



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Analysing the Russian Revolution

Richard Malone

Fourth Edition



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India
103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

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Fourth Edition © Cambridge University Press 2022

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First published 2004
Second Edition 2009
Third Edition 2015
Fourth Edition 2022
20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Cover designed by Carolina Kerr
Text designed by Claire Atteia
Typeset by Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.
Printed in Singapore by C & C Offset Printing Co. Ltd.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of Australia at www.nla.gov.au

ISBN 978-1-108-88689-5 Paperback

Additional resources for this publication at www.cambridge.edu.au/GO

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Area of Study 1
Causes of revolution: The development of significant ideas, events, individuals and popular movements in Russia, 1896 to October 1917
14

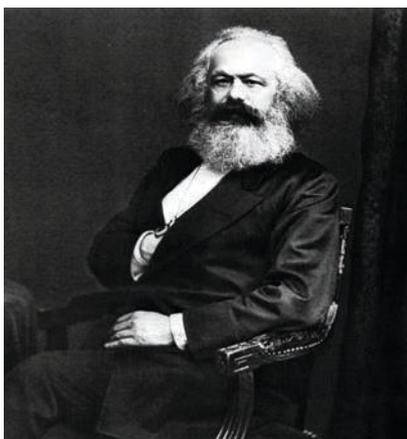


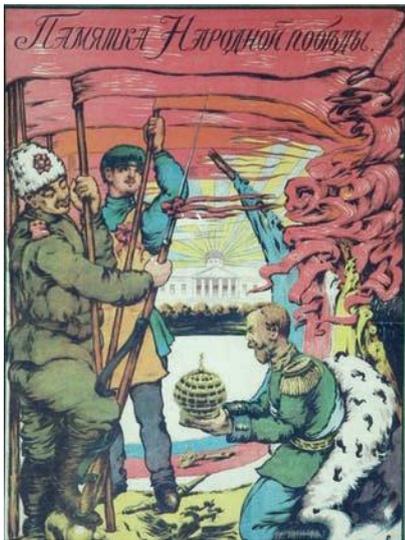
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At last.

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About the author

Richard Malone believes that History is the best subject because it connects the past with the present by studying how people behave. Understanding human nature is the key to decoding the complex world around us. You not only explore how political, economic and social patterns emerge and repeat but also learn about yourself. Richard has been deeply involved in History for over 20 years presenting at conferences and student lectures, marking examinations for VCAA, mentoring young teachers, assessing the National History Challenge, serving on the HTAV Board of Directors, leading overseas student study tours to Italy, Gallipoli and China, and writing several textbooks. His leadership roles of Year Level Coordinator, Humanities Learning Leader, Head of Curriculum and Head of Middle School have been challenging, yet more importantly, provided avenues for growth.



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Acknowledgements

This book is dedicated to my precious family who make my life full of colour. To Kerry, thank you for your passionate support for my dreams that enable my pursuits to bear fruit. Your wisdom, inspiration and generosity encourage wholeness. To my children, Abbey, Jacob and Hudson, thank you for infusing my life with spontaneity, richness and joy. You give life an energetic edge!

For being my community and sharing the many seasons of life's journey – Neale and Susan, Pete and Jo, Jess, Mark and Julie.

For inspiring my mind and heart with the stories of history – Peter McPhee, Michael Adcock, Adrian Jones, Neville Wilson, Iain Belot and Sally James.

For sharing wise insights and resources from a teacher perspective that have simply made each edition richer – Michael Bucklow, Fi Stokes, Nick Alexander and Catherine Hart.

For providing invaluable practical feedback from a student perspective – Amelia Grevis-James, Brooke Dewar, Lachlan Miles, Daniel Moldrich, Abbey Malone and Joanne Oakley.



How to use this resource

Structure

- This textbook is broken into two sections, each aligning with an Area of Study in the VCAA History: Revolutions Study Design
- **Area of Study openers** give a broad overview of the chapters to come and a timeline of key events
- **Chapter openers** also include an overview, listing the key issues of the chapter and a flow diagram.
- **QR codes** are included in all chapters for easy access to related videos.
- Look out for icons flagging **key events**, **quotes** and **statistics** in the margins for use in revision.

Activities

- **Focus questions** are placed throughout the chapter to assess comprehension and encourage discussion
- **Analysis activities** explore key primary and secondary historical sources. These sources can be visual or text-based, to help develop your understanding of the revolution as well as your skills as a historian.

