Screenplay for the film "1916 — Empress Alexandra Feodorovna. Historical Chronicles with Nikolai Svanidze" written by Marina Zhukova, translated by AI, and preceded by a summary also written by AI

Screenplay Summary:

In 1917, a decisive and tragic year, two revolutions swept through Russia: the February Revolution overthrew the monarchy and opened a brief democratic interlude, while the October Revolution established Bolshevik power for decades.

The fall of Nicholas II unfolded against a backdrop of famine, strikes, and chaos in Petrograd, triggered in particular by conflict at the Putilov factory and the bread supply crisis.

Workers' demonstrations turned into an uprising, troops fraternized with the demonstrators, the police were overwhelmed, and soldiers mutinied and sometimes killed their officers.

The tsar, isolated on his train between Headquarters and Tsarskoye Selo, was cut off from the capital and eventually abdicated after learning that his son would likely not live long enough to reign.

In Petrograd, the Duma hastily created a Provisional Committee, where the socialist lawyer and deputy Alexander Kerensky stood out for his energy.

In a simple corridor exchange, the Duma accepted the creation of a Soviet of workers' and soldiers' deputies inside the Tauride Palace itself, thus opening the way to the system of "dual power."

Kerensky became vice-president of the Soviet and a member of the Provisional Committee, forming a link between the "bourgeois" government and the revolutionary masses.

He showed spectacular courage by protecting hated former ministers from lynching, physically playing the role of a shield between them and the crowd.

The first Provisional Government, composed mainly of liberals, was formed under the leadership of Prince Lvov; Kerensky became Minister of Justice.

He immediately ordered the release of political prisoners, a general amnesty, the end of legal discrimination, and the preparation of a Constituent Assembly.

At the same time, however, the Soviet issued "Order No. 1," which effectively transferred power in the army to soldiers' committees, undermining officers' authority and accelerating military disintegration.

Kerensky, who had judged the Soviet "not dangerous," realized too late that the Duma had handed control of the armed forces to another body.

The question of the throne was settled when Grand Duke Michael refused the crown, renouncing it "for the entire dynasty" amid threats of civil war.

Kerensky opposed any restoration and also presented himself as guarantor of the imperial family's safety, first in Tsarskoye Selo, then by organizing their transfer to Tobolsk after Britain refused asylum.

Meanwhile, the front was crumbling: massive desertion, fraternization with the Germans, and the growing influence of Soviet and soon Bolshevik propaganda, which preached rejection of the war.

Germany, guided by the revolutionary financier Parvus, saw an opportunity in Russian chaos and decided to help the radicals, especially Lenin, return to Russia and intensify propaganda.

Lenin, for whom Russia was only one link on the road to world revolution, considered its defeat desirable to speed up a general conflagration.

The Provisional Government, by contrast, chose to remain in the war on the Allies' side, redefining the conflict as "defensive," thinking more about Russia's international future than about its own survival.

At the front, despite Kerensky's fiery tours, authority collapsed; his charisma produced brief enthusiasm that was not enough to slow the army's disintegration.
Thus an explosive situation of dual power emerged: a legal but weak government, without reliable armed forces, and a Soviet that was increasingly radicalized, where the Bolsheviks were gaining ground.
In this complex game, Kerensky appears as the man who might have changed the course of history but who, through his choices and illusions, inadvertently helped open the way for Lenin and the October Revolution.

Screenplay :

1917: Alexander Kerensky

1917.The most important and most terrible year of the 20th century in Russia – and in the world. In that year Russia saw two revolutions.
The first revolution made Russia democratic for nine months – three quarters of a year – and the second made it Bolshevik for three quarters of a century. The abdication of the tsar, the Provisional Government, the return from emigration and the incredible, devilish, fateful activity of Lenin and Trotsky – or Trotsky and Lenin. And the man who could have turned the course of history, but did not – Alexander Fyodorovich Kerensky.

On 2 March 1917, after noon, on a train standing at Pskov station, the Russian emperor Nicholas II invited his physician, Professor Fyodorov, and said to him:
"In other times I would not ask you such a question, but the moment is now very serious, and I ask you to answer me with full responsibility: will my son live, and will he ever be able to reign?"
"Your Majesty," replied Doctor Fyodorov, "I must confess to you that His Imperial Highness the Heir will not live even to sixteen."

After this conversation Nicholas made the decision to abdicate for himself and for his son. The day before, on 1 March, the commanders of all the fronts had spoken out in favour of the emperor's abdication. Earlier, on 27 February, the sovereign had tried to return from Headquarters to Tsarskoye Selo.

