

9

How significant is Lenin's contribution to history?

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Lenin died in January 1924, although for most of 1923 he was incapacitated by illness. In the last years of his life, he was concerned about the state of the party, the growing bureaucracy and the power of Stalin. His relationship with Stalin deteriorated in 1922 and it seemed likely that Stalin's power would be curtailed. But Lenin died before any changes could take place and it was Stalin who took the lead at his funeral and in developing the Lenin cult. Lenin's contribution to the Russian Revolution from 1917 to 1923 was enormous, but how significant is he in history? Did he really make a difference?

- A** Lenin's relationship with Stalin at the end of his life (pp. 172–173)
- B** Lenin's funeral and the Lenin cult (pp. 173–174)
- C** Summing up Lenin (pp. 175–176)
- D** Did Lenin make a difference? (pp. 177–180)

A Lenin's relationship with Stalin at the end of his life

Lenin suffered a series of strokes from late 1921 until his death in January 1924. He was able to carry on working during 1922, but a major stroke in March 1923 left him without the power of speech. In 1922, he still had considerable influence but was removed from the onerous work of running the day-to-day business of government. He had time to think about the problems of the party. He became concerned about the extent of the party bureaucracy and increasingly aware of the power that Stalin had accrued to himself. He was particularly worried about the way Stalin had abused his power by intimidating and bullying the Communists who were governing Georgia. Lenin detected a dark side to Stalin that might present a danger to the party. He mounted an investigation into the Georgian affair that confirmed his fears. He also fell out with Stalin over the issue of the Soviet republics (see page 163).

After the second of his strokes in December 1922, Lenin wrote a testament, a 'Letter to the Party Congress' to be read after his death (see Source 9.1 on page 173). In it Lenin warned that Stalin had become too powerful and that he could not be trusted to use his power wisely. From this point onwards, Lenin did not trust the information with which Stalin provided him. How much Stalin knew about this is not certain, but he clearly perceived that relations with Lenin were not good and was anxious about the Georgian investigation.

Stalin's wife worked as a secretary for Lenin, living in his house while he was ill, and she provided a conduit of information about Lenin's contacts. Stalin found out about the increasingly warm correspondence between Trotsky and Lenin. They were working on plans to restore more democracy to the party and there seems little doubt that, if Lenin had survived a little longer, Stalin would have lost some of his key positions in the party. Stalin tried to see Lenin, but Krupskaya, Lenin's wife, would not let him visit. Stalin, in a telephone conversation, insulted her, using crude, abusive language. Lenin was upset by this and added a note to his testament which would have been very damaging to Stalin if made public.

THE GREAT RUSSIAN CHAUVINIST AND THE GEORGIAN AFFAIR

During the Civil War Georgia had been run by Mensheviks. At the end of the war, the Red Army took control by force and Stalin – himself a Georgian – was sent to visit the area and see how the Bolsheviks in Georgia were managing. However, Stalin was insulted and shouted down at meetings by the Mensheviks, and accused of betraying his birthplace. Stalin, who never took kindly to slights and insults, took the Bolsheviks to task for being too weak on opposition groups. He threatened and bullied them to adopt a more aggressive policy. In one incident, a local Bolshevik leader was struck by Ordzhonikidze, one of Stalin's henchmen. Stalin believed that Russians should govern the peoples of the USSR from Moscow rather like the tsars had done. This is why Lenin called him the 'Great Russian chauvinist'.

FOCUS ROUTE

Make notes on the relationship between Lenin and Stalin at the end of Lenin's life using these questions to guide you:

- Why was Lenin concerned about Stalin?
- What was the Georgian affair?
- How did Lenin and Stalin's relationship deteriorate?
- What appears to have been the purpose of Lenin's testament?
- Who came out of the relationship the worst?

VALUING PROBABILITIES

Chance or accident can be a significant factor in explaining events.

- How does chance seem to have played a role in the succession to the Russian leadership?
- Can you think of other examples when chance may have had a significant impact on historical events?

