

# The History of the Twentieth Century

## Episode 145

### “The July Days”

#### Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

The February Revolution in Russia quickly produced astonishing political reforms. Freedom of speech and of the press. Universal suffrage, even for women. The end of legal restrictions on the rights of Jews and other religious and ethnic minorities. The promise of a new constitution, and a new, representative government. The popular and charismatic Alexander Kerensky, the Minister of Justice, proudly proclaimed that Russia was now “the freest nation in the world.”

If this had been peacetime, most Russians would likely have celebrated all this as a great victory, this transformation of an almost medieval autocracy into a modern liberal state in a matter of weeks. But Russia was not at peace. Russia was embroiled in the Great War, and many Russians would not be satisfied until that too had changed.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 145. The July Days.

Today we press on with the topic of the February Revolution and its aftermath, in a little series of episodes I like to call, “What the hell is going on in Russia?” which is what most foreign observers would also have asked. Recall that last time, we saw a shake-up in the Provisional Government triggered by the refusal of the foreign minister, Pavel Miliukov, to make a clear, unambiguous, and public statement that Russia was disavowing any previous claims to territory or reparations from the Central Powers and wanted only “peace without annexations or indemnities,” as the socialists were wont to put it.

Miliukov had had multiple opportunities to satisfy public demands to make such a statement, and every time he had been slippery and evasive in his responses, until he was forced to resign. Also out of the Government is the war minister, Alexander Guchkov. Guchkov and Miliukov were leaders of the Octobrists and the Kadets, or Constitutional Democrats, respectively, two liberal

political parties that supported a constitutional monarchy and a constitutional democracy, respectively. These were radical ideas just a few weeks ago, but now the liberal democratic ministers—or bourgeois ministers, as the socialists would have it—now find themselves marginalized on the political right. The Russian Revolution has already passed them by.

The man of the hour is now Alexander Kerensky, a 36-year old lawyer and Duma member. Kerensky was born in the town of Simbirsk in 1881, and yes, you *have* heard that name before. Lenin was also from Simbirsk, although Lenin is eleven years older than Kerensky, so it's doubtful they were best buds or anything, although Kerensky's father Fyodor was a teacher and administrator at the local gymnasium, which is what you British people call a "grammar school" and what we American people might call a "prep school," and apparently the elder Kerensky did have young Vladimir Ulyanov as a pupil at one point and apparently the Kerensky and Ulyanov families were on friendly terms.

You'll recall that the younger Kerensky went to law school and made a name for himself as a lawyer representing political dissidents during the crackdown following the Revolution of 1905 and for his work on labor issues. Kerensky had been elected to the Duma as a representative of the Trudoviks, which you might render in English as the Labor Party, which was a socialist party, although the most moderate of socialists. The Trudoviks were an offshoot of the Social Revolutionary Party which, despite its name, was the more moderate socialist party, except that the Social Revolutionaries were boycotting the Duma and not running candidates, and so party members who broke with that decision and chose to compete in elections to the Duma became the Trudoviks.

After the February Revolution, Kerensky had gotten a seat on the Ispolkom, the executive committee of the Petrograd Soviet. He had also gotten a seat in the Provisional Government as minister of justice. You'll recall that the Soviet at first refused to join the Provisional Government, and Ispolkom had passed a measure to bar its own members from working for the government, but the well-spoken Kerensky made an impassioned plea to the full Soviet, and they voted to give him a special exemption.

After Miliukov and Guchkov left the government, the Petrograd Soviet and the socialist parties relented and agreed to join with the government. The Socialist Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks now have ministers in the Provisional Government, but not the Bolsheviks, who still oppose the Provisional Government.