His train reached the station Dno. It could go no further. They would not let him through. Nicholas decided to go to Pskov.

On 2 March at 10 p.m. in Pskov, two deputies of the State Duma arrived from Petrograd to see Nicholas – Alexander Ivanovich Guchkov and Vasily Vitalyevich Shulgin. These two men were witnesses to how Nicholas wrote and signed the document of abdication.

During the conversation Nicholas comported himself calmly and simply. According to Shulgin, only the tsar's pronunciation sounded a little foreign – Guards' style. Shulgin worried that he had appeared before the sovereign unshaven, in a lounge jacket and a crumpled collar. Shulgin could be forgiven. On 2 March the fourth day of the second Russian revolution was under way. The emperor truly did not know, had not seen, and could not imagine what had been happening in the capital of his empire during those four days. In those days of complete confusion the greatest decisiveness was shown by the man whom the entire subsequent century would blame almost exclusively for weakness and indecision. That man was Alexander Fyodorovich Kerensky.

Already in 1915 the Russian industrialist and financier Alexei Ivanovich Putilov had warned that Russia was doomed to a revolution and that the pretext could be anything at all: hunger, a strike, a palace coup.

In 1917 everything unfolded exactly according to Putilov's prediction. And it all began at the Putilov factory. Incidentally, originally it had been the plant of another Putilov, and by 1917 it was no longer in private but in state hands. But that is not the point. On 18 February, in response to rising prices, the workers demanded a 50 percent wage increase.
The management refused. The workers stopped the machines. Meetings began in the workshops across the entire plant. Three days later the administration declared a lockout. Forty thousand people were thrown onto the street. In addition, the food situation in Petrograd had become critical.

On 21 February women were already breaking into bakeries and grocers' shops and looting them. On 23 February bread disappeared in Petrograd. On that same day a general strike began. The Duma was discussing the food question. The Minister of Agriculture, Rittikh, spoke in the Duma, and after his speech he wept in the government pavilion. There was plenty of bread, but it was not reaching the city.
Rail transport had come to a halt. Frosts, snow drifts. After the meetings in the factories the workers, singing, poured out into the streets. The mounted and foot police could not restrain the crowd. The governor of Petrograd, General Balk, gave the military command an order to suppress the riot. On 25 February Cossack detachments and infantry units were brought into action.

On the square of Nikolaevsky railway station, by the monument to Alexander III, the Cossacks began to fraternize with the participants of the many-thousand-strong rally.

At this time in the Alexandrinsky Theater the premiere of Lermontov's drama *Masquerade*, staged by Meyerhold, was being performed. The theater was sold out, and so were the streets. Nevsky Prospect and all the adjoining streets were packed with revolutionary crowds.

On Sunday, 26 February, regiments of soldiers, without their officers, began to leave the barracks. Some officers were arrested, some were killed. Civilians joined the soldiers who had spilled out onto the streets. At midnight from Sunday to Monday, from 26 to 27 February, four days before his abdication, Nicholas II signed a decree to suspend the work of the Duma. On the morning of 27 February mutiny broke out in the Guards units. Cavalry units called back from the front to restore order never arrived in the capital. On the morning of 27 February the imperial government no longer existed. The Duma, dissolved by the tsar, did not dare to assemble for an official session in the White Hall of the Tauride Palace. But in full composition it gathered for a private meeting in the Semi-Circular Hall. An officer ran into the hall and, his voice breaking, interrupted the session: "Gentlemen deputies, I beg for protection. I am the commander of the guard assigned to protect the Duma. Some soldiers have burst in, my assistant has been wounded. I barely escaped. What is happening? Help!"

At that moment of universal confusion Kerensky began to speak:
"We cannot delay. The troops are in turmoil. I am going to the regiments now!"

According to eyewitness accounts, Kerensky spoke decisively, sharply, with a hint of scorn. His eyes were burning. Right there it was decided to create a Provisional Committee with unlimited powers.

It included representatives of the centrist factions of the Duma, and from the left parties two men: Kerensky and Chkheidze. The Duma approved the composition of the Provisional Committee. At that very moment soldiers, students, workers, intellectuals – an endless crowd from the streets – poured into the Duma building.

Kerensky ran out onto the steps of the Tauride Palace to the first crowd of soldiers.

“Citizen soldiers!” shouted Kerensky. “A great honour falls to your lot. I declare you the first revolutionary guard!”

This guard did not last even a minute. The crowd swept it away.

By midday on 27 February the 200-thousand-strong Petrograd garrison was left without officers. In the Duma there was not a single person who would take command of the garrison.

