

Russian Revolutions

Long-term causes for 1905 Revolution:

- **Nationalities:** The population of Russia was made up of many different nationalities. Only 40% of the Tsar's subjects spoke Russian as their first language. The minority groups such as the Poles, Finns and Jews wanted freedom from Russian rule. Jews even suffered severe racial prejudice.
- **Peasants and the countryside:** discontent regarding peasants' land holdings, in fact, the dramatic increase in population resulted in 20% decline in the average share. In 1901, there was serious crop failure, and in early 1905, 3000 peasant disturbances had required military responses. The Social Revolutionaries were a radical movement. Their aim was to carve up the huge estates of the nobility and hand them over to peasants. They believed in a violent struggle and were responsible for the assassination of two government officials and a large number of Okhrana agents.
- **Aristocracy:** Made up 1.5 percent of society and owned 25% of land. Key part of Tsar's government, often acting as local officials. In the countryside they dominated the zemstva. Most were loyal to Tsar and wanted to keep Russian society as it was. Some were in financial trouble and had to sell their lands. Greatest fear was that the peasants would rise up and take their land.
- **New industries, cities, and the working class:** Sergei Witte, senior minister, introduced policies that led to rapid industrial growth (increase in produce), but living conditions did not improve. Workers wanted the right to establish trade unions demanding a six-day week, higher wages and improvement in living and working conditions. There had been previously no government regulations on child labor, hours, safety or education. In 1898, the Social Democratic Workers Party was founded. And by 1903, 138'000 workers participated in 550 work stoppages. Just a year later, 10'000 supporters made the Party the largest anti-monarchist group in Russia. In 1903, the party split between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks.
- **Middle classes:** new capitalist class came with industrialization. They were concerned with managing the economy and controlling workforce. Clashes between workers and capitalists had a role in the upcoming revolution. Many middle-class people wanted greater democracy in Russia (Cadets).

Short-term causes for 1905 Revolution:

- **Russo-Japanese War:** fought from January 1904 to August 1905, is considered to have brought about the Russian Revolution after the country suffered numerous defeats, losing in total eight battleships, smaller vessels, and more than 5'000 men while the Japanese only lost three torpedo boats and 116 men. The war was overall a humiliation for the Russian fleet (only three of their boats managed to escape) and had a crippling effect on Russia's economy, since the majority of the country's finances were focused on sustaining warfare. This created social unrest and demoralization, adding to the Russians' growing anger at the failed policies of Tsar Nicholas II.
- **Bloody Sunday:** Sunday, January 22nd 1905, 200'000 protestors, led by Father Gapon, marched on the Winter Palace to give a petition to the Tsar. Cossacks started firing.

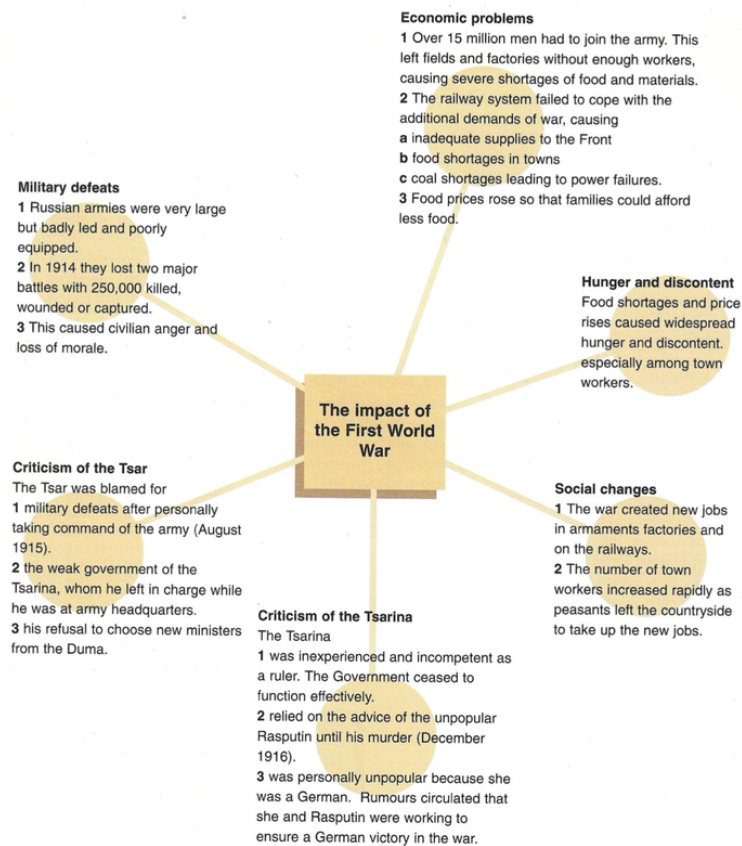
How did the Tsar survive the 1905 Revolution?

