Why was there a second revolution in Russia in 1917? How important was the role of Lenin and the Bolsheviks in bringing it about?

**Lenin and Trotsky prepare**

'The Great October Socialist Revolution' was the grand Communist title for what turned out to be quite a small-scale affair, although the results were to be very important for Russia and the world for years to come. This revolution took place in October according to the old calendar. It is otherwise known as the November Revolution.

On the eve of the November Revolution Lenin returned from Finland for good. He came to the Smolny Institute in Petrograd, the Bolshevik headquarters. Although Lenin was in charge, it was Trotsky who had done most of the planning.

The plan was for the Bolsheviks to strike at the same time as the All-Russian Congress of Soviets was meeting in Petrograd. This organisation represented all the revolutionary parties, not just the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks knew that the Mensheviks and some other members of the Congress would oppose their method of seizing power.

Source A shows some of the most important buildings and bridges in Petrograd. The armed Bolshevik Red Guards were sent to seize them. They had already won over some of the troops in the Petrograd garrison and in the Peter and Paul Fortress. The cruiser Aurora, with a Bolshevik crew, was to sail up the River Neva and fire its guns as a signal for the Red Guards to capture their targets.

**The Bolsheviks strike**

Although Kerensky had a good idea of what was planned and had closed down the Bolshevik newspaper offices, he did not have enough loyal troops to protect his government. The Red Guards took control of the capital. There was little fighting, much less than in March. The Bolsheviks did have to capture the Winter Palace but they achieved this relatively easily, and arrested the members of the Provisional Government who were meeting there.

The All-Russian Congress of Soviets was also meeting while these dramatic events were unfolding. When they discovered what was happening, the Mensheviks and most of the Socialist Revolutionaries walked out of the meeting in protest at the Bolsheviks having taken the law into their own hands, without their agreement. Trotsky shouted after them: 'You are pitiful, isolated individuals. You are bankrupts, your role is played out. Go where you belong from now on ... on to the rubbish heap of history.' By walking out, the other revolutionary parties left the Bolsheviks in control.

**B Trotsky describes the Bolshevik headquarters in his autobiography My Life (1930).**

On the third floor of the Smolny, in a small corner room, the Committee was in continuous session. All the reports about the movement of troops, the attitude of soldiers and workers, the agitation in the barracks ... the happenings in the Winter Palace - all these came to this centre.

All that week I had hardly stepped outside of the Smolny; I spent the nights on a leather couch without undressing, sleeping in snatches, and constantly being roused by couriers, scouts, messenger-cyclists, telegraphists, and ceaseless telephone calls.

**C Stalin praises Trotsky's role in the revolution in The Role of the Most Eminent Party Leaders 6 November 1918.**

All the work of practical organisation of the insurrection was conducted under the immediate leadership of the Chairman of the Petrograd Soviet, Trotsky. It is possible to declare with certainty that the swift passing of the garrison to the side of the Soviet and the bold execution of the work of the Military Revolutionary Committee (the group of Bolsheviks organising the Revolution), the Party owes principally and above all to comrade Trotsky.
The signal for the start of the assault was given from the cruiser Aurora which fired a blank shot from her bow gun ... the formations of Red Guards, sailors and soldiers poured out of the adjacent streets and street corners in an irresistible rush across the square in front of the Winter Palace ... The last bastion of counter-revolution [forces opposed to the Revolution] fell on the night of October 25–26, 1917. This marked the victory of the armed uprising of the working people in the capital of Russia, Petrograd, which [began] a new era in human history.

E A scene from the Soviet film October, made in 1927 to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the October/November Revolution.


Carried along by the eager wave of men we were swept into the right-hand entrance, opening into a great bare vaulted room, the cellar of the east wing, from which issued a maze of corridors and staircases. A number of huge packing-cases stood about, and upon these the Red Guards and soldiers fell furiously, battering them open with the butts of their rifles, and pulling out carpets, curtains, linen, porcelain, plates, glassware ... The looting was just beginning when somebody cried, ‘Comrades! Don’t take anything. This is the property of the People!’ Immediately twenty voices were crying, ‘Stop! Put everything back! Don’t take anything! Property of the People!’

