

10 (a) Write an account of Lenin's role in the Bolshevik party. (15)

Lenin was the founding leader and ideological driving force behind the Bolshevik Party. His leadership, writings, and revolutionary strategy were central to the party's development, its seizure of power in 1917, and its transformation of Russia into a communist state. Lenin's role in the Bolshevik Party was marked by firm leadership, ideological clarity, and tactical flexibility.

Firstly, Lenin played a key role in the split of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) in 1903, which led to the formation of two factions: the Bolsheviks (meaning "majority") and the Mensheviks ("minority"). Lenin led the Bolsheviks, advocating for a tightly organized, centralized party of professional revolutionaries, in contrast to the Mensheviks' preference for a more democratic and mass-based movement.

Lenin was also the chief theorist of the Bolshevik movement. His interpretation of Marxism adapted it to Russian conditions. Lenin argued that the working class needed party leaders to lead it toward revolution, as spontaneous working-class action alone would not be enough. He also developed ideas about spreading revolution (through Comintern) and about the role of the state.

Moreover, Lenin's role was crucial in both the February and October Revolutions of 1917. Although in exile during the February Revolution, he returned to Russia in April with the help of the Germans. Upon arrival, he issued the April Theses, calling for "peace, land, and bread" and "all power to the Soviets." His radical attitude set him apart from other socialist leaders and realigned the Bolsheviks with the growing discontent of workers and soldiers.

Lenin's leadership also ensured that the Bolsheviks seized the right moment to take power in the October Revolution. He pushed the Central Committee to act decisively, overcoming hesitation from some party members (e.g. Kamenev and Zinoviev). Thus, on October 25, the Bolsheviks overthrew the Provisional Government in Petrograd, establishing Soviet rule.

Lenin's leadership role in the party meant that, after the revolution, Lenin became the head of the new Soviet government, officially known as the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom). He also led the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany in 1918, by instructing Trotsky to secure peace at any price. This was important because Russia could leave WW1 - it was a controversial but strategic move to preserve the revolution.

In addition, Lenin provided strong leadership during the Russian Civil War (1918–21), when the Bolsheviks faced fierce opposition from the White armies and foreign intervention. Under his direction, the party introduced War Communism to control the economy and ensure Red Army supplies. He also supported the establishment of the Cheka, a secret police force, to crush internal opposition. (Lenin also suppressed opposition parties, banned factions within the Communist Party, and oversaw the Red Terror, a campaign of political repression.)

In addition, Lenin recognized the economic failures of War Communism and therefore introduced the New Economic Policy in 1921. This marked a temporary retreat from pure socialism, allowing some private trade and small-scale capitalism. Lenin saw it as a necessary compromise to stabilize the economy and prevent further rebellion.

Lenin is remembered as both a revolutionary visionary who changed the course of history and as a leader whose policies contributed to repression and authoritarianism. Lenin's role in the Bolshevik Party was significant. He shaped its ideology and strategies. He organised the party and led it to power in 1917. He then laid the groundwork for the Soviet one-party state. A final contribution as party leader was that Lenin expressed concerns about the growing power of Joseph Stalin, though these warnings were suppressed after his death in 1924. Lenin's ideas and leadership continued to influence the direction of the USSR long after his death.