FOCUS ROUTE

Make notes to explain:

- how Stalin used Lenin's funeral to his advantage
- what the cult of Leninism was and why Stalin encouraged it.

According to the historian Robert Conquest, Lenin was more than upset: 'He was in fact prepared for open hostilities . . . One of Lenin's secretaries told Trotsky that Lenin was now preparing "a bomb" against Stalin; and Kamenev learned from another of the secretaries that Lenin had decided "to crush Stalin politically"' (*Stalin: Breaker of Nations*, 1991, page 104). But before this could happen, Lenin had another stroke on 7 March and never recovered the power of speech.

SOURCE 9.1 Extracts from Lenin's testament, 25 December 1922

Comrade Stalin, having become General Secretary, has immeasurable power concentrated in his hands, and I am not sure that he always knows how to use that power with sufficient caution. Comrade Trotsky, on the other hand . . . is distinguished not only by his outstanding ability. He is personally perhaps the most capable man in the present C.C. [Central Committee], but he has displayed excessive self-assurance . . . These two qualities of the two outstanding leaders of the present C.C. can inadvertently lead to a split . . .

I shall not give further appraisals of the personal qualities of other members of the C.C. but recall that the October episode with Zinoviev and Kamenev was no accident, but neither can the blame for it be laid on them personally, any more than non-Bolshevism can upon Trotsky. Speaking of the young C.C. members I wish to say a few words about Bukharin . . . Bukharin is not only a most valuable and major theorist of the Party; he is also rightly considered the favourite of the whole Party; but his theoretical views can only with the very greatest doubt be regarded as fully Marxist.

[Postscript added 4 January 1923]

Stalin is too rude, and this fault . . . becomes unacceptable in the office of General Secretary. Therefore, I propose to the comrades that a way be found to remove Stalin from that post and replace him with someone else who differs from Stalin in all respects, someone more patient, more loyal, more polite, more considerate.

B Lenin's funeral and the Lenin cult

The unexpected news of Lenin's death led to widespread displays of public grief. Theatres and shops were closed for a week, while portraits of Lenin draped in red and black were displayed in windows. Over three days, three and a half million people queued for hours to file past his body lying in state. However much they hated the regime the people seemed to have a genuine affection for Lenin, much as they had had for the tsars.

Stalin made the most of Lenin's funeral to advance his position in the party. Just before Lenin's death, Trotsky was ill and had set out to the south of Russia for a rest-holiday. Stalin contacted him and told him that he (Trotsky) would not be able to get back in time for the funeral. So Trotsky did not attend and it looked as though he could not be bothered to turn up. His reputation and political prestige were severely damaged by his non-attendance. Stalin, on the other hand, acted as one of the pallbearers and made a speech in which he appeared to be taking on the mantle of Leninism (see Source 9.2 below). Stalin hoped to transfer to himself the prestige, respect and loyalty associated with Lenin. He set himself up as Lenin's disciple, the person who would carry on Lenin's work. He was already thinking of the looming power struggle.

SOURCE 9.2 J. V. Stalin, *Collected Works*. These are extracts from Stalin's speech at Lenin's funeral

There is nothing higher than the calling of the member of a Party whose founder and leader is Comrade Lenin . . . Leaving us, Comrade Lenin ordered us to hold high and keep pure the great title of member of the Party. We vow to thee Comrade Lenin, that we shall honourably fulfil this commandment. . . . Leaving us, Comrade Lenin enjoined us to keep the unity of the Party like the apple of our eye. We vow to thee, Comrade Lenin. That we will honourably fulfil this, thy commandment . . .

SOURCE 9.3 Members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party carrying Lenin's coffin to Red Square on 27 January 1924. Stalin is on the left in the picture



SOURCE 9.4 Although the cult of Lenin is associated with Stalin, Zinoviev played a more important part initially. Here is an extract from a pamphlet he produced in 1918 in his typical overblown style:

On the horizon a new figure has appeared. He is the chosen one of millions. He is leader by the grace of God. Such a leader is born once in 500 years in the life of mankind.

