
Problems Facing the New Bolshevik Government

Match the problems faced by the new Bolshevik government in the early period of their rule with the solutions to the problems that are listed at the bottom of the page. In some cases, there may be more than one solution to each problem, and a solution can be used more than once.

Problems

1. Russia was still fighting in World War I which was incredibly unpopular.

The Bolshevik Solution (explain what they did and why they did it):

2. Lenin promised all power to the Soviets, but the Petrograd Soviet included Mensheviks, Social Revolutionaries and other socialists who the Bolsheviks did not want to share power with. The Bolshevik Solution (explain what they did and why they did it):

3. Peasants demanded land to be taken from the aristocrats (nobles) and distributed amongst the peasants. The Bolshevik Solution (explain what they did and why they did it):

4. National minorities (e.g. Finland, Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) throughout Russia wanted independence.

The Bolshevik Solution (explain what they did and why they did it):

5. Members of the Civil Service (government workers) went on strike and refused to recognize the new Bolshevik government.

The Bolshevik Solution (explain what they did and why they did it):

6. Opposition political parties (Kadets, Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries) refused to work with and recognize the decisions made by the Bolshevik government.

The Bolshevik Solution (explain what they did and why they did it):

7. In elections to the Constituent Assembly Socialist Revolutionaries won 410 seats, Bolsheviks won 175 seats, Kadets won 17 seats and Mensheviks won 18 seats.
The Bolshevik Solution (explain what they did and why they did it):

8. Workers were tired of being exploited and controlled by management.
The Bolshevik Solution (explain what they did and why they did it):

9. Class and gender classifications existed in society and ranks created a class system in the military. The Bolshevik Solution (explain what they did and why they did it):

10. Eastern Orthodox Church has too much control over state affairs. They control education and also civil matters such as divorce and marriage. Also controls great amounts of land and wealth. The Bolshevik Solution (explain what they did and why they did it):

11. Too much monetary wealth is in the bank accounts of the middle and upper classes, banks are controlled by private companies and individuals.

The Bolshevik Solution (explain what they did and why they did it):

Bolshevik Solutions to the Early Problems Facing Russia

- A. Lenin forms the Council of the People's Commissars (October 1917) or SOVNARKOM, which is made up exclusively of Bolsheviks and is designed to replace the Soviets. SOVNARKOM is the main organ of control in Soviet Russia, and is an alternative to a broadly based government made up of all socialist groups. SOVNARKOM ruled by decree (official order of the government) without going to the Soviet for approval. Although Lenin seized power in the name of the Soviets, he never intended on ruling through the Soviets.
- B. Bolsheviks pass the Land Decree through the SOVNARKOM in October 1917, which gives the peasants the right to take over the estates of the gentry without compensation, and to decide for themselves the best way to divide it up. Land could not be bought, sold or rented; it belonged to the entire people. Privately owned land was not part of the socialist vision of the Bolsheviks.
- C. Workers' Control Decree of November 1917: Factory Committees were given the right to control production and finance in workplaces and to "supervise" management.
- D. Rights of the People Decree November 1917: This gave the right of self-determination to the national minorities in the former Russian empire.
- E. October 1917 Bolsheviks announce maximum eight-hour day for worker, and old age, unemployment and sickness benefits.
- F. Opposition press from the centre, right and socialists is banned. Members of rival political parties Kadets, Social Revolutionaries and Mensheviks were jailed and banned.
- G. CHEKA (Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage) is established in December 1917. This group was made up of dedicated Bolsheviks focused on bringing the Red Guard and military units under control. It was also interested in intimidating and terrorizing the middle class into submission. Anyone accused of being burzhui (bourgeois) was liable to be arrested, beaten or robbed. Striking civil servants were arrested and the civil service was purged (cleaned out of anyone not loyal to the Bolsheviks).
- H. Banks nationalised (controlled by the state) in December 1917.
- I. Abolition of titles and class distinctions in November 1917. The term "comrade" was the new form of address, and led workers and soldiers to be cocky, rude and assertive to their social betters. The state allowed people to rob and loot the houses of the middle class.

- J. Women declared equal to men and able to own property in November 1917.
- K. Democratization of the army in December 1917: officers to be elected, army to be controlled by army soviets and soldiers committees, abolition of ranks, saluting and decorations.
- L. Church land nationalised. Church and state are separated.
- M. Lenin claimed that the Constituent Assembly was a bourgeois parliamentary democracy and allowed it to meet for one day, January 5, 1918. After this the doors were closed and representatives were told to go home. A crowd that demonstrated in favour of the Assembly was told to go home and was fired on by soldiers loyal to the Bolsheviks.
- N. The Russian army disintegrated after the Decree on Peace was signed on October 26, 1917. Trotsky, the chief negotiator for the Bolsheviks withdrew from the Brest-Litovsk peace conference because he felt the German demands were too extreme. Lenin knew he would have to accept the peace terms in order to keep the promise the Bolsheviks had made to the people of Russia during 1917. Under pressure from Lenin representatives of the Bolsheviks reluctantly signed the peace on March 3, 1918, although Trotsky refused to attend the final meeting.