- **Short-term economic improvement:** In his October Manifesto, the Tsar offered people a Duma (elected parliament), right to free speech and the right to form political parties. In November, he offered further concessions and financial help to the peasants. This divided his opponents:
- **Division within the opposition:** The middle-class liberals were delighted, but the revolutionary groups were suspicious. In the end, they were proved right in not trusting the Tsar.
- **Loyalty of the army:** While his opponents debated what to do next, the Tsar made peace with Japan and brought back his best troops to crush the revolt. Rebellions in the countryside were ruthlessly put down. By March 1906, the revolution had been completely crushed. In May, he underlined his victory by introducing the Fundamental Laws, agreeing to the existence of the Duma but putting so many limitations on its powers that it could do nothing.

How did WWI weaken the Tsar's government?

- **Army:** The Russian Army suffered extreme casualties in WW1: out of the 13 million soldiers mobilized, 2.5M died. Conditions were abominable, and the shortages in everything from weaponry to bandages made it hard to keep up the fight and care for the wounded. In September of 1915, the Tsar took personal command over the armed forces, though this did not make a difference since, as we have seen, he was incompetent for the job. In fact, it only made him more unpopular: he was now held personally responsible for the defeats against Germany. The massive rate of casualties continued into 1916, and by 1917, most of the soldiers had turned against the monarch who had led them to the army to its death. Even previously, the army were more motivated to defend their country from invasion rather than loyalty to the Tsar, so a shift to the revolutionary side wasn't as difficult as it might seem.
- **Peasants, workers, ethnic minorities:** The extreme casualty rate took a toll on widows and orphans needing state war pensions which they did not always receive. One source report that 13% of a village's population was killed by the war, and this strain alienated the peasants and workers that were once in favor of the Tsar. Food shortages threatened the population in 1917, and the Russian government even contemplated taking food by force before deciding it might provoke a nation-wide revolt. Prices went up, and workers' average pay in 1917 could only afford one sixth of what it used to in 1914. Overcrowding worsened in the factories with the extra 3.5 million jobs created by war contracts, and the railways could not cope with the demands of the cities despite there actually being enough food and fuel for everyone. This further increased the Tsar's unpopularity, causing many workers to turn on their ruler.
- **Middle class:** Although the middle classes got on better than the peasants and workers, they were deeply unhappy with the Tsar's rule by the end of 1916. To help the soldiers on the front, they set up their own medical organizations that often proved to be more effective than government-led ones, and sent provisions and food to the Russian troops. Many industrialists in 1916 did not have enough raw materials to fulfill war contracts, and when, in 1915, Duma politicians put forward a government more capable of uniting the people, the Tsar dismissed them soon after.
- **Aristocracy:** By the end of 1916, the situation had worsened to the point that the Council of the United Nobility asked for the Tsar to abdicate. Aristocrats were threatened by the war because the many losses of junior officers endangered the future of the aristocratic class. The conscription of peasants also meant that there was a shortage of workers at these people's estates. In addition to all of this, many were discontent with the amount of influence Rasputin had over the Tsar. When the latter left and his wife was in control, rumors began to spread because she was German and having a potential affair with Rasputin. This

spiraled so far out of control that he was murdered by a group of aristocrats in December of 1916.