As a side note for you long-time listeners, the Russian Provisional Government has also invited our old friend, the impresario Sergei Diaghilev, to join the government as Minister of Culture. Diaghilev is in Spain right now. He hasn't been back to Russia in many years now and is eager to visit, but he was unwilling to commit to a ministerial position. The finances of the *Ballets Russes* were in their usual shambolic state and the ballet company was Diaghilev's first priority, so he

turned down the offer. Sadly, although he doesn't realize it yet, he has just passed up his last opportunity to visit his homeland and will in fact never see Russia again.

Alexander Kerensky took over the post of Minister of War after the government shakeup, which means the explosive questions of exactly why Russia still fights and what its war aims are now become Kerensky's to sort out. He has good relationships within both the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet. He is well liked by the Russian public. So although he's been handed the biggest challenge facing the Provisional Government, if there's anyone who can come up with a solution and make it stick among all the factions in Petrograd, it's surely Alexander Kerensky.

So what are Kerensky's options? When he sat down for his first day's work at the War Ministry and got his briefing from his officials, what did they tell him? Well, first of all as you may have noticed, I've barely said a word about military actions on the Eastern Front since the February Revolution went down. That's because barely anything is happening. Austria is too feeble to threaten Russia by itself, and Germany has been observing a *de facto* truce with the Russians.

Recall that the German government hopes the Russian government will collapse internally, maybe even with a little help from Vladimir Lenin, whose return to Russia they had expedited. Germany is having its own domestic troubles in the aftermath of the Turnip Winter, and would be hard pressed to begin another offensive in the East just now, but more than that, a German offensive might be just the thing to draw Russia's political factions closer together in opposition to the common threat. Therefore, no German offensive. There was only occasional shooting between the lines, just enough to keep everybody honest.

As you know from episode 133, the Turnip Winter had turned many Germans against the war, notably Matthias Erzberger, the Center Party leader, who has been traveling to Stockholm to meet informally with a Russian journalist to discuss peace. So allow me to stop here just for a moment and play a little game of "what if?"

After what had happened to Miliukov, one might reasonably conclude that the Russian people were desperate for peace. Peace would be popular. Peace would allow the Provisional Government to consolidate its reforms and get on with the project of calling a Constituent Assembly and drafting a new constitution for Russia. Miliukov fell because he would not clearly and unambiguously renounce all Russian claims on annexations and indemnities. Come July, as you'll recall, the Reichstag, led by the German Social Democrats, would pass a resolution calling for peace without annexations or indemnities—exactly the same demand most Russian socialists were making. Is there the outline of a deal here? Is there perhaps at least enough to agree to an armistice and begin negotiations, buying the Provisional Government some time?

Maybe. Maybe that would have worked. Maybe it wouldn't, though it's hard to see how the outcome could have been any worse for Russia than what's actually going to happen.

It would have required a lot of salesmanship to sell a peace agreement. The Russian people opposed annexations because they associated this kind of thing with the Imperial past. In the bad old days of absolutism, when the Emperors regarded ordinary Russians almost as their personal property, those Emperors might want to trade the lives of their subjects for more square miles on the map. But this is the new democratic Russia. We don't trade lives for Imperial glory anymore.

But even so, after three terrible years of war, there remained a lot of anti-German resentment in Russia. Remember all the way back, oh, a few months ago, when the biggest criticism of the Emperor's ministers was that their prosecution of the war was stupidity or treason and they were accusing the Empress Alexandra of secretly supporting Germany? Even after the February Revolution, there was a sentiment in favor of the war and plenty of Russians were willing to condemn Lenin as a German stooge. Perhaps they would have reacted the same way to Kerensky, if he had proposed an armistice. But the fact is, support for the war was slipping away by the day. In February, the Imperial ministers were traitors for not managing the war better. In a few months, most Russians will be ready for peace at any price. The mood is shifting rapidly and perhaps Kerensky misread the moment, or perhaps the moment has not quite yet arrived.