The ministers of the Provisional Government were arrested in the Winter Palace, apart from Kerensky, who managed to flee abroad. The following day Lenin drew up a decree which declared that power had been taken over by the Congress in the name of the soviets of all Russia.

Why did the Bolsheviks win?
The Bolsheviks had not won because they were an irresistible force. Far from it. They won because Kerensky and the Provisional Government had lost respect and support, other political parties were hesitating, and only Lenin appeared to offer decisive leadership. Therefore a relatively small group, the Bolsheviks, was able to seize control of the capital. A few days later they also seized control of Moscow. They now controlled the two largest cities, but little else. The real struggle was about to begin.

1 How important was Trotsky’s part in the November Revolution?
2 Use source A and other information in the chapter to describe the part played in the November Revolution by the Red Guards.
3 Why was there opposition to the Bolshevik Revolution from within the All-Russian Congress of Soviets?
4 What evidence of propaganda is there in sources D, E and F? What impression do these sources give of the events of the November Revolution? What was the intention of the people who produced these sources?
5 How was Lenin able to seize power with only a relatively small party?

Extended writing
Why was there a second revolution in Russia in 1917 so soon after the first? There are several points you might consider in answering this question, including: the continuation of the war; the role of Lenin and the Bolsheviks; the weaknesses and problems of the Provisional Government. Were all these things, and others, equally important in bringing about revolution?
How did the Bolsheviks alter life inside Russia? What was the Bolshevik system of government like?

The Bolshevik success in November 1917 came as a surprise to almost everyone, and few believed that Lenin would succeed in staying in power. None of his supporters had any experience of governing. They had to work out what to do whilst fighting opponents at home and from abroad.

Peace with Germany

The first need was for peace. The Germans had invaded Russia and were threatening Petrograd. A cease-fire, or armistice, was arranged with them. Trotsky was sent off to negotiate with the Germans, and eventually the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed in March 1918. The terms of the peace were very harsh, and Trotsky was forced to give up large areas of the old Russian Empire. Lenin persuaded his colleagues that they had no choice; otherwise the Germans would destroy his government. Anyway, Lenin was confident that world revolution was about to break out elsewhere, including Germany, in which case the treaty would not last long.

The Constituent Assembly

Back in Petrograd, meanwhile, many changes were underway. The Provisional Government had always intended to hold elections for a new parliament, called a Constituent Assembly. This would give all Russians the chance to vote for their future. But the elections had been postponed because of the war. Now the Bolsheviks allowed the elections to take place. The results are shown in source B.

As soon as the Assembly met, Lenin had it closed down. He declared it ‘counter-revolutionary’. He had no intention of giving up power.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Deputies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bolsheviks</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialist Revolutionaries</td>
<td>370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left Socialist Revolutionaries (allies of the Bolsheviks)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mensheviks</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kadets</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B The results of elections to the Constituent Assembly.

A new Russia

Many laws were passed to change Russia:

- businesses and trade were nationalised;
- peasants were allowed to take over the land;
- women were given equal rights to men;
- the Church had its wealth taken by the government;
- different peoples in the old Russian Empire were given the right to be independent.

A new system of government was created. Instead of having government ministers as in Britain, there were commissars appointed to take charge of foreign affairs, industry and so on. In Britain the most important government ministers form the Cabinet, which helps the prime minister to govern. The equivalent in Russia was the Council of Peoples’ Commissars, called SOVNARKOM for short. But in 1919 the Politburo was created. It
contained a few leading Bolsheviks such as Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin. It met every week and made important decisions. Another organisation, called the Orgburo (Organisational Bureau), was responsible for carrying out decisions made by the Politburo. It was assisted by the Secretariat. Joseph Stalin was the only Bolshevik to belong to the Politburo, Orgburo and Secretariat. This was important in helping him come to power, as will be explained in a later chapter.

One-party rule

Other political parties such as the Mensheviks, the Socialist Revolutionaries and the Kadets were quickly weakened by the arrest of their leaders and the closing down of their newspapers. By 1921 Russia was already a ‘one-party state’. That party was the Communist Party, the name adopted by the Bolsheviks in 1918. The secret police or Cheka was set up to arrest real or imagined opponents of the Communists.