Develop your historical thinking skills

The end of chapter review activities include a combination of tasks to help consolidate your learning:

- **Define key terms** encourages you to write definitions of important terms in your own words
- **Activities** can include research work or various creative tasks like role-plays
- **Establishing historical significance** and **Analysing cause and consequence** are exam-style writing tasks that allow you to practise paragraph-length answers
- **Constructing historical arguments** are practice essay questions that allow you to prepare for internal and end-of-year assessment
- **Analysing historical sources as evidence** provides practice for exam-style source analysis, both textual and visual
- **Analysing historian's interpretations** focuses on arguments made by individual historians and encourages you to put forth your own views

Digital resources

For a list of links to all the websites referred to in this book, go to: www.cambridge.edu.au/revrussia4ed

Further digital resources are available in the **Interactive Textbook** and on *Cambridge GO*:

- **PDF textbook** – downloadable, contains note taking and search functions
- **Interactive activities** – (e.g. drag and drop questions) assist recall of facts and understanding of concepts
- **Videos and links to history** – additional sources to watch read and analyse

The **Teacher Resource Package** also includes:

- Teaching programs and teaching tips
- Curriculum grids for each topic area
- **Suggested responses**
- **Practice Assessment Material**

Understanding icons

The following icons are used throughout the textbook to indicate different activities, resources, or points of view.

	Analysis activity – textual analysis:	Source analysis questions focusing on speeches or text extracts
	Analysis activity – visual analysis:	Source analysis questions focusing on artwork or photos
	Significant individuals:	Biographies on significant individuals of the Revolution
	Key historian:	Snapshots of important historians and their points of view on the Revolution
	Key statistic, events, quotes:	Indicators of particularly memorable quotes, statistics and events
	Historical interpretations:	Examines the differences between the opinions of historians
	Digital activities:	See the Interactive Textbook for access to digital resources
	The story so far video:	Summary videos on the chapter, available through the Interactive Textbook or through QR codes

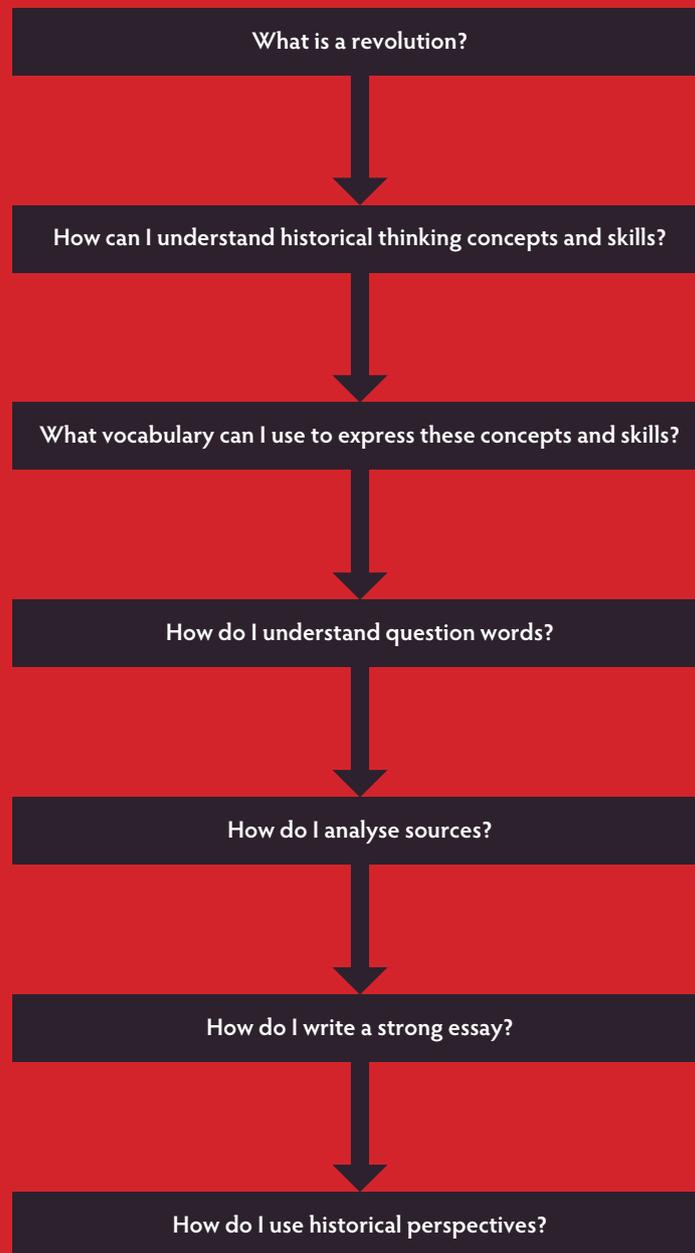


1 **WHAT MAKES GOOD HISTORY?**

History is the judge – its executioner, the proletariat.

