

October 1917 –February 1918 Early Decrees by Lenin

An 8 hour working day was introduced and a system of social insurance to cover old age, sickness, injury, unemployment, maternity, and problems faced by widows and orphans.



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Titles Decree - Titles and class distinctions were abolished. "Comrade" was adopted as the formal manner of address between citizens.



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Army Decree - All ranks were abolished in the army. Units were run by democratically elected leaders, who did not have a new official rank, though they acted as officers. Uniform decorations and saluting of officers was banned.



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Workers' Decree – Workers took over factories, mines and railways and owned them communally. Banks were nationalised (taken over by government).



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All schools and education was taken over by the state. Measures began to be taken to Communist the topics taught and the way lessons were run.



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Church lands were confiscated. The Russian Orthodox Church was basically closed down, though it would be a while before it was truly removed across Russia. Marriage became a civil, not religious, ceremony.



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Peace Decree – Lenin ordered an immediate ceasefire and negotiations for a peace treaty in November 1917. He ordered Russian soldiers to stop fighting Germany. He promised an “immediate peace without annexations (land being taken) and without indemnities (financial punishments).”



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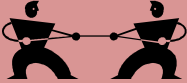
Land Decree - Private ownership in the countryside was banned; former owners lost their land without compensation and it was shared amongst the peasants. Many peasants took the land violently.



How did Lenin begin to consolidate power immediately after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917?

Treaty of Brest-Litovsk – March 1918

Lenin held off signing the Treaty until March 1918. When he did, it guaranteed peace with Germany and an end to the war. However, it cost ¼ of Russian land, 4/5 coalmines, 1/3 population and 6 billion German Marks in reparations. Germany also took Russian parts of Poland, and Turkey took part of the Caucasus. Finland, Georgia and the Ukraine were to become independent. Lenin justified this by saying that Russia was exhausted, and that “the Russian Revolution must sign the peace to obtain a breathing space to recover for the struggle.”



Constituent Assembly

Lenin allowed elections for a group that would write a new constitution for Russia, a Constituent Assembly. Lenin had to allow this as the lack of new elections had been a key accusation that he had laid against the Provisional Government.



Closing the Constituent Assembly

Lenin’s Bolsheviks came second in the elections for the new assembly. They won 24% of the seats, but the Socialist Revolutionaries won 40.4%. When the CA met for the first time on 5th Jan, 1918, Lenin ordered the new government to be subservient to the Bolshevik led Petrograd Soviet and the main group who ran the Bolshevik Party, the Sovnarkom. This was outvoted by 237 votes to 137.

Lenin immediately sent in armed troops and Red Guards. The CA was shut down on the very day it opened, the representatives dispersed and Lenin never attempted to use a democratic government to rule again.



Party structure

Lenin restructured the Party to be able to lead the country. He instituted the Central Committee. To make quicker decisions when necessary, the Politburo, or Political Bureau of the Central Committee, was formed in 1919. It had 7 members and was essentially a government cabinet of key officials and leaders, with Lenin in charge. Other key characters included Stalin and Trotsky.



Party name

In 1918, Lenin renamed the Bolshevik Party the Communist Party. This was clever because a) Bolshevik means majority, which implies that there is also a minority alternative view, whilst Lenin was imposing one Party line, and b) the name Communist implies a positive, inclusive message. The peasants in particular already used the word "commune" to describe close-knit farming communities.



War Communism

*In June 1918, Lenin introduced War Communism. It was enforced by a group called **Vesenkha**, the "Supreme Economic Council.*

In summary, under War Communism:

1. All industry was nationalized and strict centralized management was introduced.
2. State monopoly on foreign trade was introduced.
3. Discipline for workers was strict, and strikers could be shot.
4. Obligatory labour duty was imposed onto "non-working classes."
5. *Prodrazvyorstka* – requisition of agricultural surpluses from peasants in excess of absolute minimum for centralized distribution among the remaining population.
6. Food and most commodities were rationed and distributed in urban centers in a centralized way.
7. Private enterprise became illegal.
8. The state introduced military-style control of railroads.

Although it ultimately had to be abandoned in 1921 in favour of NEP, it did at least help Lenin initially to control the economy.



How did Lenin begin to consolidate power immediately after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917?

The above notes are all initial decisions made by Lenin in the first year or two of power. In an exam question, check carefully the dates. You may well be asked about consolidation, for example, 1917-21 or 1917-24. It is likely therefore that you will also need to include other aspects of consolidation, including:

- Winning the Civil War;
- Introduction of NEP when War Communism failed;
- 1921 Ban on Factions.