Marxist theory: Marxist theory said that capitalism was inevitably going to collapse because of the ever-increasing need for the bourgeoisie to exploit their workers better than rival business owners. This would create what he called "inherent contradictions", which meant that after a certain point, the proletariat would gain sufficient consciousness of their exploitation to revolt and give rise to a community free of class. The alienation of both classes would help bring this about: on the workers' side, because their produce is taken from them and used by the bourgeoisie for profit, and on the bourgeoisie's side, because they are exploiting and oppressing fellow human beings. This divide between the classes and the fact that a capitalist market demands increasingly effective exploitation to be successful will add workers to the proletariat until they are sufficient in number to revolt.

Why was a socialist revolution unlikely to occur?

A socialist revolution was unlikely to occur for the three following reasons: **a weak capitalist society, small working class, and a poorly educated workforce**. From a Marxist point of view, a socialist revolution was unlikely to take place because it had to rely on a prominent proletariat (workforce). 80% of the population were poor peasants working on aristocrats' estates. This left only a minority to be employed in industry. What industry there was in Russia was concentrated in main cities-Moscow and Petrograd- where workers were housed and employed in masses. Moreover, the Tsar's suffocating police force prevented them from organizing themselves or forming any sort of trade unions. The latter was in fact illegalized before 1905. Also, Marxist theory would have that the proletariat be sufficiently educated to be aware of their own exploitation—in Russia, they were not.

Lenin's changes to Marxism:

A) Immediate Revolution: Lenin decreed it was unnecessary to wait for the development of capitalism to begin the process of revolution. Instead, the First World War had shown that capitalism was "morally bankrupt" and that revolution was what was needed. This went against the other party, the Mensheviks, who thought the collapse of capitalism and the improvement of the workers' conditions were essential to begin a revolution similar to that of 1789. But Lenin argued that there was no point in using democratic processes if the Tsar hadn't either.

B) Role of Peasantry: Although Marxist ideas primarily revolve around the proletariat being the motor of revolution, Russia's population was mainly constituted of peasants whose political stance had been long debated. This posed a problem, since industrial workers, as I said above, were unable to organize and were uneducated. Lenin therefore turned over the idea of a peasant revolution, or a revolution combining peasants and workers, for there was still one thing that would unite them: poor working conditions. In 1917, Lenin's writings and propaganda were slowly being aimed at the peasantry, including them in the term "proletariat".

C) The Party as Vanguard: To overcome the workforce's limitations (lack of organization and education), Lenin thought the only way forward would be by appointing a small intellectual group of revolutionaries to make decisions on the proletariat's behalf (and organize revolution). This contrasted with Marxists' views that the revolution would have to come from the proletariat itself, and therefore believed that such a revolution would be unsuccessful. In 1903, this difference in tactics would lead to a split in the revolutionaries: the once unified Bolsheviks split into the Mensheviks (Marxists) and Bolsheviks (Lenin-Marxists)

D) Weakest Link: Marx had seen capitalism as a way to seize foreign territories and exploit their resources. Lenin added to this that it was a way to buy off the workers by improving working conditions. Therefore, revolution would actually be more likely in countries who had been the least successful colonizing i.e. Russia.

E) Dictatorship: In order to face counter-attacks from the bourgeoisie, Lenin thought that a dictatorship of the proletariat would be obligatory. He was willing to use violence to achieve his ends, which set him apart from other Marxists. Lenin also thought that this absolute seizure of power would pave the way to a communist society, in which everyone was equal in rights and land.

In his "April Thesis", Lenin called for an immediate revolution on behalf of the proletariat. He believed the Bolsheviks should have nothing to do with the Provisional Government and its efforts to modernize Russia, and that only an immediate uprising would work to bring about fundamental political and social change. In this thesis there was an appeal to the industrial workers and peasants promising "peace, land and bread" in exchange for support of the revolutionaries. Lenin's talent at propaganda and making slogans were key to getting the masses' support.