– KARL MARX

Flow of chapter





1.1 What is a revolution?

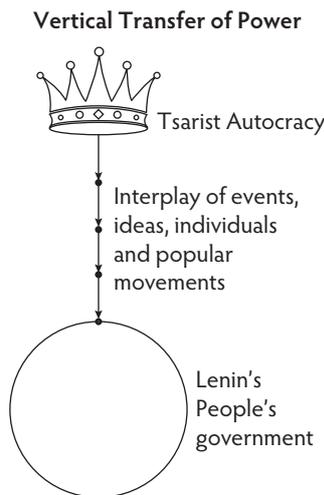
A revolution is not a dinner party or writing an essay or doing embroidery. A revolution is an act of violence.

– Mao Zedong

Understanding the nature of revolutions is important. Revolutions ‘represent a great rupture in time and are a major turning point in the collapse and destruction of an existing political order which results in extensive change to society’. (VCAA Study Design 2021–25, p. 65). Revolutions are primarily political events, by challenging and then changing the way a country is governed. This then has significant economic, social and cultural impacts on the whole country and those around it.

English historian E.H. Carr argued that revolutions must involve a vertical shift of power – from the privileged to the less privileged, and from the upper class to the middle and lower classes. Or in the case of the Russian Revolution, from an all-powerful autocratic tsar to a government that represented the people. Therefore, a *coup d'état* cannot be defined as a revolution, as it is merely a horizontal transfer of power from military to military or one privileged power base to another. The fundamental distinguishing feature of revolutions is not the extent to which they are initiated by the popular masses, but rather the degree of long-term change they actually achieve.

4



Top ten characteristics of revolutions

- 1 Caused by the interplay of events, ideas, individuals and popular movements.
- 2 Change needed due to massive tensions and conflicts.
- 3 Unauthorised and illegal challenges to the authority of the existing order.
- 4 Involve a process, or series of interconnected events, rather than a single defined event.
- 5 Profound effect on the political and social structures of post-revolutionary society.
- 6 Change in a post-revolutionary society is not guaranteed or inevitable.
- 7 New government often challenged internally by civil war and externally by foreign threats.
- 8 Challenges can result in a compromise of revolutionary ideals.
- 9 Extreme measures of violence, oppression and terror are used to overcome opposition.
- 10 Only consolidated and secure once all opposition is removed.

Adapted from VCAA Study Design (2021–25)

1.2 How do I understand historical thinking and skills?

Thinking concept	Brief explanation	Sample questions	Practical tips
Sequencing chronology	Chronology involves the arrangement of events in order of time. This sequence is important to knowing why events happened, and their consequences, plus distinguishing between long-term factors and short-term triggers. Knowing chronology is the basis for evidence, analysis and arguments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When did Bloody Sunday occur? What happened after the February Revolution? 	Create timelines and do regular chronology tests.
Ask historical questions	Be curious. Ask questions about the past. It helps you to understand why things happened the way they did. Research to find the answer.	Who... ? What... ? When... ? Where... ? How... ? Why... ?	Choose an event, individual or issue and create a question using each of the sample question words.
Compare and contrast	Comparison is an important skill. It enables you to identify what is similar and what is different. This provides valuable understanding and insight about the past.	Compare the two sources about the role of the proletariat in the October Revolution.	Create a Venn Diagram to list similarities and differences between two events, individuals or issues.
Establish historical significance	How significant an event, individual or issue was depends on how broad an impact it had. Impact can be determined by how long it went for, scale of the event, the number of people it affected, how it was perceived at the time and other events it may have caused.	What were the significant outcomes of the Bolshevik economic policies of War Communism?	List all the causes or consequences of an event. Rank them from most important to least. The top ones are the 'most significant'.
Use sources as evidence	Primary sources are crucial in understanding the past. Examine sources closely, including language, words, symbols, gestures and colours. Secondary sources are crucial in interpreting the past. Use them to understand a variety of different points of view.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who created the source and when? What was happening around the time it was created? Is this source an accurate representation of what occurred? Why or why not? 	Make a list of key primary sources, learn the main message of each.