SOURCE 9.5 Extract from a poem by V. Mayakovsky written to celebrate Lenin's fiftieth birthday, 1921

*I know ...
It is not the hero
Who precipitates the flow of revolution.
The story of heroes
Is the nonsense of the intelligentsia!
But who can restrain himself
And not sing
Of the glory of Il'ich?
Kindling the lands with fire
Everywhere ...
Lenin! Lenin! Lenin!
I glorify in Lenin.*

SOURCE 9.6 I. Deutscher, *Stalin*, rev. edn 1966, pp. 270–71. Deutscher demonstrates that Stalin's own 'Biographical Chronicle' shows how he orchestrated Lenin's funeral and put himself in the central role

21 January – 6.50a.m. Lenin dies at Gor'kiy. 9.30a.m. Stalin and other members of Politburo arrive at Gor'kiy.

23 January – 9a.m. Stalin and other leaders carry coffin with Lenin's body from Lenin's home at Gor'kiy ... (they travel on by train) ... to the House of Trade Unions in Moscow where Lenin lay in state for the next four days; 6.10p.m. Stalin stands in the guard of honour at the bier.

25 January – Stalin calls upon the party to collect relics of Lenin for the newly founded Lenin Institute.

26 January – At the second congress of the Soviets, Stalin reads an oath of allegiance to Lenin.

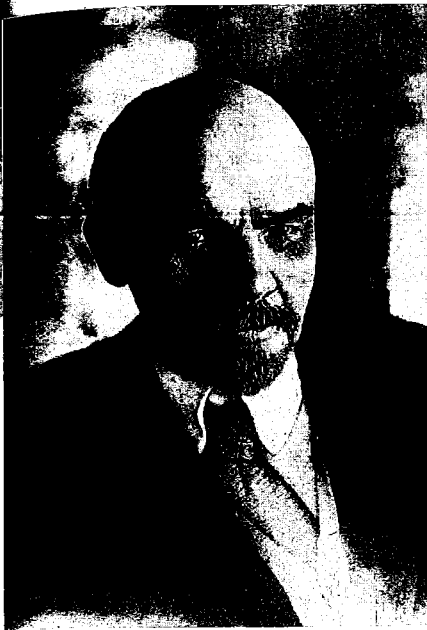
27 January – 9a.m. Stalin and others carry the coffin out of the House of Trade Unions; 4p.m. End of the funeral procession at the Red Square – Stalin and others carry the coffin into the future mausoleum.

28 January – Stalin addresses a memorial meeting.

The cult of Leninism

The Lenin cult had begun just after the attempt on his life in 1918 (see page 143). Stalin gave it new momentum at Lenin's funeral. The Lenin cult was a sort of quasi-religion in which Lenin's name could be invoked like a deity or his words trotted out, much as the Bible is used to justify actions. At least, Stalin used it this way. Lenin made it clear before he died that he did not want this kind of adulation. His wife, Krupskaya, publicly asked that there should be 'no external reverence for his person'. But under pressure from Stalin, Lenin was embalmed and his tomb turned into a shrine. Lenin's brain was sliced into 30,000 segments and stored so that scientists in the future could discover the secrets of his genius.

All sorts of Lenin memorabilia, from posters to matchboxes, were produced. Statues of Lenin appeared all over the Soviet Union. Petrograd was renamed Leningrad and many streets and institutions were named after him. Trotsky was sickened by the whole business, but it was difficult to speak out against it without being accused of disloyalty and disrespect.



LENIN – THE ABSENT REVOLUTIONARY

It is strange to think that Lenin had been absent from Russia for seventeen years (apart from six months in 1905–6) before his return in April 1917. He was a professional revolutionary who knew very little about the people he had come to lead to revolution, and they knew virtually nothing about him. After the July Days he went into exile again and was not seen again until he returned secretly in October. Most people did not recognise him even in the period after the Bolsheviks took power. Trotsky was much better known and much more popular. Commentators have said that Lenin had no real knowledge of ordinary Russian people and no experience of their everyday working lives (he had only had a paid job for two years). Maxim Gorky said that his ignorance bred contempt for ordinary people and the suffering they endured.