At about 3 p.m. in one of the corridors of the Tauride Palace, the chairman of the Duma, Rodzianko, approached Kerensky and informed him of the following. The Menshevik deputy Skobelev had appealed to him, Rodzianko, with a request to provide premises for the creation of a Soviet of Workers’ Deputies for the purpose of maintaining order. Rodzianko asked Kerensky:
“What do you think, is this not dangerous?”
“What is dangerous about it?” replied Kerensky. “Someone has to lead the workers.”

Rodzianko agreed, all the more so since no one was working in Petrograd, and Russia was at war. This corridor decision was a turning point in the February Revolution. At that very moment the Duma itself handed control of the armed people over to a parallel structure of power. Meanwhile the army was to be the main stumbling block in all subsequent events.

The idea of a Soviet was not new. During the 1905 revolution the experiment of a Soviet in Petrograd had already been tried. Then it had been headed first by the semi-mythical Khrustalyov-Nosar, and then by the entirely real Trotsky.

On 27 February 1917 the Soviet was given Room No. 13, and the Social Democrat Chkheidze was elected chairman of its Executive Committee, with Kerensky as his deputy.

During the day on 27 February the Soviet consisted of Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks; the Bolsheviks ignored it. Closer to night, they changed their minds and joined the Executive Committee.

It is not surprising that in Petrograd the Bolsheviks were changing their position so quickly. The revolution was a complete surprise. Two weeks before it began, Lenin, speaking in Switzerland at a meeting of Swiss workers, had declared that a revolution in Russia would certainly happen – but that his generation would hardly live to see it.

On 28 February, at the Bolsheviks’ suggestion, it was decided to address all the units of the Petrograd garrison with instructions to send their deputies to the Soviet. As a result, in the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies the soldiers made up two-thirds. It was these soldiers who later opened the doors of the barracks and army units at the front to the Bolsheviks.

It must be said that the revolution was a complete surprise not only for Lenin but for everyone.

Vasily Vitalyevich Shulgin speaks with maximal frankness about the state of mind of the members of the Provisional Committee:
“Helpless, we did not even know what to begin with. How to make anyone obey us? Whom?

Against whom? And in the name of what? Who could enter the government? Who? In essence – no one. We broke spears over it, drove ourselves mad and drove the whole country mad with the myth of some brilliant men endowed with public confidence, men who in fact did not exist at all. Yes, Kerensky in the government is necessary. He is the most active. He is the only one they listen to. He is a talented actor. His talent is fed by the energy of the audience."

Kerensky's own impressions absolutely confirm this. The Semenovsky Guards Regiment arrives at the Duma and, in a state of extreme agitation, fills the Catherine Hall. Kerensky speaks before them. In his memoirs he writes:
"Having finally obtained the possibility to speak freely with free people, I felt a sense of intoxicating ecstasy."

On the second day of the revolution Kerensky put forward the slogan:
"The State Duma does not shed blood."

The Tauride Palace turned into the main Petrograd police station. Kerensky personally supervised it. He intended to save people. Even the former office of the Duma's chairman was completely packed with the arrested. Many came to the Duma for refuge. The Duma deputies sorted out these arrested, corrected their papers.
High-ranking officials were led in through the government pavilion. Former ministers came to the Duma of their own accord. The Minister of the Interior, Protopopov, came. The crowd was ready to tear him to pieces; Kerensky personally led him through the Duma. With his right hand stretched out in front of him Kerensky cut a path through the crowd, shouting: "Don't you dare touch this man!" With his left hand Kerensky pointed at "this man".

The former head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in a crumpled overcoat, ran behind Kerensky through the bayonets, while Kerensky himself, absolutely pale, kept shouting: "Don't you dare touch this man!" This professional actor's improvisation only ended when Kerensky slammed the door of the government pavilion behind him, collapsed into an armchair, and said to the former minister: "Sit down, Alexander Dmitrievich."

Protopopov and Kerensky were both from Simbirsk. Before the revolution, for that reason alone, they had maintained good relations despite everything. Lenin was also from Simbirsk. But for him concrete people, cities and countries had no meaning.

To his old friend Georgy Alexandrovich Solomon, Lenin would say:
"Russia will be the first state with a realised socialist system. And it's not about Russia – about her, my good sirs, I don't give a damn – she is only a stage through which we pass on the way to the world revolution."

Later, puzzled by Lenin's stance, his friend tried to find an explanation:
"I recall that Lenin long before his death suffered from progressive paralysis, and one involuntarily wonders whether this was not simply a manifestation of symptoms of his illness." It must be said that the former head of the Ministry of the Interior, Protopopov, suffered from the same disease as Lenin. But Protopopov's serious illness was spoken of openly, and therefore nobody was surprised at anything.