... continued

Thinking concept	Brief explanation	Sample questions	Practical tips
Identify continuity and change	Understanding patterns in the past is helped by identifying when changes occurred and why, or when things continued unchanged. Turning points are a useful way for identifying change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was the change quick or slow? Was the change for the better or worse? To what extent did daily life improve for peasants under Lenin's Soviet government? 	Highlight on a chronology list the events that were main turning points that produced major change.
Analyse cause and consequence	This is crucial to understanding and analysing the past. Causes of revolutions can be categorised into long-term causes and short-term triggers, or PESC (Political, Economic, Social, Cultural). Makes links between events rather than treating them separately. Consequences can be intended or unintended.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What were the main causes of the Tsar's abdication? What were the main consequences of the Kornilov Affair? 	Use graphic organisers such as creating a Y-chart for each main event describing the cause of the event, the event itself, and the consequences of the event.
Explore historical perspectives	This can be explored from two angles: firstly, from individuals and groups of people at the time; and, secondly, from historians studying revolutions. Both provide important interpretations into the past.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How did different groups of people at the time make sense of the radical events? How did Russian women perceive Lenin's social reforms of 1917 and 1918? 	Start a list of (named) quotes and add to it throughout your study. Identify which are from the time and which are later historians.
Examine ethical dimensions of history	Insights bring empathy. Engage with the beliefs, values and attitudes of people in the past. Acknowledge that the moral frameworks and social circumstances of the past are different to our own. Respect their story.	What pressures on Lenin resulted in his decision to crush the Kronstadt sailors' revolt?	Use Three Level Guides to read sources deeply for stated or implied values and moral principles: Level 1 Literal. Reading what is right there. Level 2 Interpret. Reading between the lines. Level 3 Applied. Reading beyond the lines.

Thinking concept	Brief explanation	Sample questions	Practical tips
Construct historical arguments	The ultimate step is developing a logical argument that can be well supported with evidence. Remember, using facts shows knowledge, but using facts to support an argument makes it evidence.	The Russian Revolution was caused by Nicholas's failure to reform as shown by his Fundamental Laws and dismissal of the Dumas.	Find a list of essay topics. Practise planning essay responses by creating an argument, body paragraphs and supporting evidence.

1.3 What vocabulary can I use to express these concepts and skills?

Short-term cause	Long-term cause	Consequences	Compare	Contrast
catalyst	origins	Positive	similarly	despite
sparked	develop	supported	related	however
triggered	evolve	promoted	connected	nevertheless
ignited	emerge	advanced	in the same way	although
provoked	deep-rooted	prevented	likewise	conversely
incited	persisting	fostered	in similar fashion	juxtapose
precipitated	perennial	Negative	another	the antithesis of
initiated		blocked		
stimulated		inhibited		
		impeded		
		restricted		
		limited		
Change	Continuity	Comparing sources	Catalysts	Danger words
influential	remain	however	accelerated	I/me
symbolic	preserve	on the other hand	sparked	bad/good
significantly	continuous	this view is contrasted with	triggered	always/never
complete	invariable	a different view is presented by	exacerbated	a lot
profound		an alternative perspective is evidenced by	facilitated	all the people
transformative			intensified	here is a quote



Significance

When you are asked to evaluate significance or questions that ask you ‘to what extent?’, you are being asked to discuss the importance and influence of a movement, idea, individual, group, event, series of events or a specific period in time etc. This requires you to use the vocabulary of significance as shown on a continuum below.

Most significant		←————→		least significant
crucially ...	major	of indirect significance ...		insignificantly ...
imperative	substantial	to a limited extent ...		to an inconsequential extent ...
essential	of direct importance ...	to a lesser extent ...		of negligible significance ...
pivotal	to a large extent ...	of minor importance		
vital	of considerable importance ...	this was marginally important ...		
fundamental				
central				

1.4 How do I understand question words?

It is important to understand what key question words mean and what types of responses are required. Question words can also be called Task Verbs or Cognitive Verbs. Be careful to remember that these words can be used differently in different subjects. So this is what these key words mean in the context of studying History.

Question words	Thinking skill required	Explanation	Sentence starter tips
Explain	Lower order	Provide reasons or examples for a particular event or issue. This might be explaining how or why an event occurred. Similar question words are why, how, identify, list, report, understand or describe.	This happened because ... A major issue was ... This sparked ... Another main cause was ... There are three main reasons... This resulted in ... As a consequence, ...
Discuss	Middle order	Provide both sides of an issue, without needing to come to a conclusion. This might mean providing the advantages and disadvantages of a particular event or issue. Similar question words are summarise, consider or investigate.	There were many reasons both for and against ... Another main reason for this was had many advantages. The disadvantage of this was ... One main perspective is ... From the point of view of ... Furthermore ... This was influenced by ...