In any case, wherever these hypotheticals might lead you, in reality it doesn't appear that Kerensky ever seriously considered winding down the war. To the contrary, Kerensky became enamored of this idea—you've heard me say it before, and I can't believe it's 1917 and the February Revolution has already happened and yet here I am saying it again—this idea that renewing the fight against the Central Powers would inspire Russian patriotism, that a new offensive would draw the disparate political factions together against the common enemy.

He had other reasons for wanting to start another offensive. You've heard me mention this one before as well: the French were urging the new Russian government to put pressure on the Central Powers to take some of the heat off France. By this time the Nivelle Offensive had failed and units of the French Army were mutinying, as you'll recall from episode 140. The French reaction was what it's always been, to ask the Russians for help.

In fairness to Russia's allies, France and Britain, they had been working to re-arm and re-supply the Russian Army following last year's Brusilov Offensive. Arms and ammunition were flooding into Archangel and Vladivostok, and from there trickling into the hands of Russian soldiers. But by now, May 1917, the Russian Army is better equipped to fight than it has been since the war began. So there's a reason to fight. And there's a reason why France and Britain expect Russia to fight.

[music: *Farewell of Slavianka*]

Before we get into the coming offensive, and yes, one is coming, I want to note that the first thing Alexander Kerensky actually did do on his first day as war minister was to issue an order to the Russian armed forces reaffirming Order Number One, the one that the Petrograd Soviet had issued two months ago, the order that set out the rights of Russian soldiers, including the right to

express opinions, the right to be treated with respect by officers, not to salute during off-duty hours, and a ban on corporal punishment. Capital punishment had already been outlawed in both the civilian and military legal systems.

Military discipline and punishment were severe everywhere during this era, but especially so in Russia, and these reforms were welcome and were the basis of Kerensky's boast that Russia now also had the most democratic army in the world. But the reforms also created confusion. Who was actually in charge now? Suspicion of the officer corps, in particular that military officers might be secret monarchists and potentially the source of a counterrevolutionary coup, also haunted Kerensky, as it did many in Russia. Kerensky appointed new commanders to all the fronts, as well as to seven of the armies, 26 of the corps, and 69 divisions.

None of this went over very well with General Alexeyev. Remember him? He was Emperor Nikolai's chief of staff when Nikolai was in personal command of the Army, which is another way of saying that Alexeyev was the *de facto* commander in chief of the Army, though not in name. After the abdication, the Provisional Government made it official.

But when Alexeyev heard that Kerensky was contemplating a new offensive, he objected vehemently. Morale, he told the war minister, was shot. The Brusilov Offensive, which had been hailed as a huge success, had cost a million casualties in exchange for a few dozen miles' worth of advance into Galicia. Then came the Revolution and the abdication. In April, Ispolkom voted to send political officials to the front line units. The Russian word for these political officials transliterated into English is "commissars," and that is how they will be known in English from now on. The role of these commissars was supposedly to smooth the relationships between officers and soldiers in the front-line units, relationships that had become increasingly fraught since the Petrograd Soviet had issued its Order Number One. The commissars were supposed to explain and interpret the new orders and arbitrate disputes between the soldiers and the officers.

You won't be surprised if I tell you that the commissars were quickly seen by the officers as strongly biased against them and in favor of the rank and file. Officers had complained up the chain of command to Alexeyev, who had complained to Guchkov, Kerensky's predecessor as war minister, who had responded to the officers' complaints by sending Provisional Government commissars to the front-line units to further clarify how things are done in the new Russian Army.

The result of this clarification of the clarification was utter chaos, of course. The uncertainties in Petrograd over the respective roles of the Soviet and the Government in ruling Russia were now being replicated at every level of the Army. And now that Kerensky has replaced Guchkov, issuing still more orders and sacking commanders wholesale up and down the line, the situation is moving from bad to worse even as Kerensky boasts of how democratic the army has become.