C Summing up Lenin

Lenin had many qualities that proved invaluable in pushing through the October uprising in 1917 and ruling Russia in the post-revolutionary period. He had great organisational abilities and leadership skills, together with a strong personality to force through decisions in the Politburo and Central Committee. He was tough, hard and calculating, totally dedicated to politics and revolution. From October 1917 until his last major stroke in March 1923, he spent up to sixteen hours or more a day, running the Bolshevik government, making sure that the revolution survived.

Lenin was a good orator, though not brilliant in the way that Trotsky was. He did not bring his speeches to life with metaphors and well-crafted phrases. Rather his skill lay in his ability to express ideas simply and make his audience understand complicated political concepts. He was good in argument, bringing people around to his views, an essential quality in a leader. He was forceful and persuasive.

Lenin did not look for personal gain from the Revolution. He did not seek the pleasures of life like some other Bolshevik leaders. His one diversion was his romantic friendship with Inessa Armand. He lived simply with Krupskaya, whom he called 'comrade', and his sister in a three-bedroomed apartment in the Kremlin and often slept in a small room behind his offices. They ate their meals in the cafeteria. He continued the austere life of the revolutionary that he was used to. He liked things to be orderly and tidy with fixed hours for meals, sleep and work. He had little private life: his life was the Revolution.

Politics also dominated his personal friendships. He would cut off personal connections with people with whom he fell out over politics. Martov, who was a close personal friend in the early days of the Social Democratic Party, was cast off when he became a Menshevik and Lenin poured scorn upon him, something he regretted when Martov died. Lenin's attitude to political opponents was vitriolic. According to the Russian writer Maxim Gorky in 1918, Lenin's attitude was that 'who is not with us is against us'.

Lenin had a strong streak of ruthlessness and cruelty. In the late 1980s and 1990s, Soviet archives were opened up as the Communist regime came to an end. These revealed a much harder, more ruthless Lenin than the 'softer' image he had enjoyed amongst left-wing historians and groups. For instance, a memorandum, first published in 1990, reveals his ordering the extermination of the clergy in a place called Shuya after people there fought off officials who had come to raid the church. The Politburo voted to stop further raids on churches but Lenin countermanded them (see page 300). Similarly, he was vitriolic about the peasants, ordering the hanging of a hundred kulaks as a lesson to others (see page 144).

Lenin believed that revolutionaries had to be hard to carry out their role, which would inevitably involve spilling the blood of their opponents. Although hard and tough on others, it seems that Lenin was not personally brave. He was not a revolutionary who rushed to the barricades. He left the fighting to others. According to Valentinov, a revolutionary who knew him well, Lenin's rule was to 'get away while the going was good'.

Lenin's domination of the party is one of the key factors in his success. There were many disputes and splits in the party, such as the serious split over the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, right into the 1920s. But in the end he always managed to bring the party behind him and keep it united. According to Beryl Williams (*Lenin*, 2000, page 13), Lenin's contemporaries attested to his 'hypnotic influence'. His personal magnetism and charisma are not in doubt. But he also had tremendous political skills – of knowing when to persuade, when to cajole, when to give in, when to threaten to resign and when to get really tough and demanding. Above all, Lenin was convinced of his role and his destiny (see Source 9.8 on page 176). He never had any doubt that he knew the right path and could lead the party along it.

ACTIVITY

Write a list of the aspects of Lenin's character and personality that you think contributed to his success.

TALKING POINT

On pages 173–4 you read about the displays of public grief after Lenin's death. What do you think were the main reasons for this reaction?