Question words	Thinking skill required	Explanation	Sentence starter tips
Compare	Middle order	Provide ways in which two things are the same and ways they are different	The main similarity was have in common was ... Another similarity was ... Unique causes of X were ... An obvious difference was ... Despite the differences ... An important contrast was ... Alternatively, ...
Analyse	Higher order	Provide a breakdown of the smaller, deeper parts of a particular event or issue. Importantly, discuss how these parts relate to the other parts and to the whole. This might be both sides of an argument on a particular event or issue. Similar questions words are 'examine' or 'explore'.	The major causes of the revolution were ... Important themes in the old regime were ... There is a strong link between ... and ... The relationship between these were... This had negative consequences because... On the other hand ...
Evaluate	Higher order	Provide an argument about which event or issue is most justified. This can only be done after the close detail of the 'analysis' step, which then also provides evidence to support your argument. Evaluate questions are often written as 'to what extent ...?' or 'how significant ...?'	The most significant cause of the revolution was is most important because ... When considering ... When assessing the ... A number of factors need to be considered such as ... The predominant consequence was ...



1.5 How do I analyse sources?

The following are three helpful models that can be used for written or visual source analysis. The advantage of using a model is so that you routinely ask yourself the best questions, meaning that you notice and comment on specific aspects of the source. Regular routines result in right and rigorous reflection! There is an activity at the end of every chapter in this book called 'Analyse primary sources' to give you the opportunity to practise your source analysis skills.

Vocabulary for summarising main messages or arguments in sources

argues	disagrees	quantifies
asserts	evidences	refutes
challenges	justifies	reinforces
claims	persuades	specifies
confirms	promotes	supports
contends	proves	verifies
defends	qualifies	

Model 1: 'DAMMIT U' MODEL

D	DATE	When was it produced? What was happening at that time?
A	AUTHOR	Who wrote or produced it? Who are they?
M	MESSAGE	What does it say? What is its message?
M	MOTIVE	Why did the author produce it? What is its purpose?
I	INTENDED AUDIENCE	Who is it produced for? How do you know?
T	TIMING	What historical context can you provide about this source?
T	TONE	Is it formal or informal? What emotion is conveyed?
U	USEFULNESS	Do you consider this source to be reliable? Is the main message supported or contradicted by other events?

Model 2: 'APPARTS' MODEL

A	AUTHOR	Who created the source?
P	PLACE AND TIME	Where and when was this source created? Does the date make this a primary or secondary source?
P	PRIOR KNOWLEDGE	What do you already know that would further your understanding of this source? For example, you may already know something about the author, or the place it was produced, or what was happening in Russia at the same time, or about the event or topic on which the source is focusing.
A	AUDIENCE	Who was the intended audience of this source? Who was it made for?
R	REASON	Why was this source produced at the time it was produced?
T	THE MAIN IDEA	What is the key message, argument, perspective or point of view shown in this source?
S	SIGNIFICANCE	Why is this source important? How does this source help you to better understand the key issues or events occurring in Russia at the time?

Model 3: 'CCF' MODEL

C	Content	<p>What do I see in this image?</p> <p>What does each item symbolise or mean?</p> <p>Which groups or individuals are included in the image?</p> <p>Are any groups or individuals excluded from the image?</p>
C	Context	<p>What was happening at the time this image was produced?</p> <p>How might this have led to its creation?</p>
F	Function	<p>What is the message of this image?</p> <p>Which side does it take? For example, is it for or against the tsar? Is it for or against the revolution?</p>

1.6 How do I write a strong essay?

Forming clear arguments that are supported by convincing evidence is the essential skill involved in writing strong history essays. To create a clear argument, you must first interpret the essay question/statement and understand what you are being asked or instructed to do. This is essential. One way to make sure you interpret the whole question is outlined below.



The instructional verb is not the only important part of a question. You also need to pay attention to ‘content words’ – words that indicate the person, event, issue or idea you must focus on. Further, you must carefully consider ‘limiting words’ – words that further define the content. They may be dates or provide more specific information about the content words, for example:

To what extent *were the actions of Tsar Nicholas II responsible for the development of revolutionary sentiment in the period to October 1917?*

An additional key word in the question above is ‘responsible’ – this indicates you need to evaluate the extent to which the actions of Tsar Nicholas II **CAUSED** or generated revolutionary sentiment.

Next, you need to consider to what extent do you agree with the statement. In what ways, or in which time periods, are they correct? When was it not correct? How could the essay statement be challenged? Brainstorming answers might lead to a clear argument that you could then use for your essay.