The former War Minister, Sukhomlinov, Kerensky simply wrested from the hands of the soldiers in the Duma, when they had already thrown him down and begun tearing off his epaulettes. Not giving up, the soldiers caught up with them and Sukhomlinov at the doors of the government pavilion.

Kerensky shoved Sukhomlinov through the door and delivered a perfectly theatrical line: “You will step over my corpse first.” The soldiers did not step over it. Stanislavsky could have said to the actor Kerensky, without a doubt: “I believe.”

The poet Marina Ivanovna Tsvetaeva was deeply impressed by Kerensky. In her cycle *The Swans’ Encampment* we read:

And someone, falling upon the map,
Sleeps not in sleep.
A breath of Bonaparte
Has passed through my land.

Marina Ivanovna Tsvetaeva, following the inexplicable tradition of the Russian artistic intelligentsia, had adored Napoleon since childhood. Evidently it is this feeling that explains her lines about Kerensky.

The Duma deputy Vasily Shulgin categorically disagreed with Marina Tsvetaeva:
“There was no Napoleon, Bismarck or Stolypin among us.” By the way, speaking of Tsvetaeva’s lines about who slept, how they slept, with whom they slept in those first days of the revolution: in those mad days the members of the Provisional Committee and the members of the Soviet Executive Committee still slept together, in one office in the Duma. In snatches, in armchairs. Shulgin, Chkheidze, Kerensky, Guchkov. While the leaders slept, the head of the Kadets, the famous historian Milyukov, carried on a many-hour argument with the socialists about whether it was possible for soldiers to elect officers. He said that nowhere in the world was this done and that the army would collapse.

Shulgin, a member of the Provisional Committee, wakes the head of the Soviet, Chkheidze, and asks:
“Do you really think elected officers are a good thing?”
Chkheidze whispers: “In general everything is lost. To save anything – we need a miracle. Perhaps elective officers will be that miracle.”

In the eighth hour of conversation Milyukov managed to persuade his socialist interlocutors that officers should not be killed.

On 29 February the servant of the former Finance Minister, Petr Bark, arrested his master and handed him over to the new authorities. It was revenge for the master’s earlier refusal to get his servant exempted from the army. Kerensky signed the warrant for Bark’s arrest, saying that one could not go against the expression of the people’s will. Two weeks later Bark was released.

By the morning of 1 March the new government had still not been formed. At that moment the Petrograd Soviet of Workers’ Deputies issued its famous Order No. 1, which was pasted up all over the city. The essence of Order No. 1 was as follows:

Power in the army passes to soldiers’ committees. Soldiers henceforth elect their commanders. They also remove them. The order forbids issuing weapons to officers; weapons are to be kept by the committees.

The trick was that the original text of the order was written exclusively for the Petrograd garrison, but in fact it was circulated at all the fronts.

One of the most authoritative Russian commanders, General Denikin, describes the mood in the army in his memoirs:
“Junior officers did not understand what was happening. At the top, in the ranks of the General Staff, a new type of opportunist began to appear, a slight demagogue, playing on the weak strings of the Soviet and the new ruling worker-soldier class. They tried to ingratiate themselves with the instincts of the crowd, tried to make themselves useful to it and open up possibilities for a new career.”

That same 1 March, at 11 o’clock, Grand Duke Kirill Vladimirovich appeared at the Staff of the naval guard entrusted to him and declared his support for the revolution. At 4:15 p.m. he arrived at the Tauride Palace with an escort and announced that the naval guard was at the full disposal of the State Duma.

Instead of aide-de-camp aiguillettes, the Grand Duke wore a red bow on his chest.

In these days he began his interviews with the words: “My yardman and I see equally well that with the old government Russia will lose everything.” Above his palace he raised the red flag.

Grand Duke Kirill Vladimirovich was third in line to the Russian throne, after the heir Alexei and Nicholas’s brother, Mikhail Alexandrovich.

On 28 March the ex-premier Vladimir Nikolaevich Kokovtsov, with his wife and a little dog named Jeepik, decided to take a walk along Mokhovaya Street toward Sergievskaya Street. Shots rang out ahead. They ran back along Mokhovaya. The frightened dog darted into the nearest gateway; they stopped, and at that moment from the doorway of the Main Artillery Directorate came the member of the Provisional Committee Guchkov, accompanied by a young man who turned out to be Tereshchenko, the future Minister of Finance and Foreign Affairs in various compositions of the Provisional Government.