SOURCE 9.7 A. N. Potresov, a Menshevik, describing Lenin shortly after his death

Only Lenin was followed unquestioningly as the undisputed leader, as it was only Lenin who was that rare phenomenon, particularly in Russia – a man of iron will and indomitable energy, capable of instilling fanatical faith in the movement and the cause, and possessed of equal faith in himself...

No one could sweep people away so much by his plans, impress them by his strength of will, and then win them over by his personality as this man, who at first sight seemed so unprepossessing and crude, and, on the face of it had none of the things that make for personal charm. Neither Plekhanov nor Martov nor any one else had the secret of that hypnotic influence on, or rather ascendancy over, [other people] which Lenin radiated.

SOURCE 9.8 Chernov, the Socialist Revolutionary leader, on Lenin

Lenin possesses a devotion to the revolutionary cause which permeates his entire being. But to him the revolution is embodied in his person. Lenin possesses an outstanding mind, but it is a... mind of one dimension – more than that a unilinear mind... He is a man of one-sided will and consequently a man with a stunted moral sensitivity.

SOURCE 9.9 S. Nechayev, *Catechism of a Revolutionary*, 1869

The first article:

The revolutionary is a dedicated man. He has no personal feelings, no private affairs, no emotions, no attachments, no property, and no name. Everything in him is subordinated towards a single exclusive attachment, a single thought and a single passion – the revolution.

LENIN AND THE ORIGINS OF THE BOLSHEVIK PARTY

Some historians argue that Bolshevism itself is a Russian phenomenon. Lenin, it is claimed, merged Russian revolutionary thought with Marxism in the creation of the Bolshevik ideology and concept of the party. As a young man, Lenin had immersed himself in the revolutionary writings of an earlier period. He was profoundly influenced by the writer Chernyshevsky who considered that society could only be perfected by socialism. While in jail in 1862, Chernyshevsky wrote his famous novel *What Is To Be Done?* Its hero is a super-revolutionary who renounces all pleasure to harden himself physically and mentally in preparation for the coming revolution. Lenin read the book five times one summer, claiming that it had changed his life and shown him how to become a revolutionary. Lenin used the title *What Is To Be Done?* for his 1902 tract on the nature of a revolutionary party.

Lenin was also influenced by Nechayev's *Catechism of a Revolutionary*, which advocated that revolutionaries should be hard and ruthless, lacking in sentiment and dedicated (see Source 9.9). This was necessary to encourage the short-term misery required for long-term happiness: some revolutionaries believed they had to make conditions so bad for people that they would rise up against their rulers. Nechayev also planned a revolutionary organisation based on cells (three or four people) directed by a central committee. We can see from these writers where some of Lenin's key ideas about revolution and the Bolshevik Party originated.

D Did Lenin make a difference?

One of the big questions in history is to do with the role of the individual: how far have individuals influenced the course of history? This is sometimes called the 'great man' theory of history insofar as it appears that certain people, occupying positions of power, make decisions or initiate actions that change the course of history. Is Lenin one of these individuals?

To make a judgement about this we have to ask how significant Lenin was in creating the world's first Communist state. How different would the world have been if he had not arrived in Petrograd in April 1917? As we saw at the end of Section 2, circumstances helped the Bolsheviks enormously: the weakness of the opposition (liberal and other socialist parties); the collapse of the army; intense economic distress; the Kornilov affair; Kerensky's blunders. All of these factors meant that the opportunity to seize power literally fell into the Bolsheviks' laps. It seems likely that the Soviet would have taken power anyway and that a socialist government – albeit a very different one from the Communist regime of the 1920s – would have been formed, even if Lenin had not intervened.

So is there a good case for suggesting that Lenin really did make a difference and changed the course of the twentieth century? Charts 9A and 9B set out some of the main points for the argument that he did. The points refer back to pages where you can find more explanation or supporting argument.