Comparing 1905 to 1917:

Similarities: Defeat in war; liberal political aspirations conjoined with proletariat

Differences: war ended quickly in 1905 but continued in 1917; Tsar made concessions in 1905 but could not in 1917 because of war; retained support of the army in 1905 and the ruling classes in 1905 but did not in 1917. Then army was not loyal, and the ruling classes were prepared to sacrifice the Tsar. In doing so they hoped to buy off the revolutionaries.

They feared revolution so much that they were prepared to make this ultimate concession. It wasn't so much the fact of a revolutionary situation that led to the downfall of the Tsar; rather it was the expectation that revolution was inevitable. But this was ultimately the fault of the Tsar himself failing to make concessions to the Duma, allowing the Tsarina (Rasputin) to govern...etc. 'What the

generals and politicians had done was unleash the revolution they had sought to prevent...The people knew what they wanted; the elite did not know how to hold on to what it had. Once the Tsar was removed, the state was decapitated, authority collapsed, the whole structure of society began to unravel, and a climate of disobedience developed. It was allowed to develop by paralysis at the top. The problem was that there was really no one at the top at all, there was a vacuum: no one was prepared to take the responsibility and use force to restore law and order.'

Why did the Provisional Government fail?

- **Failings of the provisional government:** The Provisional Government failed mainly because they refused to end the country's involvement in WWI. After Tsar Nicholas's abdication in 1917, the Provisional Government was formed out of a coalition of various Duma parties. It was intended to hold power until the Constituent Assembly could be called to draw up a constitution. But the new government saw its primary task as continuing the war. This caused them to overlook economic and social conflicts, and perhaps most importantly, the Soviets' rise to power. This system of Dual Power was ambiguous in the way that the Provisional Government did not know the extent of their authority. In October, it would turn out that the Soviets were more popular.
- **People's revolutions:** All three classes were restless for change: the peasants believed the land should be owned by those working it; their patience was tested every day. The proletariat had seen remarkable improvement since the February Revolution, but they became increasingly radicalized because of rising prices and food shortages. Their uprisings were mainly defensive and done with economic purpose. The soldiers were in the same situation as the other two and had lost trust due to the Kornilov Affair. They tended therefore to disobey orders. The insistence the Provisional Government put on continuing the war only made the situation worse for all.
- **Bolsheviks:** By October 1917, the Bolsheviks had 300'000 members and would play a crucial role in leading the proletariat. The Provisional Government had failed to conform to the people's increasingly radical demands, and in August, after the Kornilov Affair, many turned to the Bolsheviks for leadership. In the July Days, Bolshevik-led protests against the war turned into a rebellion. The Mensheviks grew more unpopular because they were reluctant to form a Soviet government, and in October, the Bolsheviks seized power.
- **Lenin:** Lenin was known to be a ruthless politician with a large sphere of influence. His slogans "Peace, land and bread" penetrated the masses and his ability to convince the Bolshevik Central Committee that revolution was imminent would be crucial in October. As I outlined in lesson five, the changes he made to so-called more "traditional" Marxism applied directly to Russia's state in 1917.