A clear structure allows your ideas to be easily understood. Structure includes your introduction and conclusion plus the topics for each of your body paragraphs. Relevant introductions are crucial in history essays because they include your main argument and how you are responding to the essay statement. Convincing paragraphs use a wide range of examples rather than just one in depth from throughout as much of the time period as the question allows. Remember that providing evidence is different from just listing lots of facts. Facts become evidence when they are supporting an argument rather than just filling up a sentence. There is an activity at the end of many chapters in this book called ‘Construct historical arguments’ to give you the opportunity to practise your essay writing skills.

The formula for a strong essay can be:

strong essay = structure (argument + evidence + fluency of expression)

How do I know if I've written a good essay?

Use this checklist to help you analyse your essay.

- I have used a relevant historical argument.
- I have addressed the specific demands of the essay question.
- I have demonstrated historical knowledge.
- I have used historical thinking concepts.
- I have used primary sources as evidence.
- I have used historical interpretations as evidence.
- I have structured my essay clearly.

1.7 How do I use historical perspectives?

There is no such thing as impartial history: the story we receive is always to some degree contaminated by the interpretation put on it by the historian.

– RAYNER, 1998

Historians are meant to be objective. They are supposed to tell stories based on truth; stories that reflect the facts from the past. Yet every historian's work reflects their country of birth, personality, political views, personal beliefs and values, life experiences and the political period in which they write. So, as Rayner stated, these influences mean that a historian's writing cannot be completely without prejudice, even if they attempt to be objective. Interestingly, many do not try to be objective at all.

The first aim of studying historians and the sources they cite is to identify their different perspectives on the same events, issues and individuals. Are they positive or negative about the Russian Revolution? Do they support or criticise the role of individuals and their ideas? What events or issues do they emphasise? You can identify the perspective of a source through the vocabulary, tone and examples used. For example, a negative perspective might read something like 'Lenin's *extreme* use of violence meant that the *massacre* of the Kronstadt sailors in 1921 was *totally unjustified*'.

The second aim of studying historians is to compare their perspectives. How does the perspective of one historian compare to that of another? Are they similar or different? And ultimately, which point of view do you believe is more justified by the events you have studied? There is an activity at the end of every chapter in this book called 'Analysing a historian's interpretations' to give you the opportunity to practise your skills of identifying and using the arguments of historians. Most chapters also have an activity called 'Use quotes as evidence' to practise using and comparing quotes in your writing.

Vocabulary and sentence stems for embedding quotes

according to

contradicts

states

argues

proposes

supports

claims

reinforces

Another interpretation is offered by historian Z who contends that ...

From this, historian Y forms the assumption that ...

Historian X rejects this assumption and suggests that ...

Area of Study 1

Causes of revolution: The development of significant ideas, events, individuals and popular movements in Russia, 1896 to October 1917

I shall adhere as unswervingly as my father to the principle of autocracy.

– TSAR NICHOLAS II, 1894

14

Overview

tsar Russian word for ruler or monarch.

Often called the Emperor

government the official political body that runs a country

coronation a formal ceremony where a monarch is crowned

reforms the healthy process of making political, economic or social changes to make a country operate more effectively

economic relating to issues to do with money, such as taxation, inflation, unemployment, wages and prices of goods

Duma Russian word for elected parliament

autocracy absolute rule by one person; in Russia also called Tsarist Autocracy

revolution a process of massive political upheaval that changes the way in which a country is governed; a vertical shift in power from an absolute monarch to a popular government ruling on behalf of the people

leaders significant individuals (women and men) who influence ordinary people

Durnovo Pyotr Durnovo – member of the upper class, Minister of the Interior under Prime Minister Witte

Chapters 2 to 7 focus specifically on the reign of **Tsar** Nicholas II. The period until 1917 has been divided into six chapters in order to assist an analysis of Nicholas's regime and his responses to the many significant crises that faced his **government**. The government experienced varying fortunes from Nicholas's **coronation** in 1896 to the end of his reign in 1917. Sergei Witte in the 1890s and Peter Stolypin from 1906 both introduced **reforms** that initially strengthened tsarism and produced significant **economic** gains. However, the tsarist regime was also weakened by the general strikes and violence of 1905, along with the failure of the **Dumas**, the Lena Goldfields massacre and multiple crises of the World War One, which diminished the credibility of Nicholas. How did Nicholas attempt to continue imposing his absolute **autocracy** during times of crisis as previous Romanov rulers had done?

Knowing that the system of tsarism collapsed in 1917 allows us to re-read Nicholas II's reign to highlight the revolutionary undercurrents of **revolution**. How popular was their message? How were the revolutionaries organised and who were the key **leaders**?