And don't overlook the Bolsheviks. Now that the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionary Party are represented in the Provisional Government, the Bolsheviks are, by default, the

opposition party. The Bolsheviks want to end the war now, at any cost, even at the cost of a Russian military defeat. And the Bolsheviks are sending their own people to the front, advocating the Bolshevik brand of defeatism and encouraging fraternization between Russian and German soldiers. Russian-language pamphlets were appearing in Russian trenches echoing the Bolshevik position, some of these pamphlets originated over in the German trenches.

And that was why Alexeyev opposed all talk of an offensive. As far as he was concerned, the Army was spent, morale was nonexistent, and the political bickering in Petrograd was spreading disrespect for officers and outright mutiny among the soldiers, destroying the Russian Army as a fighting force.

And so Kerensky sacked him. The new commander of the Russian Army would be none other than Alexei Brusilov, he of the Brusilov Offensive. This was a logical choice. Brusilov was the most successful commander the Russian Army had. He was the one who had planned and executed last year's offensive at a time when Russia's friends and foes alike believed that the Russian Army was incapable of such an offensive, and it had proved to be Russia's most successful offensive since the opening weeks of the war.

And more than that, Brusilov, unlike Alexeyev, supported the political changes the Revolution had brought to the Army. He welcomed the commissars of the Petrograd Soviet. In his mind, they helped raise the soldiers' fighting spirit and make the Army more effective. Brusilov was raring to go, and he had one more idea, to borrow soldiers from the Caucasian Front in Anatolia. These were seasoned fighters, with victories under their belts and the morale that comes with victory. Let's forget about the offensives against Turkey, Brusilov suggested, and use these units against Austria instead.

Kerensky agreed, and so was born what history will sometimes call the Second Brusilov Offensive and sometimes the Kerensky Offensive. The British and French were glad to hear the news; it reassured them that their Russian ally was still on board.

The offensive would begin on July 1, and Kerensky would spend the month of June on a whirlwind tour of the Galician front, employing his own considerable charisma and speaking skills as a one-man barnstorm-slash-morale program, sometimes with Brusilov at his side. And it seemed to work! Soldiers mobbed him for the opportunity just to touch him or shake his hand. Kerensky and Brusilov would swear fealty to the Revolution and to the principles of freedom and equality and ask the soldiers if they were prepared to lay down their lives for the same principles. "We will! We swear it!" they called back. To all appearances, Alexander Kerensky was single-handedly reviving the Russian Army.

The downside to all this was that Kerensky's tour, which was receiving widespread publicity, was also tipping off the Germans and the Austrians to the location of the coming offensive: Galicia. The attack would come here because no one in the Russian government or military thought the Russian Army was in any condition to take on the Germans. The Austrians were

another story. Their army was also in sorry shape, and so the first objective of the coming offensive would be to advance deeper into Austrian Galicia and once again capture Lemberg, the capital of the province.

But this plan contained a political difficulty. With all the debate going on in Petrograd about the purposes of the war, and Kerensky and other ministers insisting that Russia had no secret territorial ambitions, why is the coming offensive beginning in Galicia? Galicia is the one place on the front where Russian soldiers are already dug into enemy soil. Why are Russian soldiers being asked to fight and die to capture land the government in Petrograd has already declared it doesn't want? The two armies facing each other are in something like a truce. Why should the Russian side be the one to break it?

This aversion to advancing deeper into enemy territory wasn't only about abstract political principles. It was also an aversion to getting mowed down in a frontal assault against an entrenched enemy armed with modern weapons. Russian soldiers, just like their counterparts in the French Army who are also mutinying at this time, have had just about enough of being ordered into suicidal charges.