Guchkov reported that the State Duma was at that very moment forming a government.

Amid endless conversations, constant tugging at his sleeve and trips to the regiments, the Kadet leader Pavel Nikolaevich Milyukov, somewhere on a corner of a desk in the overcrowded Duma, was writing a list of ministers – and it is hardly likely that this list was the result of long reflection. None of the men who entered the first Provisional Government wanted supreme power in the country for himself. But the imperial government had scattered – you could not find it with dogs. Power simply fell on them, together with a collapsing army, in a country of vast size that was at war.

These men were, in fact, the best that Russian politics had. Intelligent, educated, not tied up in intrigue around the throne. They loved Russia, but they had one flaw: power was not their passion, not the sole aim of their lives. One of the fathers of the October coup, Lev Trotsky, said of these men that they looked at the revolution through the eyes of a bourgeois frightened for the fate of culture. Lenin called such people “blockheads”. And in that sense they really were no match for Lenin.

There were eleven of them in the new government: ten liberals and moderate conservatives and one socialist – Kerensky.

The chairman of the government was Prince Lvov, of the Rurikid line, an opponent of absolute monarchy, a liberal, in outlook a non-party fighter for the civil rights of peasants. He firmly

believed in the victory of democracy in Russia and repeated: “Do not lose your composure; keep your faith in the freedom of Russia!”

In this government Kerensky received the post of Minister of Justice. That same evening he signed his first orders.

All prosecutors were instructed to release all political prisoners and to convey to them congratulations on behalf of the new revolutionary government. Then a telegram was sent to Siberia ordering the immediate release from exile of the 73-year-old “grandmother of the Russian revolution,” Yekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaya, and that she be escorted with honours to Petrograd.

Another telegram ordered the release of five Social Democratic Duma deputies who had been in exile since 1915. That very day a declaration of the tasks of the Provisional Government was written. It stated: full amnesty, criminal and political, including cases of terrorist attempts; freedom of speech, press, assembly and strike; abolition of estate, national and religious restrictions; preparation for a Constituent Assembly to determine the form of government in the country. In fact, when the words about the Constituent Assembly were being written into the declaration, nothing was yet known in Petrograd about the abdication of the emperor. Moreover, despite the declaration, Pavel Nikolaevich Milyukov spoke at a rally and announced that the under-age heir would rule and that the regent would be Nicholas’s brother, Grand Duke Mikhail Alexandrovich.

In response to this speech, the Executive Committee of the Soviet urgently convened and demanded an answer from Kerensky. Kerensky stated:
“There will be no regency. In the last resort I shall propose to the government a choice: either abandon the regency or accept my resignation.”

Kerensky’s words might have seemed presumptuous, were it not for one circumstance. In those days only armed men had real value. The Provisional Government did not have a single military unit under its command. And Kerensky still had one foot in the Petrograd Soviet, which from the outset began working with the troops of the Petrograd garrison. This garrison was special. It was formed mainly of those who were dodging the front. It had been created precisely so that revolutionary propaganda could be conducted among them. The idea meant nothing to them; anything was acceptable so long as they were not sent to the front. Already in 1915 complaints had been made about a division recruited in Petrograd. It was called “the St. Petersburg Racing Society.” Wherever it was sent into battle, it always ran.

The question of the regency resolved itself. On 3 March Guchkov and Shulgin returned from Pskov, where the emperor was. They brought the document of abdication. Nicholas had abdicated not in favour of his son, but in favour of his brother, Grand Duke Mikhail Alexandrovich. From the station Guchkov and Shulgin drove to Millionnaya Street to meet the Grand Duke. In the room to Mikhail Alexandrovich’s right were Rodzianko and Milyukov. Milyukov had not slept for five days; he would start, open his eyes, and doze off again. To the left of the Grand Duke were Lvov and Kerensky. Kerensky thought that at any moment people might burst in and kill the Grand Duke.

Milyukov woke up and delivered a speech, the gist of which was that the monarch was the only centre, the only concept of power in Russia.

Then Kerensky addressed the Grand Duke:
“Allow me to speak to you as a Russian to a Russian. By accepting the throne you will not save Russia. A civil war will begin. In any case I cannot vouch for your life.”

The Grand Duke rose and said that he wanted to think for half an hour. Then he returned and declared that he could not accept the throne. He abdicated on behalf of the entire 300-year-old dynasty.

Kerensky rushed to him:
“I shall affirm before everyone – yes, before everyone – that I deeply respect Grand Duke Mikhail Alexandrovich!”