In theory, decisions were still made by the Central Committee of the Communist Party. This was elected by an annual meeting or congress of important Party members. But since it met much less frequently than the Politburo, the Central Committee could not make day-to-day decisions.

Only about five per cent of the population became Party members. To become one, you had to be recommended by two existing members, and then serve a probationary year to show how suitable you were. A Party member was expected to do things like explain Communist propaganda to workmates, and behave like a good citizen. A relatively small number of Communists became full-time Party workers. There was also a Party youth movement called the Komsomol.

There were other organisations in the new state. There were elected local soviets, but their powers were quickly reduced. From 1923, all citizens could vote for the Supreme Soviet, but there was only one candidate in each constituency, and the Supreme Soviet was less important than the Party.

This system sounds complicated, but it is important to understand that the Soviet Union was run in this way until the late 1980s. The key fact is that, whoever was in the government, real power lay with the Communist Party, and its leader, the General Secretary.

1) How harsh were the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk for Russia?
2) Why did Lenin and Trotsky sign the Treaty?
3) Look at source B.
   a) Explain whether the Bolsheviks would have been satisfied with the result of the elections to the Constituent Assembly.
   b) Why did Lenin close the Assembly down?
4) Did the Communists bring about more changes in Russia than the Provisional Government had done? Explain your answer.
5) What is meant by a ‘one-party state’?
   a) What was the intended message of source C?
   b) What reasons did workers and peasants have to be pleased about the Bolsheviks’ success in winning power?
6) What view of the Russian Revolution is put across in sources D and E? Who were the posters probably aimed at?
   a) What would have been the likely attitude of governments in other countries to these posters? Why would a non-Communist’s view of these events be likely to have been different from that of a Bolshevik?
**Civil War and Foreign Intervention, 1918–21**

Why did Civil War break out in Russia in 1918? Why did foreign countries become involved in the Civil War? Why were the Bolsheviks or Reds able to win the Civil War? What effect did the Civil War have on Russia?

**Opposition to the Bolsheviks**

The Communists had won power mainly because their opponents had been weak and poorly led. Once Lenin’s enemies began to organise themselves, the Bolshevik government faced a serious threat to its survival. Opponents saw no reason why they should obey the Communists. Communists were not well known and had not been elected, but rather they had seized power by force.

One of the earliest Communist decrees or laws allowed all the subject peoples of the old Russian Empire to have their independence from Russia. The Communists were too weak in any case to stop them. There were movements to break away in Finland, in the Baltic region, and in the Caucasus region to the south. The Ukrainians set up their own parliament, made a separate peace treaty with the Germans, and soon began fighting the Communists.

Meanwhile, in the south of Russia, several army officers loyal to the old regime formed anti-Communist armies. Admiral Kolchak and Generals Denikin and Wrangel became leaders of the so-called White armies. Their followers and supporters were not just soldiers but came from many different groups. They included businessmen, landowners, and others who had suffered from Lenin’s takeover by losing their land and businesses.

After the Constituent Assembly was closed down, other left-wing or revolutionary parties also sought to overthrow the Communists. Even their former allies, the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, split with the Communists over the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and the way in which the Communists attacked the richer peasants. The SR leader Chernov formed a Socialist Revolutionary government in the Volga region, and another SR government was set up in Archangel in the north.

Everywhere the Communists were under threat. Even Lenin himself was shot and wounded by Dora Kaplan, a Socialist Revolutionary.

**Foreign intervention**

The Communists, or Reds, as they were known, were further threatened when other countries began to interfere in Russia in the first half of 1918. 17 foreign governments, including the British, American, French and Japanese sent armies for several reasons. These governments were angry that the Communists had made peace with the Germans. They wanted to see a non-Communist Russian government in power that would restart the war against Germany and take the pressure off their troops in western Europe. They were also hostile to Lenin’s government because it refused to pay the Tsar’s debts to foreign countries and had nationalised foreign-owned industries. Foreign governments also knew that the Communists preached world revolution, and so they wanted to get rid of the Communists before they could cause trouble elsewhere.