Brusilov had wanted to begin the offensive on June 23, two weeks after Kerensky finished his speaking tour at the front. But a week before the offensive was scheduled to start, the first All-Russian Congress of Soviets convened. This was an effort by the socialists to broaden the base of the Petrograd Soviet across the country. The Petrograd Soviet only represented workers and soldiers in Petrograd, so the idea here was to, first, organize more soviets in other parts of the country, and second, have them elect representatives to come to Petrograd and be part of a truly national Congress of Soviets, which is all well and good, but the Congress of Soviets got wind of the coming offensive and warned Kerensky and the Provisional Government not to begin any such offensive until the Congress had had a chance to debate and approve the proposal. They eventually did, on June 25, two days after the offensive had been scheduled to start, forcing a delay.

Please take note here that the socialists of the Petrograd Soviet are taking steps to develop a national network of soviets that represent the Russian nation, while the Provisional Government is still just a self-appointed committee of lawyers. When is that Constituent Assembly going to meet, again?

[sound effect: crickets]

Yeah, that's what I thought. On the military side, I should also mention that another good reason to begin the offensive in Galicia is that the anti-government, anti-war Bolshevik agitators have been infiltrating the Army beginning at the northern end of the front line, at Riga, on the coast of the Baltic Sea, the place where the front line is closest to Petrograd, and are working their way southward. Kerensky had gotten to the Galician front before the Bolsheviks had, but in the month of June, in the three weeks plus between the day Kerensky left and the day the offensive

finally got going, the Bolsheviks arrived and began preaching their gospel: the Provisional Government was illegitimate, so was Kerensky, what Russia needed was an armistice and a peace conference with Germany at once, and don't believe anything your officers tell you. On June 27, just days before the offensive was to begin, thousands of Russian soldiers held a mass meeting and passed a resolution that declared no confidence in the Provisional Government and denounced the offensive that was about to begin as "contrary to the interests of the Revolution."

In hindsight, all this Bolshevik influence in the Army looks ominous. Not everyone saw it that way at the time. Kerensky was reluctant to restrict Bolshevik activities; that went counter to his notions of revolutionary freedom and democracy. A lot of military officers thought Bolshevism was a cover for cowardice. Some joked of "Trench Bolshevism," sarcastically implying that soldiers assigned to the trenches and experiencing enemy fire have a miraculous change of heart and suddenly become peaceniks.

The offensive finally began on June 29. This time, the Russian Army had at its disposal quantities of shells unlike anything it had had before. Russia's own increased productivity, plus imports of ammunition from her allies, made possible an artillery bombardment more powerful than anything previously seen on the Eastern Front. When the infantry attacked on July 1, initially they made gains. Austrian trenches fell to advancing Russians. Kerensky was hailing their great victories: "Today is the great triumph of the Revolution...the Russian revolutionary army with colossal enthusiasm assumed the offensive."

But it all fell apart in a matter of days. Russian soldiers occupied the Austrian trenches, but refused to advance any further. There was violence against officers and outright mutiny. The Russian Eleventh Army, at the northernmost end of the offensive zone, fared the worst. They were up against the German part of the line, and they had the greatest numbers of Bolsheviks behind them, preaching defeatism. At the southern end of the line, the Seventh Army, the one Kornilov was assigned when he left the Petrograd Garrison, enjoyed the most success. This was surely due in part to relatively few Bolsheviks working this unit, but it also seems Kornilov was a more popular commander than most and was more effective in motivating his soldiers.

If Kerensky or anyone else in the Provisional Government had had difficulty before in seeing the dangers of Bolshevik agitation, they were beginning to get the picture now. Russian military intelligence had not been idle. They have been investigating the Bolsheviks for two months now, with assistance from British and French intelligence, and by July, they are reporting their findings to the Provisional Government. There is no longer any room for doubt. The Bolsheviks are being funded by the Germans, and Lenin himself is in regular communication with German agents in Stockholm and right here in Petrograd. This is no longer about democracy and freedom of expression. It is now about treason.