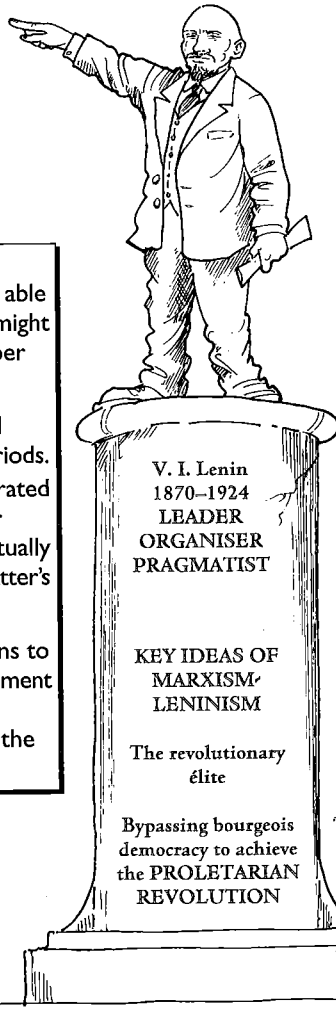
FOCUS ROUTE

- 1 Make notes on the ways that Lenin's personal qualities and actions at key times may have influenced the course of Russian history.
- 2 What circumstances helped Lenin to play such a key role?

ANALYSING EVIDENCE

What criteria would you use to decide whether an individual had significantly influenced the course of history? In Lenin's case, was it more to do with him or circumstance?

9A Lenin's personal qualities



Leader

He was an outstanding leader, who alone was able to hold the Bolshevik Party together when it might have fragmented, for example over the October uprising, the Red Army and the NEP.

No one else in the party had the prestige and standing to see them through these difficult periods. He had great organisational abilities, demonstrated in his management of the country during War Communism, when he and Sverdlov made virtually all the day-to-day business decisions until the latter's death in 1919.

He was flexible and pragmatic, finding solutions to the problems that arose when building a government from scratch in 1917–18 (for instance, using 'bourgeois specialists' and single managers in the factories, introducing the NEP in 1921).

Theorist

He was a brilliant theorist. His adaptations of Marxist theory have become known as Marxism–Leninism. His developments of Marxism had two important implications for the Russian Revolution:

1 His concept of a small, disciplined revolutionary party that could seize power as a vanguard on behalf of the working class was crucial in 1917 (see page 26).

2 His development, along with Trotsky, of the notion that the proletariat could carry through a socialist revolution without going through the 'bourgeois-democratic stage' (because the bourgeoisie was too weak) led to the April Theses, Bolshevik opposition to the Provisional Government and the October uprising.

V. I. Lenin
1870–1924
LEADER
ORGANISER
PRAGMATIST

KEY IDEAS OF
MARXISM
LENINISM

The revolutionary
élite

Bypassing bourgeois
democracy to achieve
the PROLETARIAN
REVOLUTION

9B Evidence supporting the view that Lenin changed the course of history

KEY POINTS OF INTERVENTION



New Economic Policy

He persuaded a very reluctant party to accept the economic compromises of the NEP, based on his record and standing in the party. There is a good chance that the Bolsheviks would have been overthrown if they had continued with War Communism (see page 146).

NEP

Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and the Red Army

Lenin pushed through the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk despite the opposition of the left Communists; he realised that they had to have peace to survive (see page 121). He supported Trotsky in creating a traditional hierarchical Red Army using ex-tsarist officers, against serious opposition in the party from leading Bolsheviks such as Stalin. Trotsky would not have got this through without Lenin and if he had not, then the Bolsheviks might well have lost the Civil War.

Brest-Litovsk and Red Army

Issue of socialist coalition

Lenin insisted that the Bolsheviks rule as a one-party state. He forced this through against the opposition of leading Bolsheviks who wanted a socialist coalition (see page 120). If this had happened, a very different Russia would have emerged and the Civil War would have taken a very different form, if it had taken place at all. Lenin crushed the Constituent Assembly, which was the legitimate government elected by Russians.

Socialist coalition

October uprising

Lenin pressurised the unwilling Bolshevik Central Committee into staging the October uprising. They resisted his demands on several occasions (he faced outright opposition from Zinoviev and Kamenev). It is very likely that the Bolsheviks would not have got into power if they had not acted when they did (see pages 104–105).