British troops landed at Murmansk in the north, and with the Japanese at Vladivostock in the far east.
British and French troops landed in the south. The Germans themselves occupied the Ukraine and west Russia. A large army called the Czech Legion also joined the anti-Communist crusade: this was a unit formed from Czechs who had been captured during the First World War and had agreed to fight on the Russian side against their Austrian masters. They too wanted Russia back in the war. The Czech Legion took control of the Trans-Siberian railway. Both Moscow and Petrograd were soon under threat. Source B shows how the Reds were surrounded by enemy armies.
**The Bolsheviks turn the tide**

Lenin was aware of the danger to the Reds, but he was also optimistic.

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**Lenin speaking in November 1918.**

Our position has never been so dangerous as now ... The imperialists of the Anglo-French-American group are thinking of building a Chinese wall, to protect themselves from Bolshevism, like a quarantine against plague ... The germ will pass through the wall and infect the workers of all countries.

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Although the position of the Reds looked hopeless, they actually had several advantages over their opponents. The Reds fought desperately, knowing that if they lost, they would certainly be killed. Trotsky formed a new army, the Red Army, and turned it into a feared fighting force. When there were not enough officers, he conscripted former Tsarist officers into the army. Discipline was ruthless. In contrast, the foreign armies were already exhausted by several years of world war, and could not be expected to fight with the same determination in a foreign country.

Many peasants did not like the Reds. But at least Lenin had given them their land. They feared that if the White generals won the war, Tsarism or something like it might be restored to Russia. Therefore they either tried to keep out of the war or supported the Reds.
Finally, the Reds controlled most of the railways and the large towns of Russia. They managed to move their troops quickly to where they were needed. They were united, whereas the Whites and foreign armies fought mostly as separate groups.

The end of the war
Most of the fighting was over by 1920. Kolchak was captured and executed by the Reds. The other White generals retreated and the foreign armies left Russia.

The last stage of the war involved a struggle against the new country of Poland. The Poles wanted to extend their territory eastward, and invaded the Ukraine in 1920. The Reds managed to drive them back almost to Warsaw, and then themselves were defeated and forced back. Peace was made between Russia and Poland at the Treaty of Riga in 1921.

The effects of the war
All wars are brutal, and civil wars particularly so. Atrocities were carried out on both sides. Prisoners were often tortured and killed. Instead of recovering from the effects of the First World War, Russia suffered three more years of devastation during the Civil War.

The Tsar and his family had been kept prisoner by the Reds in Siberia and then at Ekaterinburg in the Urals. In July 1918 Kolchak’s White army was approaching the town, and the Reds were afraid that the Tsar might fall into White hands. The Red guards herded the royal family into a cellar, shot them all, and burned their bodies in a nearby mine.

During the Civil War Lenin and Trotsky ran Russia ruthlessly. They tolerated no opposition, and the local soviets or councils lost most of their powers. Decisions were made by the people running the Communist Party.

Although the Reds won the Civil War, they did not forget how close they had come to defeat by foreign armies. For years afterwards the Soviet government remained suspicious of the motives of foreign governments, and many Communists believed that they would only be safe if they helped bring about revolutions in other countries.

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During the Civil War, the Communists set up an organisation called the Communist International, or Comintern. Its task was to help set up Communist parties in other countries and to work for an international Communist revolution. This helped to increase suspicion of Communist Russia among foreign governments.

There were 0.5 million Communists serving in the new Red Army during the Civil War. Most people who joined the Communist Party did so after the Revolution and so their early years in the Party were dominated by fighting. These new Party members were not prepared to put up with any opposition and in the years ahead were often prepared to use force to get their way.

However, the Communists were keen to end their isolation. Soon after the end of the War, in 1922, they signed the Treaty of Rapallo with Germany, another country defeated in the First World War. Soon afterwards other countries, including Britain, agreed to recognise officially the Communists as the legal government of Russia, although they remained suspicious of ‘the Reds’.

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1) Who were the Bolsheviks’ enemies inside Russia in 1918?

2) Why did they fight the Reds?

