

6 (a) Write an account of the Bolsheviks' rise to power during 1917.

The year 1917 was a turning point in Russian history. It saw two revolutions: the February Revolution, which ended Tsarist rule, and the October Revolution, which brought the Bolsheviks to power. The Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, rose from a small revolutionary faction to the ruling party of Russia by the end of the year. Their rise to power was made possible by a mix of strong leadership, popular support, and the failures of the Provisional Government.

In February 1917, mass protests and strikes broke out in Petrograd due to food shortages, military defeats, and poor working conditions. The army eventually refused to fire on protesters, and Tsar Nicholas II was forced to abdicate. At this point a Provisional Government was formed to rule until elections could be held, but it had to share power with the Petrograd Soviet, a council of workers and soldiers. This situation of dual power created confusion and weakened the government. The Bolsheviks were only a small party in February 1917.

The Provisional Government, led by Kerensky, made several key mistakes. They continued fighting in World War I, which was deeply unpopular. They failed to solve the land problem (peasants wanted land, but reforms were delayed). Moreover, they could not deal with the economic crisis. So, food shortages, inflation, and strikes continued. The Provisional Government also postponed real democratic elections, losing trust among the people. These failures allowed the Bolsheviks to gain support by promising what the government could not deliver.

In April 1917, Lenin returned to Russia from exile and issued the April Theses. In this he demanded Peace (end to the war), land to be redistributed to peasants, the food shortages to be solved, and all power to be given to the Soviets. These ideas were radical but appealed to workers, soldiers, and peasants who were desperate for change. They helped the Bolsheviks stand out from other socialist groups.

In June, the Provisional Government launched a disastrous offensive, known simply as the June Offensive. As a consequence, in July 1917, mass protests broke out in Petrograd. Although the Bolsheviks were not fully behind the demonstrations, they were blamed and temporarily repressed. Lenin fled to Finland.

In August, General Kornilov attempted a military coup. The Provisional Government turned to the Bolsheviks for help. The Red Guards, armed by the Bolsheviks, defended Petrograd. This made the Bolsheviks look like heroes and defenders of the revolution, further increasing their support. This was a significant turning point in the Bolsheviks' rise to power.

As a consequence, by September 1917, the Bolsheviks had gained a majority support in key Soviets, especially in Petrograd and Moscow. This gave them a platform for action and showed their growing popularity among workers and soldiers.

Lenin then returned from Finland and pushed for a seizure of power. On October 25, the Red Guards, led by Leon Trotsky, took control of key buildings in Petrograd, including the Winter Palace. The Provisional Government was arrested with little resistance. The final action in the Bolsheviks' rise to power was declaring that power had passed to the Soviets, and that Russia now had a new government called the Council of People's Commissars, with Lenin as its head.

The Bolsheviks' rise to power in 1917 was the result of careful planning, strong leadership, and widespread dissatisfaction with the Provisional Government. By promising peace, land, and bread (and delivering decisive action) they were able to seize control and begin the transformation of Russia into a communist state.