October uprising

April Theses

Lenin forced these through despite much opposition in the party, though he was in tune with the militant rank and file. The April Theses became the basis of party policy – uncompromising opposition to war, and the handing over of power to soviets – which brought the Bolsheviks much support and made them the only credible opposition party to the Provisional Government (see pages 82–84). The April Theses gave them a clear focus which cut through the indecisiveness of other socialist parties.

April Theses

ACTIVITY

How do Sources 9.10–9.14 support the case that Lenin made a difference? Refer in your answers to specific parts of the sources.

SOURCE 9.10 C. Read, *From Tsar to Soviets: The Russian People and their Revolution 1917–21*, 1996, p. 164

While the leadership [of the Bolshevik Party] continued to show that it was not fully disciplined by falling into warring groups over every major initiative from Lenin's April Theses, through the July Days, the seizure of power in October, the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, military and trade union policy during the Civil War and the adoption of NEP in 1921, it is essential to note that, despite the divisions, Lenin's line was eventually followed on all of these key questions. In other words, the 'Bolshevik' structure of the party boiled down to Lenin's domination of it. This is confirmed by the fact that, after his illness and death in 1924, the divisions were no longer able to be healed and the leadership fell into purging and, eventually, bloodletting.

SOURCE 9.11 A letter from Lenin to the Bolshevik Central Committee, 29 September 1917, in which he urges a Bolshevik takeover

To miss such a moment, to 'wait' for the Congress of Soviets, would be utter idiocy, or sheer treachery... To refrain from taking power now... is to doom the revolution to failure. In view of the fact that the Central Committee has even left unanswered the persistent demands I have been making... I am compelled to regard this as a subtle hint that I should keep my mouth shut... I am compelled to tender my resignation from the Central Committee...

SOURCE 9.12 N. N. Sukhanov, quoted by J. Carmichael, *A Short History of the Revolution*, 1967, p. 83

Lenin was a very good orator – not an orator of the consummate, of the rounded phrase, or of the luminous image, or of absorbing pathos, or of the pointed witticism, but an orator of enormous impact and power, breaking down complicated systems into the simplest and most generally accessible elements, and hammering, hammering, hammering, them into the heads of his audience until he took them captive.

[Talking of the April Theses] Skobelev told Miliukov about his [Lenin's] lunatic ideas, appraising him as a completely lost man standing outside the movement. I agreed with his assessment of Lenin's ideas and said that in his present guise he was so unacceptable to everyone that he was not at all dangerous... We refused to admit that Lenin might stick to his 'abstractions'. Still less did we admit that through these abstractions Lenin would be able to conquer not only the revolution, not only all its active masses, not only the whole Soviet – but even his own Bolsheviks. We were cruelly mistaken.

SOURCE 9.13 R. Service, 'Lenin: Individual and Politics in the October Revolution', *Modern History Review*, September 1990

The October Revolution has often and widely been held to have been predominantly Lenin's revolution. But was it? Certainly Lenin had a heavier impact on the course of events than anyone else. The point is, however, that great historical processes are wrought not only by individuals. There were other mighty factors at work as well in Russia in 1917. The conditions for a seizure of power with the sanction of exhausted workers, war-weary soldiers and angry peasants could hardly have been more favourable... Lenin died before he had the chance to face up properly to the consequences of the kind of revolution he had led. He was a man who helped to shape his times: but his times also moulded him.

SOURCE 9.14 P. Kenez, *A History of the Soviet Union from the Beginning to the End*, 1999, pp. 27–28

Historians have asked whether the Bolshevik seizure of power in October was a coup d'état, carried out by the impetuous Bolsheviks, or a true revolution, the work of the radical workers and soldiers of Petrograd. But perhaps the most striking aspect of events was neither the Bolsheviks' daring, nor the behaviour of the workers, but the complete disintegration of governmental authority. Every politically aware person in Petrograd knew that the Bolsheviks were about to act, but the government could not defend itself. Under the circumstances one could hardly speak of a coup d'état, much less a conspiracy. The Bolsheviks seized power because the country was in the throes of anarchy.