The investigators felt they had enough evidence to arrest Lenin and twenty-seven other high-ranking Bolsheviks. But did they have enough soldiers? Remember, the Russian Revolution



began with the Petrograd Garrison, and nowhere else in all Russia were soldiers so filled with revolutionary spirit, by which I mean, so likely to disobey orders. Every military unit in Petrograd numbered Bolsheviks among its soldiers, but there were a couple that stood out. One was the First Machine Gun Regiment. Another was the sailors from Kronshtadt, the home base of the Russian Baltic Fleet and headquarters of the Russian Admiralty. These Bolshevik sailors were led by a man born Fyodor Fyodorovich Ilyin, who went by the name Fyodor Raskolnikov, apparently after the protagonist of Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, whose name is also destined to become Boris Badenov's favorite curse word 42 years from now.

Kerensky ordered the First Machine Gun Regiment sent to Galicia as a reinforcement in the early days of the offensive, though it is likely his real motive was to remove the regiment from Petrograd so it couldn't defend the Bolsheviks. But word of these plans leaked out. The First Machine Gun Regiment learned it was to be sent to Galicia, and the soldiers voted a resolution declaring they would not go to the front unless ordered by the new All-Russian Congress of Soviets. Meanwhile, the new commander of the Petrograd Garrison was informed by military intelligence of the plans to arrest the Bolshevik leadership. He passed this on to the Provisional Government, and apparently someone somewhere in this chain of communication leaked the information to the Kshessinskaya Mansion, since the entire Bolshevik leadership, including Lenin himself, suddenly disappeared.

The Provisional Government had other problems. In Kiev, in the Ukraine, the Soviet there, or Rada, to use the Ukrainian word, established shortly after the February Revolution, was forming itself into something like a Ukrainian parliament, dominated by socialist parties. In June, the Rada had created a General Secretariat, essentially a cabinet. The Rada was declaring itself the representative of the Ukrainian people and sure looked like it was moving in the direction of declaring outright independence. A delegation from the Provisional Government in Petrograd, composed of socialist ministers, returned to Petrograd on July 14 after meeting with representatives of the Secretariat. The ministers were able to persuade the Rada to avoid making a full declaration of Ukrainian independence from Russia, but at the cost of the Provisional Government acknowledging the Rada as the autonomous government of an autonomous Ukraine, pending the convening of that Constituent Assembly, where the final decisions on the future of the Russian government would be made.

These concessions were enough to placate the Rada, but they were more than the Constitutional Democrats in the Provisional Government would stand for. The Kadets withdrew from the government. The vacated ministerial positions would be filled by Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries, thus tilting the Provisional Government even further to the left. These developments prompted the Prime Minister, Georgi Lvov, to announce that he, too, would resign.

You don't recognize that name, do you? I did mention him before, when he got the position of prime minister, or technically, chairman of the council of ministers. But Lvov was a passive man

who offered no real leadership to the government or to Russia during his tenure, which is why you never heard his name again until now. Hopefully, the Provisional Government can replace him with someone a little more dynamic.

[music: *Farewell of Slavianka*]

On the evening of the very next day, July 15, the Bolsheviks invited the First Machine Gun Regiment to a concert. You can put that word “concert” into quotes, because although there really was a concert that night, it was merely a cover for a Bolshevik political rally. Since the Bolshevik leadership was in hiding, the main speaker that night was Leon Trotsky, who was still not yet technically a Bolshevik, although by this time his thinking is almost indistinguishable from Lenin’s. No record of Trotsky’s speech survives, but accounts of it make it sound like the speech of a lifetime. In addition to the usual Bolshevik message of “Down with the Provisional Government” and “All Power to the Soviets,” Trotsky denounced the offensive, declared Alexander Kerensky no better than Kaiser Wilhelm, and called for armed revolt against the Provisional Government.

The regiment spent the next day debating what to do, and by five o’clock that afternoon, about half of them decided that the time was right for that revolt. And thus began what history calls the “July Days.” Members of other Army units were invited to join in, as were sailors from Kronshtadt and workers at the Putilov plant, the largest factory in the city, always a revolutionary hotbed. Reportedly, the Bolsheviks were handing out forty rubles each to the demonstrators, which is maybe US\$500 in today’s world. That night, anti-government soldiers swarmed through the streets, demonstrating against the government and occasionally looting shops.

