



Buildings in St Petersburg that sealed Kerensky's fate in October 1917. The Winter Palace (left) in which the Provisional Government were detained on the night of the revolution and the Smolny (right), in which the Soviet Military Revolutionary Committee planned the revolution

tobacco, of everything required to make life bearable. In fact, he really had very little to offer in the face of determined Bolshevik propaganda and advances in the Soviets.

Effective politician but 'out of his depth'

In many ways Kerensky was the consummate politician. As mentioned earlier, he was an excellent speaker. In the Duma, he would wear a bourgeois morning coat, complete with starched collar. But when he spoke in the Petrograd Soviet, he took off his collar and morning coat and appeared as a man of the people. When he went to speak before the Army he put on khaki. He made clever use of film to record his speeches and gain publicity. Women fell madly in love with his boyish good looks. He was regarded by foreign observers as a good democrat, and an ally to cultivate. He was able to appear all things to all men. Except, of course, that he was not able to give the Russian people the things that they wanted. Could anyone by October 1917?

For all he was regarded as a clever orator he would often faint with exhaustion after a major speech. By September 1917 he was living on his nerves. The only way he could keep going was by taking morphine and brandy. He reputedly had serious stomach trouble, lung problems, kidney trouble. This is hardly surprising given the position he was in. He found it hard to take decisions. He became increasingly isolated and often hysterical. He knew he was destined to take Russia out of the chaos it was in and restore order, discipline and pride, but often wasn't sure how to get there. As his support faded away he seemed to lose his vitality and political touch.

When the Bolsheviks seized power in October Kerensky fled the capital to try to find loyal troops to help him regain power. Kerensky, like many Russians, believed that Bolshevik government could not possibly last more than a few weeks. It is alleged he fled in a nurse's uniform, and this undermined any remaining credibility he may have had. It proved to be a vain quest. Few people had any faith left in the Provisional Government's ability to either win the war or restore order in the country. He avoided arrest by using a car flying the American flag. He fled to Gatchina where he was forced to flee again, this time dressed as a Danish sailor. He left Russia on a British boat in June 1918. Kerensky fled first to England and then to France, where he played a major part in anti-Bolshevik political activity. In 1940 he moved to Australia and then on to the United States, where he spent most of the rest of his life teaching in Universities. He wrote many books explaining his role in the revolution, vilifying the Bolsheviks and those who had let him down in 1917. He died in 1970, of cancer, in New York. He is buried in the Vale Cemetery, Putney, South-west London.

Kerensky, for all his attributes, was an idealistic but light-weight politician. He was master of the telling phrase, but unable to control the rush of events in mid 1917. He was no match for Lenin and Trotsky, he had no clear ideology to drive him on, no strong support when it came to the crunch. Nevertheless, for a few short months, Kerensky was at the centre of earth-shattering events, only to find himself ousted and exiled. The ultimate irony is, however, that since the fall of communism, Kerensky has become a role-model for some of the new social-democratic politicians in Russia, and his brief period in power regarded as a lost opportunity. *C'est la vie!*

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