Back in 1905, after the events in Petersburg, Kerensky had maintained links with the terrorist wing of the Socialist-Revolutionaries and had even proposed that they kill Nicholas II. The outstanding police agent and at the same time leader of the SR fighting organization, Evno Azev, rejected his plan. As a member of the bar Kerensky joined the committee for providing aid to the victims of Bloody Sunday, 9 January. He was arrested for ties with SR fighters, imprisoned in the Kresty prison, and exiled to Tashkent – but not for long. He returned.

As a lawyer he took part in the major political trials – over the Lena shootings of 1912, in the Beilis case of 1911–1913, and in the case of the Bolshevik Duma faction in 1915. In 1912 he was elected to the Duma and admitted to a Masonic lodge. From 1916 he was a member of the Supreme Council of Russian Freemasons. Membership in a Masonic lodge for Russian politicians, starting from the times of Catherine the Great, was normal. And not only for politicians – Pushkin was also a Mason.

On the evening of 3 March, during a meeting of the government, one of the members of the Petrograd Soviet called Kerensky out and informed him that the Soviet intended to arrest the former tsar and his family. The idea came from Bolshevik deputies. Kerensky’s reaction was unequivocal – to do everything in his power to prevent a slide into terror. On 4 March Nicholas sent a message to Prince Lvov, head of the Provisional Government. The message had no salutation and contained the following requests of the former tsar:

First – to allow him to be reunited with his family in Tsarskoye Selo.
Second – to guarantee his family’s safety.
Third – to provide for the passage of the imperial family to Murmansk for departure to England.

The fourth request was quite unrealistic. Nicholas asked for permission, after the war, to return to Russia and settle in the Crimea, in Livadia. Moreover, Nicholas wanted to see his mother, Maria Fyodorovna. She was in Kiev and herself went to him at Headquarters. She arrived at the Kiev station accompanied by an escort of Cossacks. On the imperial platform, the governor of Kiev saw her off. When she returned two days later, no one met her, the entrance to the imperial platform was heaped up, and there were no Cossacks to be seen. No carriage had been ordered. Maria Fyodorovna went home in a cab.

In Kiev the dowager empress Maria Fyodorovna and her daughter Olga continued their work in hospitals and infirmaries.

On 7 March Kerensky, speaking before workers in the Moscow Soviet, declared:
“Right now Nicholas II is in my hands. And I will tell you, comrades, that up to now the Russian revolution has proceeded without blood, and I will not allow you to darken it. In the nearest future I

myself will take Nicholas II to Murmansk, from where he will depart for England." Moreover, the government decided to ask Great Britain to grant Nicholas asylum.

The Petrograd Soviet regarded this as an excellent pretext to wrest power from the government.

The Soviet's Executive Committee immediately issued a declaration in the tone of a government order: troops were to seize all key stations along the tsar's route, telegraph orders to all cities to arrest the former tsar, arrest him and take him to the Trubetskoy bastion of the Peter and Paul Fortress.

On 9 March at 11:30 Nicholas, accompanied by Duma deputies, was brought to Tsarskoye Selo, to the Alexander Palace. In the evening of that same day representatives of the Petrograd Soviet and military units in armoured cars arrived in Tsarskoye Selo. They intended to take Nicholas either to the Soviet or to the Peter and Paul Fortress. The local military unit in Tsarskoye Selo did not surrender Nicholas.

Kerensky met the imperial family for the first time in April. He was the first to extend his hand to Nicholas, introduce himself – "Kerensky" – and say that they could fully rely on him. Nicholas remained a mystery to Kerensky. Only his disarming charm was obvious. The empress left a completely definite impression:
"From the first glance I understood that Alexandra Fyodorovna, an intelligent and attractive woman, though now broken and irritated, possessed an iron will. A born empress, fully conscious of her right to rule."

The British royal family and the Romanovs were related dynasties. George V and Nicholas II were as alike as identical twins. Everyone confused them. They loved to amuse themselves: they would swap clothes and fool their families.

In March Great Britain agreed to receive the imperial family. However, departure was postponed because the children had chickenpox.

Meanwhile the situation in London changed. In left-wing circles of the House of Commons and in the press an outcry arose over the former Russian emperor's imminent arrival. His Majesty King George V, Nicholas's cousin, withdrew his invitation.

The British ambassador, Sir Buchanan, wept as he informed Kerensky of his king's decision. Kerensky passed the news on to Nicholas. Nicholas remained imperturbable. Staying longer in Tsarskoye Selo was becoming unsafe. Nicholas expressed the desire to go to the Crimea. The chances of a successful transfer to the Crimea could not be guaranteed. Kerensky suggested Tobolsk, advised them to take as much warm clothing as possible, and tried to cheer Nicholas up. Nicholas replied: "I am in no way troubled. We trust you."