3) Why did foreign governments join in the Civil War?

4) Why did the Reds win the Civil War? Was it due to their own strengths or the weaknesses of their enemies?

5) a) What do sources E, F and G tell us about the nature of the Civil War?

b) Which of sources E and G best explains the differences between the Whites and the Reds?
What was War Communism? Why was it introduced? How did it affect Russia and its people?

The new Russia
The Bolsheviks hoped to create a new society in Russia after the revolution. They wanted a country in which the old ruling class and wealthy people lost their money, land and businesses. They believed that the country should be run for the benefit of ordinary people. However, Lenin faced several difficulties in trying to achieve this.

- Many people in Russia still opposed the Bolsheviks or were only interested in their own affairs.
- Russia was already a backward country. Now it had been further devastated by several years of war.
- Between 1918 and 1920 the Bolsheviks had to devote most of their energies to fighting the Civil War.

Changes in the economy
Despite these problems, the Communist Party made a start on taking over the economy. A decree or law passed soon after the revolution nationalised the factories. This means that the government took many of them from their previous owners. Other factories were taken over and run by ordinary workers themselves.

It was soon discovered that there were not enough experts and experienced managers to go round, and so the Communists had to co-operate with some of those who had been in positions of responsibility before the revolution. These people belonged to the class to which Lenin often referred as the bourgeoisie, or middle class.

This did not seem like the socialism or Communism that Marxists had expected. Not much had changed in the economy except that now the government claimed to be running things in the interests of ordinary people.

Lenin set up an organisation called the 'Supreme Council of National Economy' to make plans for the future. But there was a severe shortage of food and other basic goods in Russia. So prices rose rapidly and money soon became worthless. Some Communists, like Nicholas Bukharin, liked this inflation. They hoped that money would disappear, since in a Communist society people would work for each other and be given what they needed. But during this time people had to barter, or exchange food and goods, since their money had no value.

War Communism is introduced
The policy of the government from mid-1918 to 1921 was known as War Communism. War Communism was not one particular law or decree, but a whole series of measures designed to take control over everyone's lives.

The most urgent need was for food, particularly in the towns. The peasants wanted to keep the land which they had just been given. But they were also unwilling to sell the food they grew. Why should they when money was worthless and there was nothing to buy in exchange? So Lenin ordered squads of soldiers and Party officials to go into the villages and requisition food - that is, seize it without payment.

Because of shortages in the towns, almost half the inhabitants of many Russian cities left them between 1918 and 1920 and went to live in the countryside.

The peasants were very unhappy at this. Sometimes they attacked the requisition squads. Sometimes they themselves were shot. Less food was grown. By 1921 only half the amount produced before the First World War was grown, even in areas like the Ukraine, which had the best farmland.
There was famine, and it is estimated that over seven million Russians died of hunger or disease during the period of War Communism. In 1921 even the Communist newspaper Pravda admitted that one Russian in every five was starving.

Industry also had its problems, as source B shows. It was decreed in June 1918 that all industry was to be nationalised. Russians were conscripted to work in factories. But most effort went into producing materials for the army, which was fighting the Civil War.

Opposition

Not surprisingly, many ordinary people rebelled against the harshness of War Communism. Workers in factories worked more slowly, or went on strike. Even more serious for Lenin, there was opposition from within the Communist Party. One group, called the Workers’ Opposition, argued that War Communism was wrong and that the Communists should do more for the working class.

The situation was critical. The police were shooting strikers, and trade unions were banned. There was a real danger that if ordinary people turned against the Communists, they would be overthrown.

Lenin had already made the decision to abandon War Communism before the explosive events at Kronstadt in 1921 (see pages 30–31) showed just how unstable the situation was.

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1. What changes did the Communists make to (i) agriculture and (ii) industry in the period of War Communism, 1918–21?
2. Why did (i) most peasants and (ii) some Communists oppose War Communism?
3. a) What does source B tell us about the effects of War Communism?
   b) These figures are official figures collected by the Soviet government. Does this mean that they are likely to be reliable as historical evidence?
4. Did the experience of War Communism prove that the Communists could not run Russia successfully? Consider carefully what had happened in Russia both before 1917 and between 1918 and 1921 before you answer this question.
How important was the Kronstadt Revolt? Why was 1921 an important year for the development of Communism in Russia?