While Chapters 3 and 4 are devoted to answering these questions, each chapter also deals with the responses of the opposition movement to the events and decisions of the mainstream government. Chapter 11 features a thematic analysis of the key tensions and conflicts within Russia. Was the creation of a revolutionary situation the result of poor leadership from Nicholas, years of agitation from opponents of his regime, or merely a historical inevitability, as Marxist theory would suggest?

As we will see, economic and political discontent could not be contained within the existing structure. As suggested by **Durnovo** in 1914, social revolution occurred, but with unpredictable political consequences. Tsar Nicholas II abdicated and the

system of tsarism abruptly ended. Chapters 8–11 analyse how and why this occurred and the system of dual authority that emerged. The return of Lenin and fellow revolutionaries from exile undermined the rapport of the new Provisional Government with the people of Petrograd (the name of St Petersburg 1914–1924). Despite surging fortunes, the Bolshevik Party eventually gained a majority in the **Petrograd Soviet** by September, which provided the foundation for their takeover of power in October.

Dates provide an interesting problem. There were two calendars operating in the world in 1917: Russia used the old Julian calendar established by Roman ruler Julius Caesar, whereas Western countries used an updated calendar by Pope Gregory called the Gregorian calendar. Chapters 8–11 use the Julian calendar dates throughout (that is, when the events actually occurred for people in Russia). Russia adopted the Gregorian calendar on 1 February 1918, and this date became 14 February 1918.

Underlying all the events of the revolution that are described in this book are the interpretations provided by **historians** who also study the Russian Revolution. At the end of most chapters are questions that focus on specific historian’s interpretations of events. It is worth spending time on these so that you develop the mindset of exploring Russian history with historians as you journey through this text with them.

Petrograd Soviet a powerful political body first formed by Trotsky during the 1905 Revolution and re-formed on 28 February 1917

historian a person who attempts to make sense of the past and usually specialises in one country or period of history

	First Revolution began	Second Revolution began
Russian Julian calendar	23 February	24 October
Western Gregorian calendar	8 March	6 November



◀ **Source 2A** The reign of Russia’s Tsar Nicholas II is the focus of Chapters 2–7. This representation is by Boris Kustodiev, from 1915.

Timeline of key events, 19th century and 1914–1939

1896

- ▶ **26 November:** Coronation of Tsar Nicholas II: Nicholas and Alexandra were officially crowned as absolute rulers of Russia; thus, the problematic reign of the last Russian tsar had begun.

1904–05

- ▶ Russo-Japanese War: A tense war began between Russia and Japan after crises in Asia. Russia's military identity and pride were eventually destroyed with a humiliating defeat to Japan's navy in May 1905.

1905

- ▶ **9 January:** Bloody Sunday massacre: The peaceful march to present a respectful petition resulted in a massacre. It resulted directly in a loss of faith in the goodness of Tsar Nicholas. This divide between the Tsar and his people was never bridged.
- ▶ **January to October:** 1905 Revolution: A series of rebellious events occurred from mutinies to strikes. The most significant was Trotsky's establishment of soviets.
- ▶ **October:** General strikes: These widespread strikes paralysed the economy, which forced the Tsar to respond.
- ▶ **26 October:** *October Manifesto*: Tsar Nicholas submitted to popular demands by creating a political body called the Duma. By giving the people representation, the Tsar was agreeing to share a portion of his absolute power.

1906–11

- ▶ Prime Minister Stolypin: His reforms restored a degree of faith in tsarism by limiting the influence of the Dumas, strengthening the economy and eliminating revolutionary opposition.

1906

- ▶ **23 April:** Fundamental State Laws: These were issued by the Tsar four days before the opening of the First Duma. His reassertion of his absolute authority rendered the Duma powerless.
- ▶ First Duma: dismissed after only months for its radical demands.

1907

- ▶ Second Duma: similarly dismissed for its radical demands.
- ▶ Change in electoral laws: The electoral system was illegally changed to ensure that those elected to the next Duma were more conservative.

1907–12

- ▶ Third Duma: served its full five-year term but had no official influence over government decisions.

1912

- ▶ Lena Goldfields massacre: Revolutionary sentiment was reignited after goldminers were massacred for striking for better working conditions.

1914

- ▶ Russia enters World War One: After initial victories, Russia's massive military machine suffered repeated defeats due to poor training and supplies. This lowered the morale of both the war and home fronts. Most significantly, the war devastated the home economy through increased unemployment, inflation, and food and fuel shortages.