Nine months after the fall of the Provisional Government the imperial family would be killed in its entirety, including the children. Here is a conversation between Lev Trotsky and another Bolshevik leader, Yakov Sverdlov. Trotsky asks Sverdlov, in passing:

"So, where is the tsar?"
"He's finished with. He has been shot."
"And the family?"
"The family with him."
"All of them?"

“All of them. Well, what of it?”
“And who made that decision?”
“Ilyich.”

Already in the first two days of the revolution, the capital had changed beyond recognition. The city’s public services immediately ceased to function. Transport worked abominably. True, the restaurants and cafés were crowded, where liquor, banned at the beginning of the war, was being served in mineral-water bottles and teapots. Soldiers at once began to speculate in loot. Rubbish was not removed from the streets; everything was covered in sunflower-seed husks, which gave Petersburg the look of a deep provincial backwater. Everywhere, day and night, shouts of “hurrah” thundered. Against this background of “hurrah” sounded the strains of “La Marseillaise”. But melodically this “Marseillaise” was not the French one. It was melancholy, full of sorrow, immediately stylized as a Russian song. The French ambassador, Maurice Paléologue, saw from the embassy window how, to the sound of this “Marseillaise”, the troops of the Tsarskoye Selo garrison were marching to the Tauride Palace. At their head rode the flower of the Cossacks, the elite of the imperial guard. Then came His Majesty’s Regiment, the most select, specially created to guard the august personages. Then the Emperor’s Railway Regiment. Bringing up the rear was the imperial police, assigned to the internal security of the tsar’s residences and, in fact, involved in the personal life of the imperial family. All the officers and soldiers swore allegiance to the new power, the name of which they did not even know.

The question which still gives no peace – what would have happened if the Provisional Government had made a separate peace with Germany and twelve million soldiers had been released from the fronts – is a subjunctive one and has no answer. The fact is that the Provisional Government did not leave the war. A new attitude to the war was formulated; the war was declared, in essence, defensive and no longer pursued aims of conquest or domination over other peoples. In reality a civilized and responsible government could not behave otherwise. Russia does not abandon her allies. Besides, the victory of the Allies was inevitable, especially given that the United States had decided to enter the war.

Renunciation of her obligations on the eve of the Allies’ victory would have meant for Russia political and economic isolation, as well as the loss of vast territories. Strictly speaking, the Provisional Government was thinking about Russia’s future and not about whether it would be able to hold onto power.

Exactly a year later, when signing the Brest-Litovsk treaty with Germany and agreeing to colossal territorial losses for Russia, Lenin would think only of retaining power. And he would retain it.

In the first weeks after the fall of the monarchy both the Duma and the Petrograd Soviet sent their deputies to the front to explain the situation in the country to the soldiers. Soon the representatives of the Petrograd Soviet pushed the Duma emissaries out of the front. Kerensky, in his memoirs, soberly assesses this situation: “This is the price for the Duma’s refusal to lead the nationwide movement on the first day of the revolution.” But Kerensky does not recall how easily he himself had said: “The Soviet is nothing terrible, someone has to deal with the workers.” Now the Soviet, speaking on behalf of the workers, was gaining strength in the army. Mandates to travel to the front were handed out freely. Bolsheviks took these mandates in huge numbers. At the front they called for just one thing – throw down your weapons.

Along with the Russian soldiers, Germany also responded to this call – and responded in an organized way. On the basis of information about the state of the Russian army after the revolution began, and on instructions from his superiors, the commander of the Eastern Front, Bavarian Prince Leopold, suddenly ceased hostilities against the Russians.

Complete silence settled over the German positions. Then leaflets signed by the prince rained down on the Russian side.

Prince Leopold called for fraternization with the German soldiers. On command the German soldiers climbed out of their trenches and crawled toward the Russians. Then German officers, with white flags, walked over to the Russian side with proposals for an armistice.

Russian peasant lads, who had only just put on uniforms, trusted the Germans absolutely. In the 1930s, in Paris, a former German lieutenant, Wollenberg, told Kerensky in detail how specially trained groups of officers and soldiers had been assigned the mission of bringing about the collapse of the Russian front.

It must be said that many soldiers at the front learned of the revolution in Petrograd precisely from German propaganda materials. This information became an unprecedented temptation for a soldier at the front line. Why should I die here when a new life is beginning at home? And the Germans are telling us we must throw down our weapons, and the Bolsheviks are coming to the front and explaining things simply and clearly: “We are calling on you not to die for others, but to destroy others – to destroy your class enemies on the internal front!” There were already rumours – true rumours – that in the Russian provinces manor houses were being burned and looted everywhere.

