
Political superstar of the communist ideology, the life of Vladimir Lenin

Vladimir Lenin, whose real name was Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, played an important role in shaping the character of the twentieth century western world. He oversaw the most far-reaching revolution that in 1917 radically changed the political and social structure of Russia and balance of power in the world. Being an important historical figure in Russia, Lenin is treated more like a god. To the Russian public, he is presented as strong, wise, courageous, and kind. Lenin's infallibility, or accuracy, was so strong that his words pervaded every level of daily life. Such as newspapers, storybooks, etc.

Children were taught to follow his example and adults were told to follow his path and advice on how to be hardworking, loyal communists. Since the revolution more than 350 million works by Lenin have been published in the former USSR. He is the ultimate mentor and guide for all Soviets, like he was a god or idol. He had the final authority on every aspect of their life. Anyone who visits the Soviet Union then and now is bound to be shocked by the utter extravagance of the nation's adulation with him. Americans today can not even grasp why the Soviets idolize one man so much. It inspires guilt in Americans about their own revolutionary past. But, to the extremes of which the worship of Lenin is carried makes us ask ourselves who he really was.

As you will see the man and the myth are often difficult to distinguish. Lenin's likeness appears before the Soviets very often and in many different ways so that he is almost too easy to forget about. An example would be, in a park in Kiev, a floral arrangement is fashioned to resemble his face. In Moscow this adulation reaches an absurd height. In Red Square people wait in an endless line to see his tomb. While in this line an eternal flame honors the millions of Soviets who died in World War Two. Who was Lenin really? A god, a man, or something else. Where did he come from? What did he believe? Why did the Soviets immortalize him so relentlessly? Lenin was born in the backwater town of Simbirsk in 1870. He grew up in a well educated family in provincial Russia. He excelled at school and went on to study law. At university, he was exposed to radical thinking, and his views were also influenced by the execution of his elder brother, a member of a revolutionary group. Expelled from university for his radical policies, Lenin managed to complete his law degree as an external student in 1891. He moved to St Petersburg and became a professional revolutionary. Like many of his contemporaries, Lenin was arrested and exiled to Siberia, where he married Nadezhda Krupskaya. The real love of his life, however, was Inessa Armand, whose death in 1920 left him distraught.

After his Siberian exile, Lenin - the pseudonym he adopted in 1901 - spent most of the subsequent decade and a half in Western Europe, where he emerged as a prominent figure in the international revolutionary movement and became the leader of the 'Bolshevik' faction of the Russian Social Democratic Worker's Party. In 1917, exhausted by the First World War, Russia was ripe for change. Assisted by the Germans, who hoped that he would undermine the Russian war effort, Lenin returned home and started working against the provisional government which had replaced the tsarist regime. He eventually led what was soon to be known as the October Revolution, but was effectively a coup d'etat. Almost three years of civil war followed. The Red Army emerged victorious, and the Bolsheviks assumed total control of the country.

During this period of revolution, war and famine, Lenin demonstrated a chilling disregard for the sufferings of his fellow countrymen. In his merciless destruction of any opposition, he was instrumental in creating the conditions for Stalin's dictatorship. Lenin was ruthless but also pragmatic. When his efforts to transform the Russian economy to a socialist model stalled, he introduced the New Economic Policy, where a measure of private enterprise was still permitted. This policy continued for several years beyond his death. In 1918 Lenin survived an assassination attempt. His long term health was affected, and in 1922 he suffered a stroke from which he never really recovered. In his declining years, he worried about the bureaucratisation of the regime and also expressed concern over the increasing role of Stalin. On a personal level, Lenin was a modest man and disapproved of adulation. But after his death, he became the subject of a personality cult of grotesque proportions which lasted until the final years of the Soviet system. Lenin's embalmed corpse remains in a mausoleum on Moscow's Red Square. Once a place of communist worship, it has now become a symbol of a political ideology and system which ultimately failed miserably.

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