The Kronstadt Rebellion

During 1920 and 1921 there were several rebellions against the harshness of Communist rule in Russia. In March 1921 the most serious of these broke out in the naval base of Kronstadt, an island just outside Petrograd. Thousands of sailors protested against their living conditions and what had been happening in Russia. They disliked the way in which the Communist Party did not appear to have much regard for ordinary people, and had taken away the powers of the local councils or soviets. The sailors demanded a ‘free socialist democracy’.

The rebellion had to be crushed. Trotsky sent the Red Army across the iced-up sea to attack the naval base. In a three-week struggle many of the rebel sailors were killed, and later thousands were imprisoned or executed. It was the last occasion in Soviet history that there was a large-scale organised rebellion against Communist rule.

The sailors of Kronstadt had helped the Bolsheviks seize power in 1917, and they had fought for them during the Civil War. Therefore their rebellion against Lenin seemed particularly serious.
The Tenth Party Congress

As described in the previous chapter, Lenin had already decided that War Communism had to be abandoned. The Kronstadt Rebellion simply convinced him further.

The Communist Party held yearly meetings or congresses in order to discuss policy and elect officials. The Tenth Party Congress of March 1921 was one of the most important in Russian history, for two reasons. Firstly, Lenin talked about the need for unity in the Communist Party. Secondly, he announced the end of War Communism. It was to be replaced by the New Economic Policy, which is described in the next chapter.

A ban on arguments

Many members of the party were feeling optimistic at the Congress, because the Civil War was virtually over. The Whites had been defeated and foreign troops had left Russia. But there were many arguments going on inside the Party. Apart from the Workers’ Opposition mentioned in Chapter 11, there was a group called the Left Communists. These included Bukharin. They believed that in order for Communism to survive and develop in Russia, the Party should help to start workers’ revolutions in other countries, to get foreign allies. Another group was the Democratic Centralists, who believed that ordinary Party members should have a bigger say in how decisions were made and carried out.

Lenin was worried that factions within the Party would weaken it and encourage opponents. Therefore at the same time as announcing changes to the economy, the Tenth Party Congress also issued a declaration on ‘party unity’. In future, anyone in the Party who openly disagreed with the official policy would be ‘purged’. In the early 1920s this meant being sacked from the Party.

The one-party state

Lenin’s decisions had important results. They meant that in future any Communist who disagreed with the Party’s way of doing things risked being labelled as a traitor to the leadership. This gave great power to those already high up in the Party like Joseph Stalin, who could silence opposition by claiming that he was carrying out Lenin’s wishes.

There were still some Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries active in Russia in 1921. But now they were silenced, arrested or shot by the secret police. The Communist Party gradually increased its hold over the way people thought and acted. Schoolchildren were taught only the Communist point of view. Thousands of churches were closed down and had their property taken by the government. The Communists said that religion was something used by capitalist governments to keep people oppressed and in ignorance. There was censorship, which meant that newspapers, books and films were only allowed if they carried the ‘right’ messages. Russia was rapidly becoming a totalitarian society – a country in which the ruling Party controlled not only what people did but even what they thought.

1. Why did the Kronstadt Rebellion break out?
2. a) In what ways does source D support source A in its attitude towards the Communist government?
   b) What did the author of source D mean by ‘the embers of hope have died out’ and ‘the Revolution is dead’?
3. What is meant by a one-party state or a totalitarian state? Do these descriptions fit Russia after 1921?
4. Why were the Kronstadt Rebellion and the Tenth Party Congress both important events in the history of Communist Russia?
What was New Economic Policy? What were its successes and failures? Why did it cause controversy?

Changes to the economy

Lenin announced the New Economic Policy, or NEP, at the Tenth Party Congress of 1921. It made two important changes to the way in which the Soviet economy was organised.

First, in agriculture, the government stopped the practice of requisitioning food, that is, forcibly taking it from the peasants. Peasants now had to supply a fixed amount of what they grew to the government. Any extra they were allowed to keep or even sell for a profit.

