

In November, 1917, [Vladimir Lenin](#) rewarded [Joseph Stalin](#) for his support of the [October Revolution](#) by appointing him Commissar of Nationalities. As a Georgian and a member of a minority group who had written about the problems of non-Russian peoples living under the Tsar, Stalin was seen as the obvious choice as Commissar of Nationalities. It was a job that gave Stalin tremendous power for nearly half the country's population fell into the category of non-Russian. Stalin now had the responsibility of dealing with 65 million Ukrainians, Georgians, Byelorussians, Tadzhiks, Buriats and Yakuts

The policy of the [Bolsheviks](#) was to grant the right of self-determination to all the various nationalities within Russia. This was reinforced by a speech Stalin made in Helsinki on November 16th, 1917. Stalin promised the crowd that the Soviet government would grant: "complete freedom for the Finnish people, and for other peoples of Russia, to arrange their own life!" Stalin's plan was to develop what he called "a voluntary and honest alliance" between Russia and the different national groups that lived within its borders.

Over the next couple of years Stalin had difficulty controlling the non-Russian peoples under his control. Independent states were set up without his agreement. These new governments were often hostile to the [Bolsheviks](#). Stalin had hoped that these independent states would voluntarily agree to join up with Russia to form a union of Socialist States. When this did not happen Stalin was forced to revise the policy and stated that self-determination: "ought to be understood as the right of self-determination not of the bourgeoisie but of the toiling masses of a given nation." In other words, unless these independent states had a socialist government willing to develop a union with Russia, the Bolsheviks would not allow self-determination.

[Vladimir Lenin](#) also changed his views on independence. He now came to the conclusion that a "modern economy required a high degree of power in the centre." Although the [Bolsheviks](#) had promised nearly half the Russian population that they would have self-determination, Lenin was now of the opinion that such a policy could pose a serious threat to the survival of the Soviet government. It was the broken promise over self-determination was

just one of the many reasons why Lenin's government became unpopular in Russia.