

Module 03: 1917 — Did the War Cause a Revolution?

Evidence 37: Lenin's Letter to Central Committee Members/Call to Power, October 24/November 6, 1917

A

Introduction

As support for a governing coalition of Socialist parties gathered on the eve of the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets, Lenin urged his followers to overthrow the Provisional Government by force. The government's decision to send the Petrograd garrison to the front and close the Bolshevik press on October 24 enabled Lenin to persuade his followers that they had to act immediately. Note that Lenin calls for a seizure of power "not in opposition to the Soviets, but on their behalf."

Document

November 6/October 24, 1917

Comrades,

I am writing these lines on the evening of the 24th. The situation is critical in the extreme. In fact it is now absolutely clear that to delay the uprising would be fatal.

With all my might I urge comrades to realise that everything now hangs by a thread; that we are confronted by problems which are not to be solved by conferences or congresses (even congresses of Soviets), but exclusively by peoples, by the masses, by the struggle of the armed people.

The bourgeois onslaught of the Kornilovites and the removal of Verkhovsky show that we must not wait. We must at all costs, this very evening, this very night, arrest the government, having first disarmed the officer cadets (defeating them, if they resist), and so on.

We must not wait! We may lose everything!

The value of the immediate seizure of power will be the defence of the people (not of the congress, but of the people, the army and the peasants

in the first place) from the Kornilovite government, which has driven out Verkhovsky and has hatched a second Kornilov plot.

Who must take power?

That is not important at present. Let the Revolutionary Military Committee do it, or "some other institution" which will declare that it will relinquish power only to the true representatives of the interests of the people, the interests of the army (the immediate proposal of peace), the interests of the peasants (the land to be taken immediately and private property abolished), the interests of the starving.

All districts, all regiments, all forces must be mobilised at once and must immediately send their delegations to the Revolutionary Military Committee and to the Central Committee of the Bolsheviks with the insistent demand that under no circumstances should power be left in the hands of Kerensky and Co. until the 25th; not under any circumstances; the matter must be decided without fail this very evening, or this very night.

History will not forgive revolutionaries for procrastinating when they could be victorious today (and they certainly will be victorious today), while they risk losing much tomorrow, in fact, they risk losing everything.

If we seize power today, we seize it not in opposition to the Soviets but on their behalf.

The seizure of power is the business of the uprising; its political purpose will become clear after the seizure.

It would be a disaster, or a sheer formality, to await the wavering vote of October 25. The people have the right and are in duty bound to decide such questions not by a vote, but by force; in critical moments of revolution, the people have the right and are in duty bound to give directions to their representatives, even their best representatives, and not to wait for them.

This is proved by the history of all revolutions; and it would be an infinite crime on the part of the revolutionaries were they to let the chance slip, knowing that the salvation of the revolution, the offer of peace, the salvation of Petrograd, salvation from famine, and the transfer of the land to the peasants depend upon them.

The government is tottering. It must be given the death blow at all costs.

To delay action is fatal.

Source:

V. I. Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 26 (Moscow: 1972), 234-235. Also in the Lenin Internet Archive,
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/1917/oct/24.htm>.