops towards Petrograd, intending on getting rid of the Bolsheviks and the Provisional Government and restore order to the country. Kerensky was in an impossible situation. He had some troops who still supported him but this would have not been enough to go up against Kornilov and the rest of the army. Kerensky had no choice but to turn to the one group who could help him: the Bolsheviks, who dominated the Petrograd Soviet. The Bolsheviks organised themselves into an army called the Red Guard. Kornilov's troops refused to fight members of the Soviet so Kornilov's plan had failed.

However it was still not a victory for Kerensky and by October his government was doomed. It had tried to carry on the war and failed, as a result they had lost the army's support (just like the Tsar in the Feb revolution). It had tried to stop the peasants taking land so lost their support too. Without support from the peasants the government had failed to bring food into the towns and food prices had increased. This meant they lost support from the town workers. In contrast, the Bolsheviks were promising the people exactly what they wanted, bread, peace and land. It was the Bolsheviks who had removed the threat of Kornilov which had strengthened their image and position. By the end of September 1917, there were Bolshevik majorities in the Petrograd and Moscow Soviets and in most of Russia'