The following morning, July 17, the demonstrators returned to Bolshevik headquarters at Kshessinskaya House, perhaps to collect another *per diem*. This is when they learned that Lenin had returned to Petrograd. You might think that at this point, all the elements are now in place for the Bolsheviks to make their move, but for some reason, Lenin held back. He did not even want to address the crowd, though he reluctantly gave in and offered a tepid speech in which he told the crowd he was pleased to see “all power to the soviets...being translated into reality.”

Lenin’s sudden passivity at this crucial moment is a bit of an historical mystery. On the face of it, it looks as if a bold move by Lenin right here, right now, might lead to a successful Bolshevik coup. But that is not how it will happen. The official Bolshevik explanation for this hesitation was that Lenin understood the time was not yet right, that the masses were not yet fully behind him. Witnesses reported that he didn’t look well and was complaining that he didn’t feel well. Perhaps he had eaten something that disagreed with him during his time hiding out in Finland. Maybe he was privy to some inside information that suggested now was not the best time. Or maybe he just got cold feet.

But the demonstrators were ready to make their move, even if Lenin wasn't. Armed Bolsheviks fanned out across Petrograd, taking control of key points, including major intersections and the railroad stations. They also seized some opposition newspaper offices. In particular, rumor had it that the war minister, Alexander Kerensky, had hastened to the Warsaw train station, intending to head toward the front line, collect units of loyal soldiers, and bring them back to Petrograd to put down the Bolshevik uprising.

As it happened, yes, that rumor was true. Motorcars filled with armed Bolsheviks raced through the streets to the station, intent on intercepting Kerensky before he could get out of town, but they were too late. Kerensky's train had already left the station.

The main Bolshevik force headed for the Tauride Palace, where the Petrograd Soviet met. The only soldiers in Petrograd willing to oppose them were the Cossacks, who were hopelessly outnumbered. What exactly the Bolsheviks meant to do once they reached the palace wasn't clear, perhaps not even to themselves. Theoretically, their goal was to have the Soviet replace the Provisional Government. But the members of the Soviet were understandably reluctant to overthrow the Provisional Government most of them still supported, especially at gunpoint.

When the mob did reach the palace, they mostly just milled around and wondered what to do next. Reportedly, Lenin slipped in over the course of the afternoon, but few knew he was there and he made no attempt to announce himself. The leaders of the Mensheviks, Nikoloz Chkheidze, and the Socialist Revolutionaries, Viktor Chernov, both of whom were also ministers in the Provisional Government, came outside to face the demonstrators and attempt to calm them down.

This was a brave gesture, but proved unsuccessful. The mob would not quiet down. They apparently mistook Chernov for another minister, the hated justice minister. Chernov was the agriculture minister. But even after they realized their mistake, they threatened Chernov, demanding that he implement the Bolshevik demand for land reform immediately and that the Soviet take power. One demonstrator is reported to have shaken his fist in Chernov's face and yelled to him, "Take power, you son of a bitch!"

The Bolsheviks began to drag Chernov away to who knows what fate, but then Leon Trotsky spoke up, as did Lenin's lieutenant, Grigori Zinoviev. Trotsky told the crowd that they had already won the battle and harming Chernov would only discredit the cause. Zinoviev told them not to use their arms against the Soviet but against "unrighteous people," that is, the bourgeoisie.

They released him, but the crowd continued to mill about, occasionally firing their weapons, until night fell and then they finally began to disperse.