Second, in industry, small factories (those employing less than 20 workers) were privatised. This means that the government returned them to private ownership. However, all important industries, such as coal and steel, the transport system and foreign trade, remained nationalised. Lenin called these ‘the commanding heights of the economy’ and believed that they must be controlled by the government for the benefit of everyone.

A new rouble was brought in, in order to help end inflation. The programme of electrification continued, and it was extended to rural areas. Lenin said: ‘Soviets plus electrification equals communism.’ In other words, communism was not just an idea, but brought real progress to the Russians.

The impact of NEP

After 1921 the improvements in the economy were rapid. The Civil War was over and people felt more secure. Peasants now realised that it was in their interest to produce as much food as possible, and make a profit. Between 1921 and 1927 the amount of cultivated land grew by 50 per cent.

In the towns workers produced more and there was more to buy. It was now legal to trade and make a profit, so many Russians began to make a living out of buying and selling, rather than actually making things. As a result, a new class of traders called ‘Nepmen’ grew up.

Russia soon recovered from the terrible experiences of War Communism. However, not all economic problems were solved. In the early years of NEP the price of food fell as more was produced. But the output of industrial goods could not keep pace: because there were still shortages, the prices of industrial goods rose, and some peasants could not afford to buy things. The government was worried that the peasants might start producing less food again.
Worries about NEP

Some members of the Communist Party had more serious worries about NEP. To them it seemed like a backward step. They thought that by allowing private ownership, private trade and profits, Lenin was bringing back capitalism. Class differences were reappearing as some people made profits. In the countryside, some peasants became rich from selling their produce, and even began to employ poorer peasants to work for them. These richer peasants were called kulaks.

In the towns, Party members began to complain at the appearance of Nepmen, who made a living by trading rather than making things. Some said that NEP encouraged greed and selfishness, with people trying to make money for themselves rather than work for the good of everyone. Communism seemed further away than ever.

Lenin admitted in 1921 that NEP was a ‘retreat’. He said that, had War Communism not been abandoned, the Communist government would have been overthrown by the people. But he also said that NEP was a temporary measure, a sort of ‘state capitalism’. The important thing was to strengthen Russia and make it easier for Russia to become socialist in the future. Lenin stated that it was important that workers and peasants should co-operate with each other.

Nobody was prepared to challenge Lenin. However, after his death, leading people in the party argued more and more about whether NEP should be continued. There were two main worries:

- Could Russia ever be a socialist country whilst NEP encouraged a minority to become rich at the expense of the majority?
- Could Russia go on risking a situation in which the government and people living in towns depended on the goodwill of the peasants to produce enough food? The Communist Party had relatively few members in the countryside. Would the peasants hold the Communists to ransom, and stop the party introducing proper socialism?

All the worries and arguments became mixed up with quarrels about who would become leader of Russia after Lenin’s death in 1924. It was to be the opponents of NEP who eventually won the day.

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**C: A speech by Lenin to Communist Party members in 1921.**

We are retreating, going back as it were, but we are doing this so as to retreat first and then run and leap forward more vigorously. We retreated on this one condition alone when we introduced our New Economic Policy ... so as to begin a more determined offensive after the retreat.

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**D: Victor Serge, a former Communist, regretted what happened under NEP. (From Lenin to Stalin, 1937).**

In a few years’ time the NEP restored to Russia an aspect of prosperity. But to many of us this prosperity was sometimes distasteful...we felt ourselves sinking into the mire [bog or swamp] – paralysed, corrupted ... There was gambling, drunkenness, and all the old filth of former times ... Classes were reborn under our very eyes ... There was a growing gap between the prosperity of the few and the misery of the many.

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**E: A Soviet cartoon from 1927, making fun of Nepmen.**

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1. In what ways was NEP different from War Communism in its treatment of (i) agriculture and (ii) industry?
2. Look at source B. In what ways and to what extent did the economy improve under NEP?
3. Look at source C. How did Lenin justify bringing in NEP?
4. Look at source D and the other evidence in this chapter. Why were many Communists unhappy about what happened under NEP?