TROTSKY POINT

Do you agree with Trotsky or Deutscher on Lenin's role in 1917? Would the twentieth century have been different without Lenin or Hitler or Churchill?

ACTIVITY

The key points picked out in Charts 9A and 9B are examples of an **analytical** approach to answering a question. When you analyse something, you break it down into its component parts and you select elements which are relevant to the statement you are making or the question you are answering. You can then use **descriptive** material to support your analytical points.

Here are some different styles of examination writing tasks. Pick one suitable for your purposes:

- a) Using the sources and your own knowledge, examine the statement, 'Lenin's role in the Bolshevik seizure of power has been exaggerated.'
- b) Lenin was a man who helped shape his times, but his times also moulded him.
- c) i) Describe Lenin's role in the Bolshevik consolidation of power.
ii) Was Lenin a dictator by intent or by circumstance?
[First part is more descriptive, second part is more analytical.]

■ Learning trouble spot

Trotsky and the role of Lenin in the revolution

Trotsky, like Lenin, believed that politics and especially revolutions were about the involvement of the masses. He believed that the masses were the driving force that made Russian revolution possible, although they needed the Bolshevik Party to provide direction. He wrote, 'Without a guiding organisation the energy of the mass would dissipate like steam not enclosed in a piston box. But nevertheless what moves things is not the piston or the box but the steam.' However, Trotsky had no doubt about the importance of Lenin's role in April and October 1917 when the Bolshevik Party was divided and unclear on the direction to take. He wrote to Preobrazhensky in 1928, 'You know better than I do that had Lenin not managed to come to Petrograd in April 1917, the October Revolution would not have taken place.'

Trotsky is even more definite about October: 'Had I not been present in Petrograd in 1917 the October Revolution would still have taken place – on the condition that Lenin was present and in command. If neither Lenin nor I had been present in Petrograd, there would have been no October Revolution: the leadership of the Bolshevik Party would have prevented it from occurring – of this I have not the slightest doubt!'

This view is one that the Marxist historian Isaac Deutscher (Trotsky's biographer) cannot accept. For him the idea that without Lenin there would have been no revolution for many years is a startling one for a Marxist with a determinist view of history. He argues that the revolutionary trend will find or create its leader or leadership from whatever human material is available. The idea of the irreplaceable colossus is 'an optical illusion' (*The Prophet Outcast: Trotsky, 1929–1940*, pages 240–246).

The role of the great man or woman in history is a perennial question. E.H. Carr discusses this in his book *What is History?* 1964, pages 54–55. He is anxious to dispel the idea that great men are jack-in-the-boxes who emerge miraculously from the unknown to interrupt the real continuity of history. For Carr the great man 'is at once a product and an agent of the historical process, at once the representative and the creator of social forces which change the shape of the world and the thoughts of men'. Carr distinguishes between those great men who, like Lenin and Cromwell, helped to mould the forces that carried them to greatness and those who, like Napoleon and Bismarck, rode to greatness on the back of already existing forces (*What is History?* 1964, pages 54–55).

KEY POINTS FROM CHAPTER 9

How significant is Lenin's contribution to history?

- 1 At the end of his life, Lenin's relationship with Stalin deteriorated.
- 2 It is likely that Stalin's power would have been curtailed if Lenin had lived just a little bit longer or if his testament had been made public.
- 3 Stalin used Lenin's funeral to portray himself as the disciple of Lenin and he started the cult of Leninism.
- 4 He tried to transfer Lenin's prestige and status to himself as the person pledged to continue Lenin's work.
- 5 Lenin had many qualities that made him a successful leader.
- 6 The 'soft' image of Lenin has been destroyed by new archive material which shows him to have been hard and ruthless.
- 7 There is a good case for saying that Lenin 'made a difference' as an individual in history.