You may be wondering about this justice minister the Bolsheviks were hunting and why they hated him so much. I won't trouble you with his name, but even as the Bolsheviks were outside the palace demanding that the Soviet take power, the justice minister was at the Petrograd

Military District headquarters, in a meeting with the transport minister, the foreign minister, several Army commanders, intelligence officers, and editors of some of the major Petrograd newspapers. At this meeting, the lead investigator announced that there was enough evidence to arrest the Bolshevik leaders and try them for treason. He showed off some of his evidence on coordination between the Bolsheviks and the German government and the millions of rubles the Bolsheviks had stashed away in Russian banks.

After the meeting ended, the army officers rushed back to their units to report this news to the soldiers. Now, the politics of these various socialist factions is a confusing business, even to those of us who enjoy the advantage of a century of hindsight, but every soldier understands treason. The Germans were still the enemy, and evidence that Lenin was working with them was damning.

The following morning, the Petrograd newspapers screamed in their banner headlines, that Lenin and the Bolshevik leadership had been exposed as German agents. That afternoon, the Bolshevik printing shop that produced *Pravda* and which the Bolsheviks had bought outright for a quarter-million rubles just a few months ago, was smashed and looted by an angry mob. And here come the loyal military units from the front. Infantry, cavalry, and an armored car detachment.

Most of the Bolshevik leadership was holed up at the Kshessinskaya Mansion. They had hundreds of armed fighters available to defend them, but it wasn't enough. "Now they are going to shoot us," Lenin told Trotsky. His pessimism was premature, though. Lenin was able to shave off his trademark beard and slip away incognito, back into hiding in Finland.

By dusk, the loyal military units had stormed the Kshessinskaya Mansion, seizing not only control of the building but a hoard of documents that would complete the government's case for treason. Some two thousand Bolsheviks were arrested, including Lenin's wife, but much of the leadership, like Lenin himself, had escaped once again. The Bolsheviks did manage to print and distribute a newsletter, in which they vehemently denied the treason charges.

The new Provisional Government would be chaired by Alexander Kerensky and would include ministers drawn from all parties from the Constitutional Democrats to the Mensheviks and have the support of the Petrograd Soviet. Every political party in Russia that matters—again, with the exception of the Bolsheviks—is included in the government, and as for the Bolsheviks, the leadership of their party is under arrest or in hiding, the party organization is smashed and the rank and file left adrift. Exposure of those German connections has thoroughly discredited them all.

Better still, now that Kerensky is prime minister, action will finally be taken to elect a Russian Constituent Assembly, which will promulgate a new constitution and serve as the new national legislature. Elections would be based on universal suffrage, all across Russia, and would include women. Kerensky originally scheduled the elections for September 25, but would later postpone them to November 25, because in many rural regions of the country, the organization and

equipment to run an election was not yet in place. Still, this was going to be the first honest, nationwide, universal election in Russian history. That is certainly welcome news.

This is one of those stories where I wish I could just stop right here when everything seems to be going smoothly and tell you that they all lived happily ever after. But once again I have to tell you that this happy set of circumstances is only going to last a few weeks before everything comes crashing down yet again.

But we'll have to stop there for today. Thanks so much for listening. I'd also like to thank Gareth for his donations, and thank you, Marc, for being a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons help keep the words flowing and the bits going, and if you'd like to help out, visit the website at [historyofthetwentiethcentury.com](http://historyofthetwentiethcentury.com) for more information. You can also leave a comment at the website, or send me an email or tweet or post on our Facebook page.

And I hope you'll join me next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century* as the high hopes of the Kerensky government meet the grim realities of the Great War. The Kerensky Offensive, next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. Leon Trotsky was not arrested in that roundup of Bolshevik leaders, despite his playing a central role in the events of the July Days. This was probably because he was still not officially a member of the Bolsheviks. But once Trotsky realized he was not going to be arrested, he actually wrote an indignant letter of complaint to the Provisional Government, protesting this "insult." But when Trotsky issued an open letter of support for Lenin on July 23, enough was enough, and the police obliged him, taking him also into custody.

[music: Closing War Theme]