**Extended writing**

‘NEP changed Russia for the better.’ Using your own knowledge, and the evidence in this chapter, explain whether you agree or disagree with this interpretation.
How important was Lenin to the success of Communism in the USSR?

Lenin did not enjoy good health for long. He survived an assassination attempt by a Socialist Revolutionary in 1918, but in 1922 he suffered his first stroke. Although he continued as leader he was severely disabled and finally died in January 1924. He was 54 years old. At his funeral millions came to pay their respects. His body was embalmed in a tomb in Moscow’s Red Square. Petrograd was renamed Leningrad in his memory.

Nobody challenged Lenin’s leadership. However, towards the end of his life he did worry a great deal about what was happening in Russia and who would succeed him as leader.

Lenin was actually responsible for some of the things he claimed to dislike. For example, during his time in power the Communist Party became more rigid in its views, and ordinary members lost the chance to have a real say in making decisions. The Party was dominated by the Central Committee. In 1919 Lenin created the ‘People’s Commissariat of State Control’, used to keep Party members in line. He put Stalin in charge of this organisation, and then came to regret it. All opposition outside the Party was crushed by the feared Cheka or secret police. Lenin personally justified the use of terror against opponents.

Lenin had devoted all his adult life to first trying to bring about a revolution in Russia and then keeping the Communists in power. He disliked all the attention and near-worship that he received after 1917, but without his leadership the Communists would probably have not won power. In the difficult years before 1914 it was Lenin who had fiercely argued for a determined, disciplined Bolshevik Party, dedicated to revolution. When he returned to Russia in April 1917, it was Lenin who persuaded the Bolsheviks not to co-operate with the Provisional Government. He took advantage of the confusion and uncertainty to lead a second revolution.

After 1917 Lenin acted ruthlessly when he thought it necessary, to keep the Communists in power. Although Trotsky was a great speech-maker and led the Red Army to victory in the Civil War, it was Lenin alone who had the respect of all the other leading Communists.

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B From a Soviet school textbook published in 1976.

On January 21, 1924 Lenin died. Millions of people were overcome with sorrow ... On the morning of January 27 his remains were brought to Red Square, where an endless mass of people streamed past the coffin. The working people of the entire world also paid their last tribute. Factory workers in many countries stopped work for five minutes in homage ... For the first time in the history of mankind the death of one man moved hundreds of millions of people throughout the world. Everyone had heard the name of Lenin.
Nevertheless, when Lenin died, there was genuine grief not just among Russians but among millions of people around the world who regarded him as the champion of oppressed people. Sources B to F show some of the opinions of Lenin and the propaganda about him.

From a Soviet poem called ‘By Lenin’s Study’, written in 1956 by Alexander Yashin.

Since dawn he’d stood there at attention, Unnoticed. 
Down the corridor bright, As Lenin worked 
They brought him endless 
Communications, wires and letters, and comrades came to talk with Lenin – 
The soldier knew them all by sight 
The frontline news was serious. 
Lenin 
Met peasants, like a friendly host 
He saw them to the door 
Where always 
The soldier waited at his post. 
Then Lenin, noticing the soldier, 
A spare chair in his study found. 
He held the door with one foot open 
And said: ‘Dear fellow, please sit down!’ 
Well, what’s so special? Lenin got him 
The chair, was thoughtful, took some pains … 
That sums up Lenin! And explains 
Why this has never been forgotten.

1 Look at sources B, C, D and G. What messages about Lenin do these sources try to give?
2 Does source E give a different impression of Lenin? Does the fact that it comes from a British newspaper make it less useful to an historian?
3 Look at source F. Why did young Communists hold their ceremonies in the Lenin Museum?
4 Can propaganda be useful to an historian? Use these sources in your answer.
5 Make a list of five ways in which Lenin improved Russia, and five ways in which he did not. Then answer this question: ‘How important was Lenin to the success of Communism in Russia?’
6 Source E claims that Lenin brought Russia to ‘ruin, famine and barbarism’, whereas source B claims that hundreds of millions were saddened by Lenin’s death. How do you explain this difference in interpretation? (Think carefully about the origins of these sources.)