Timeline of 1917

Date	Event
February 23rd	International Women's Day: strikes and demonstrations in Petrograd, growing over the next few days.
February 26th	50 demonstrators killed in Znamenskaya Square Tsar Nicholas II prorogues the State Duma and orders commander of Petrograd military district to suppress disorders with force.
February 27th	Troops refuse to fire on demonstrators, deserters. Prisons, courts, and police attacked and looted by angry crowds. Okhrana buildings set on fire. Garrison joins revolutionaries.
from	Petrograd Soviet formed. Formation of Provisional Committee of the Duma by liberals
March 1st	Constitutional Democratic Party (Kadets).
March 2nd	Order No.1 of the Petrograd Soviet.
April 3rd	Nicholas II abdicates. Provisional Government formed under Prime Minister Prince Lvov.
April 20th–21st	Return of Lenin to Russia. He publishes his April Theses .
	"April Days": mass demonstrations by workers, soldiers, and others in the streets of Petrograd and Moscow triggered by the publication of the Foreign Minister Miliukov's note to the allies, which was interpreted as affirming commitment to the war policies of the old government.
	First Provisional Government falls.
May 5 th	First Coalition Government forms when socialists, representatives of the Soviet leadership, agree to enter the cabinet of the Provisional Government. Kerensky, the only socialist already in the government, made minister of war and navy.
June 3rd	First All-Russian Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies opens in Petrograd. Closed on 24th. Elects Central Executive Committee of Soviets (VTsIK), headed by Mensheviks and SRs.
June 10th	Planned Bolshevik demonstration in Petrograd banned by the Soviet.
June 16th	Kerensky orders offensive against Austro-Hungarian forces. Initial success only.
June 18th	Official Soviet demonstration in Petrograd for unity is unexpectedly dominated by Bolshevik slogans: "Down with the Ten Capitalist Ministers", "All Power to the Soviets".
July 2nd	Russian offensive ends. Trotsky joins Bolsheviks.
July 3rd–4th	The "July Days"; mass armed demonstrations in Petrograd, encouraged by the Bolsheviks, demanding "All Power to the Soviets".
	July 6th German and Austro-Hungarian counter-attack. Russians retreat in panic, sacking the town of Tarnopol. Arrest of Bolshevik leaders ordered.
July 7th	Lvov resigns and asks Kerensky to become Prime Minister and form a new government. Established July 25th.
July 22nd	Trotsky and Lunacharskii arrested.
August 26th	Second coalition government ends.
August 26th–30th	"Kornilov mutiny". Begins when the commander-in-chief of the Russian army, General Lavr Kornilov, demands (or is believed by Kerensky to demand) that the government give him all civil and military authority and moves troops against Petrograd.
August 31st	Majority of deputies of the Petrograd Soviet approve a Bolshevik resolution for an all-socialist government excluding the bourgeoisie.
September 1st	Russia declared a republic
September 4th	Trotsky and others freed.
September 5th	Bolshevik resolution on the government wins majority vote in Moscow Soviet.
September 19th	Moscow Soviet elects executive committee and new presidium, with Bolshevik majorities, and the Bolshevik Viktor Nogin as chairman.
September 25th	Third coalition government formed. Bolshevik majority in Petrograd Soviet elects Bolshevik Presidium and Trotsky as chairman.
October 10th	Bolshevik Central Committee meeting approves armed uprising.
October 11th	Congress of Soviets of the Northern Region, until October 13th.
October 20th	First meeting of the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet.
October 25th	October Revolution is launched as MRC directs armed workers and soldiers to capture key buildings in Petrograd. Winter Palace attacked at 9:40pm and captured at 2am. Kerensky flees Petrograd. Opening of the 2nd All-Russian Congress of Soviets.
October 26th	Second Congress of Soviets: Mensheviks and right SR delegates walk out in protest against the previous day's events. Congress approves transfer of state authority into its own hands and local power into the hands of local soviets of workers', soldiers', and peasants' deputies, abolishes capital punishment, issues Decree on Peace and Decree on Land , and approves the formation of an all-Bolshevik government, the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom), with Lenin as chairman.

How did the Bolsheviks consolidate their power?