During a visit to the Southwestern Front, Kerensky spoke with soldiers. One frail lad shouted out: “You keep persuading us that we must fight the Germans so that the peasants will get land! But if I’m killed, I won’t get any land, will I?” In response Kerensky turned to the officer: “Send that lad home at once. Let everyone in his village know that the Russian army has no need of cowards.”

According to the testimony of an English nurse, Miss Farmborough, after Kerensky’s address to the troops, the soldiers carried him on their shoulders to his car, kissed him, his car, and the ground he walked on. Some prayed, some wept, others sang patriotic songs. But this was as fleeting as the patriotic upsurge of August 1914, when they prayed to the emperor, who had announced Russia’s entry into the war, and sang “God Save the Tsar.”

Desertion in the army grew inexorably. Efforts to counter German propaganda had no success. Fraternization with the Germans became widespread.

At the same time the German ambassador in Copenhagen, Count Brockdorff-Rantzau, recommended that the German government promote the widest possible chaos in Russia. The means to achieve this chaos would be the strengthening of radical political parties. Count Brockdorff-Rantzau had an intermediary in this matter – such a vivid character as Alexander Helphand.

His party name was Parvus. It was Parvus who first put forward the idea of permanent revolution. Later Trotsky would develop it. At the same time Parvus was a talented financier. He actively handled money matters with Gorky on behalf of the Bolsheviks. And Parvus was also an employee of the German Foreign Ministry. It was this same Parvus who explained to the German generals who Lenin was, how he could be useful to Germany, and why he should be helped.

For historical fairness it must be said that Lenin had his own aims. This man had an idée fixe – to turn the imperialist world war into a “civil war between classes,” that is, into a gigantic fratricidal meat-grinder that would produce the mince for Lenin’s signature cutlet called “world revolution.” That was to be the first course in the famous Soviet cookbook. Also in fairness it must be said that in his theoretical kitchen Lenin did not value Russia at a penny, with its enormous peasant population, but preferred the West European states with their powerful proletariat. At the same time, Lenin believed that Russia’s defeat in the war would not spoil things, since it would accelerate the coming of the world revolution. And since only Germany could defeat Russia, it followed that the duty of every true revolutionary was to help Germany in defeating Russia.

Immediately a telegram went out from the German Foreign Ministry. His Imperial Majesty had that morning decided that the Russian revolutionaries were to be transported across Germany and supplied with material for propaganda so that they could start work in Russia. The main “material for propaganda” was the two million marks already allocated.

As early as 15 August 1915 the German ambassador in Copenhagen, Count Brockdorff-Rantzau, had reported to Berlin that he and Parvus had drawn up a plan to organize a revolution in Russia. The ambassador testified that Parvus was a brilliant man. Kerensky, for his part, writes in his memoirs that Parvus possessed greater political foresight than the fathers of the Great October Revolution. These words of Kerensky’s could be taken as a petty insult to Lenin and Trotsky, but they are not, because Parvus really was a first-class strategist, who at a certain stage surpassed Lenin in subversive activity against Russia.

Lenin maintained contact with Parvus through his old friend Ganetsky, although Parvus had asked for Nikolai Bukharin’s help – Bukharin, who would later become Lenin’s favourite. In addition, Parvus engaged in successful business with Russia. The income went to the party. Courier functions were assigned to Uritsky, the future head of the Petrograd Cheka. Parvus’s business partners were Krasin and Borovsky, the future People’s Commissars of Trade and Foreign Affairs. Lenin only had to monitor this financial activity. But money was not everything.

Lenin’s mother-in-law, Yelizaveta Vasilyevna, who ran the household, had died. Krupskaya did not know how to manage a household. She had a maid, but Krupskaya could not supervise her. The house and clothes quickly fell into a slovenly state.

And then the revolution broke out in Russia.

In March 1917 Parvus travelled from Denmark to Berlin to see the Imperial Chancellor with a proposal to transport émigré revolutionaries from Switzerland to Russia. Kaiser Wilhelm personally gave his approval for sending the radicals.

Lenin laid down a condition: let numerous Mensheviks, who did not preach the idea of Russia’s defeat in the war, travel with him. In the company of the Mensheviks, the Bolsheviks would not look like German agents. Besides, Lenin demanded that the carriage in which he travelled have extraterritorial status. Germany agreed and, into the bargain, allocated substantial credits for revolutionary propaganda. Lenin arrived in Petrograd…