

# LENIN AND THE BOLSHEVIKS

- Chairman                    So, everybody, how important was Lenin?
- Russian historian        The greatest man in History! The man who founded Bolshevism, who masterminded the 1917 revolution, who set up Soviet state which defeated Hitler and fought the Cold War against America. Basically, the man who shaped the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- American historian    I want to challenge virtually every word you say – I mean ... to start with ... firstly, there were TWO revolutions in 1917, not one. The first one was the popular uprising of March 1917. Lenin had nothing to do with that AT ALL; he was in exile in Switzerland. Lenin *snuck* into power in November 1917 because the Provisional Government messed up ...
- Chairman                    Messed up?
- American historian    Aw – it didn't stop the war – it didn't stop the shortages in the towns – it didn't give the peasants any land ...
- Russian historian        [earnest] ... but surely that is point – the reason you identify these as three failures of the Provisional Government is because that was Lenin's campaign – 'Peace, Bread, Land'.  
I must say it: there is a myth that the November Revolution was not really *proper* Revolution at all, that instead it was Provisional Government which ... disintegrated ... anyway, it is rubbish.  
The collapse of the monarchy in March 1917 saw TWO COMPETING governments set up – 'Provisional Government' of the Duma, yes, but also Petrograd Soviet of workers and soldiers. The next eight months were a period of struggle – a period of 'Dual Government': they were about who going to rule Russia, bourgeois or proletariat?  
It was Lenin who won that struggle, who secured the Russian Revolution as a PEOPLE'S revolution. His leadership during that year – his propaganda in *Pravda* ... and it was the Bolsheviks who defeated Kornilov in August and took over Petrograd Soviet in September ... the Bolsheviks became more and more popular ... and then in November they organised a mass uprising – which established it as a true popular revolution.
- American historian    It's stretching the truth beyond reason to describe November 1917 as 'popular' in any sense of the word ...
- British historian        ... it wasn't even Lenin. OK, he was the leader – he got to make the speech announcing the new government on 8 November – but it was Trotsky who did the work. It was Trotsky who ran the Red Guards who defeated Kornilov – Trotsky who took over the Petrograd Soviet by becoming Chairman – Trotsky who persuaded Lenin to mount the November revolution, and then who organised the Red Guards who WON IT. Lenin was a figurehead, the theoretician .
- Russian historian        [triumphantly] Aha! Yes!!! The *theoretician*!!! The man who *devised* it all – the man who deserves the credit. Look at the Communist state Lenin introduced into Russia after November 1917. You cannot deny it was Lenin who dismissed the Constituent Assembly – who invented the idea of the 'dictatorship of proletariat'. And look at all those wonderful laws – land to peasants, factories to workers; an 8-hour day; unemployment pay, pensions; *agit* trains – free education;

free love, divorce and abortion; Science; women's rights. Do you not agree it was the most exciting social experiment of all time? Some people say that War Communism was purest Communist society ever...

- American historian [ironically]... half the country given away at Brest-Litovsk, priests executed, newspapers censored, strikers shot, rationing, *Prodravvyorstka*, History abolished as a curriculum subject – oh yeah, a society to die for ... LITERALLY!
- British historian But again, who deserves the credit – Lenin ... or Trotsky? Trotsky, as Foreign Minister, negotiated Brest-Litovsk. Trotsky, as head of the Cheka, organised the Terror. It was Trotsky who led the Red Guards to victory in the Civil War – showing personal heroism at Leningrad, moreover ... AND splatted the Kronstadt Rebellion in 1921.
- American historian AND – talking of Kronstadt – didn't Lenin introduce the New Economic Policy ...
- British historian ... it was Trotsky who suggested it ...
- American historian [dismissively] ... whatever ... didn't ... *the Bolsheviks* ... introduce the NEP which reversed all their reforms? [now unpleasantly ironic – 'an edge'] Religious and national freedoms, foreign experts, Nepmen, Kulaks – WOW! Some communist experiment that, eh? How long did your 'purest' communism last – a couple of years?
- Russian historian [aggressively] So as I understand it what you are saying, is that Lenin was failure because he introduced a strict Communist regime in 1917 AND he was failure because the NEP softened it at the edges...
- Chairman OK ... whoah! SO? Lenin: genius ... or shyster?