

ACTIVITY

1 Look at the statements in the speech bubbles. Match each comment to one of the people to show how you think the people shown might have responded to the first measures and actions of the new regime.

2 What does this suggest about:

- which groups would be likely to support the Bolshevik government
- which groups might oppose the Bolsheviks?



(i) Worker at the Putilov engineering works



(ii) Army officer



(iii) Peasant



(iv) Railway worker



(v) Owner of a small factory



(vi) Left-wing Socialist Revolutionary leader



(vii) Moderate socialist leader



(viii) High-ranking civil servant

A I was in favour of the Bolsheviks taking power and I am pleased that we have more power to control our workplaces. No more 'bowing and scraping' before our lords and masters. The tables have turned.

B They won't be able to run the country without us; they have no experience of government. They need the middle classes and they shouldn't encourage the mobs to attack us in the streets and plunder our houses.

C I supported the Soviet, not the Bolsheviks. I don't want one party to run everything. I demand that the different socialist parties get together to form a government that represents everybody.

D You can't put the workers in control of the factories. They don't have the know-how to buy materials and sell them in the marketplace. Already they are giving themselves huge pay rises. It will all end in disaster.

E The behaviour of the Bolsheviks has been disgraceful. They have closed the newspapers. They have arrested Kadets and Socialist Revolutionaries and closed the Constituent Assembly, the legitimate government of Russia. The Bolsheviks are tyrants.

F The Bolsheviks have betrayed the revolution. They have helped the German empire when German workers are crying out for revolution. The Brest-Litovsk Treaty is a shameful peace.

G The army really will fall apart without ranks and discipline. And they have sold Russia to the Germans. Our country must remain 'one and indivisible'.

H Now we have what has always been ours. The land, it belongs to us. I don't know who the Bolsheviks are and I don't much care, but they have done what we wanted and now they can leave us alone to mind our own affairs.

6E How did the Bolsheviks stay in power?

HOW DID THE BOLSHEVIKS SURVIVE THE FIRST FEW MONTHS IN POWER?

Weak opposition

The opposition was unable to co-ordinate action against the government. The power of the Soviet had declined, so there was no serious contender on the left to challenge Bolshevik power.

Political misjudgements

The Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks did not take action, particularly violent action, because they thought the Bolshevik government would collapse quickly and the Constituent Assembly would triumph. They underestimated the Bolsheviks' capacity to survive.

Collapse of army

This meant that officers and conservative forces could not count on any loyal troops to attack the Bolsheviks.

Workers and peasants distracted

Declining living conditions and disillusion with revolution made it difficult to rouse anybody to action. The attention of urban workers was more focused on keeping their own factories going and keeping their jobs. The peasants were only concerned with the land – what was going on in the cities was largely irrelevant to them.



Attacks on opposition

The Bolsheviks moved quickly to deal with opposition. They:

- closed down the opposition press
- arrested key figures in other political parties
- closed down the Constituent Assembly by force before it could get underway
- set up the Cheka to make arrests and deal with demonstrators and protestors.

Use of class warfare

This tactic was effective in deflecting antagonism onto the bourgeoisie. It brought support from large sections of the working class who revelled in turning the tables on the rich and wealthy.

Concessions to urban workers and peasants

Lenin initially gave urban workers and peasants what they wanted – workers' control, eight-hour working days, land and peace, etc., so there were real gains for these groups after the October Revolution.

ACTIVITY

Look at Chart 6E and the table you have completed for the Focus Route activity on page 116. Write a short essay of four or five paragraphs weighing up how well Lenin dealt with the problems and threats facing him in the first months in power. In each paragraph:

- a) identify the problem or threat
- b) explain what Lenin did
- c) evaluate his performance – did his actions achieve what he wanted and what, if any, were the drawbacks/disadvantages?

KEY POINTS FROM CHAPTER 6

How did the Bolsheviks survive the first few months in power?

- 1 The Bolshevik government was in a fragile condition in the first few months, facing strikes and protests from other socialists over one-party rule.
- 2 There were divisions within the party over a proposed socialist coalition. Some leading Bolsheviks temporarily resigned in protest at Lenin's failure to support the coalition idea.
- 3 Lenin always intended to rule on his own and asserted this in his own party and in government.
- 4 Lenin's early policies had to be modified in response to pressures from the masses.
- 5 The Bolsheviks crushed opposition and developed forces of terror and coercion, especially the Cheka.
- 6 Lenin persuaded the Bolsheviks to sign the unfavourable Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. He knew he had to have peace for his government to survive.