- **Coercion:** When the Bolshevik Party lost the Constituent Assembly elections in 1917, coercive force, the CHEKA (the first communist police force) would be key for the Bolshevik consolidate of power. A period known as the "Red Terror" would see a massive influx of political crimes and execution of counterrevolutionaries. They murdered and imprisoned advocates for democracy, and constitutions, and freedom of political expression by the tens and eventually the hundreds of thousands. The Bolsheviks wanted to promote and control the rise of Communist parties elsewhere, so they established the Communist International or Comintern in 1919.
- **Persuasion:** The Bolsheviks would use means of propaganda (informal social control) to generate support for the party. Agitprop, the department responsible for the diffusion of communist propaganda, would try to persuade people by explaining to them the motives of the Bolshevik Party. All newspapers were banned except for the Pravda newspaper which helped diffuse their message as well. Trains going deep into the country would disperse pamphlets and bring teachers and lecturers into villages to wow them with technology they had never seen before. Literacy centers were created in order to teach peasants how to read and understand the Bolshevik propaganda. The Party banned religious worship and teaching in schools, taking control over what should and should not be taught to the younger generation. For example, they advocated careers in the sciences and condemned those in humanities which were regarded as "useless". However, certain freedoms were introduced which helped them maintain power: abortion on demand, liberty in marriage, and more land for the peasants.
- **Consent:** Many Bolshevik policies were very popular with large sectors of Russian society. Although punitive, the treaty of Brest-Litovsk in January 1918 brought the long-promised peace so important to the soldiers who had backed the Bolsheviks. One of Lenin's earliest decrees in November 1917 redistributed the church and aristocratic lands to the peasantry and in December factories were formally put under the control of the Soviets. There was a whole series of remarkably progressive social and cultural measures that were decades ahead of their time, women enjoyed a range of rights and freedoms that were still unknown in the west. Finally - something that was to become increasingly important - Bolshevik party members found plenty of employment opportunities that grew dramatically as the communist state expanded its control over Russian society and its economy. This 'nomenklatura', a Bolshevik bureaucracy drawn from the ideologically pure working class and peasantry, owed their newfound position of influence to the party apparatus. They therefore had a clear vested interest in defending the regime. The chairman of the communist bureaucracy, initially a minor role within the party hierarchy, would therefore become increasingly important as the power of their patronage expanded. In 1922 the party chairman was Stalin. Perhaps one of the most important changes the Bolsheviks made was peace with Germany. A work day was limited to eight hours, and rules were introduced for holidays. The first health insurance was put in place and all factories were to be handed over to workers' committees. Land handed over to peasants. The NEP was an economic plan which reintroduced the private ownership of land and allowed private businesses to run once again.

The Civil War

The key to the Bolsheviks ability to hold on to power and consolidate it was their success in the Civil War which broke out in March 1918. The creation of a one-party state and signing of the punitive peace of Brest-Litovsk hardened political opposition to the Bolsheviks. But the first phase of the Civil War was instigated by former prisoners of war from the Austro-Hungarian army who had been recruited to the Russian war effort with the promise of Russian support for Czech and Slovak independence. This Czech Legion was being transported to help the Entente powers on the Western Front when they revolted against the Bolshevik soviets that were attempted to disarm them. Very quickly a loose confederation of anti-Bolshevik forces aligned against the Communist government, including landowners, conservatives, pro-monarchists, liberals, army generals and non-Bolshevik socialists.

Fearing both that the 'dangerous' Marxist ideas would spread and that the Bolsheviks would default on the massive war loans that had been given to Tsarist Russia, the British, French and Americans and non-Bolshevik Russians mobilised against the Bolsheviks.

Why did the Bolsheviks win the Civil War?

BOLSHEVIKS' STRENGTHS	WHITES' WEAKNESSES
Reforms gained them popularity	Less popular because associated with the Tsar, landlords and foreign intervention
Trotsky enforced strict discipline, used a combination of encouragement and terror to make his soldiers fight, and proved to be an outstanding military strategist.	They were harsh towards the people whose lands they captured
Controlled the main cities of Moscow and Petrograd with their factories	Made up of several different groups with only their opposition to the Bolsheviks in common.
Controlled the railways which allowed them to send supplies and troops where they wished	Lacked a single leader
War communism kept the Red Army supplied with food and weapons	They fought in separate armies far apart, which meant that Trotsky could take them down one by one.
Shared a singleness of purpose and were fighting for survival	Stop outside support when Allies withdrew their forces in 1919.
CHEKA hunted down people who sided with the Whites and forced peasants to hand over food to the Government.	Failed to work together

New Economic Policy

In 1921 with the Civil War over and the Kronstadt rebellion crushed, Lenin introduced a remarkable volte face in economic policy which would last up to and beyond his death in 1924. The NEP effectively reintroduced limited capitalism, allowing private ownership and the profit motive back into the economy. The results were remarkable and did much to help the Bolsheviks stay in power.