1915

- ▶ **August:** Tsar takes personal command of the army: Tsar Nicholas's decision to replace Nikolaevich at the war front meant that he now personally shouldered the blame for the continued losses, but also left the inexperienced Tsarina Alexandra in control of the Russian government.

1915–16

- ▶ Influence of Rasputin: Rasputin's reputed ability to heal Tsarevich Alexei's haemophilia earned him the favour of Alexandra. She promoted and dismissed several leading government ministers on his recommendation. Rasputin directly contributed to the loss of faith in the royal government and to his own assassination.

1917

- ▶ **23 February–3 March:** February Revolution: This spontaneous, leaderless revolution 'from below' resulted in the formation of the Provisional Government and Petrograd Soviet, and, most significantly, the abdication of the Tsar.
- ▶ **1 March:** Soviet Order No. 1 (issued by Petrograd Soviet): This severely weakened the powers of the Provisional Government by decreeing that military orders were only to be obeyed if approved by the Soviet. It affirmed that the Soviet had the real authority and control of Petrograd.
- ▶ **2 March:** Abdication of the Tsar: This unintentionally ended the 300-year Romanov Dynasty and hence tsarism. With power given to the Provisional Government, hopes were raised of an immediate solution to the crises of the old regime.
- ▶ **3 April:** Lenin's return and speech at Finland Station: Lenin's return immediately transformed the political debate with his call for the overthrow of the Provisional Government and catch-cry of 'Peace, Land, Bread!'
- ▶ **4 April:** Lenin's *April Theses*: Lenin stamped his strong personal and ideological leadership over the direction of Russia by delivering a crucial blueprint for revolution:
 - that the February Revolution was merely a capitalist coup, not a genuine revolution
 - that a second revolution was needed to overthrow the corrupt Provisional Government
 - that the soviet, led by Bolsheviks, was the only possible form of government.
- ▶ **18–20 June:** June Offensive: War morale was dealt a final blow with Kerensky's failed attack on the Austrians and Germans. It fuelled Lenin's arguments for withdrawing from the imperialist war.
- ▶ **3 July:** July Days: This failed revolt seemingly signalled the end of the Bolshevik leadership and party, and the final victory of Kerensky and the Provisional Government.
- ▶ **26 August:** Kornilov Revolt: This revolt exposed Provisional Government weakness and a lack of military support. Allowed out of jail, Trotsky earned great respect by forming the Red Guard to defend Petrograd against fear of Kornilov's attempt to establish military rule.
- ▶ **8 September:** Trotsky becomes Chairman of Petrograd Soviet: This crucial event symbolised the majority support of the Bolsheviks in the Soviet for the first time.
- ▶ **7 October:** Secret return of Lenin: The timing of, and support and strategies for, the October Revolution were implemented through Lenin's persuasion.
- ▶ **24–25 October:** The October Revolution: The Bolsheviks' military capture of key organisations and vantage points in Petrograd led by Trotsky's Red Guard was the fulfilment of *April Theses* as the Provisional Government was overthrown in a Bolshevik takeover.



2

RUSSIA UNDER TSAR NICHOLAS II

I am not prepared to be a Tsar. I never wanted to become one. I know nothing of the business of ruling.

– NICHOLAS IN A LETTER TO HIS BROTHER-IN-LAW
IN 1894 WHEN HIS FATHER DIED

Overview

Our story goes like this: once upon a time, there lived a charming and kind young prince, the heir to a large and rich kingdom, covering one sixth of the world. He fell in love with a beautiful faraway princess. He married her and became king. They loved each other passionately and had five children. One would expect them to live happily ever after. But they could not escape their fate. They were doomed, their bloodline was cursed. The fairy tale turned into tragedy. This is the story of a family, a very special family and a very special story.

Andrei Maylunas & Sergei Mironenko, *A Lifelong Passion: Nicholas and Alexandra their own story*, Doubleday, New York, 1997, xv

The royal **Romanov Dynasty** represented what had always been and would ever be. But revolutions can only occur when conflicts and tensions grow to an extent of creating significant unrest within a country. Therefore, this chapter analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the system of tsarism – the traditional political system of autocracy, the divisive social hierarchy of **privileges**, the harsh economic reality of industrial workers and peasants – and the man who led the whole system, Tsar Nicholas II. Begin considering that, despite the problems evident in the Tsar's regime, was revolution inevitable? Can revolution ever be inevitable?

Romanov Dynasty
the series of rulers from the Romanov family beginning with Michael Romanov in 1613

privileges economic and social benefits given to the upper social classes due to birth rather than talent or merit

Key issues

After completing this chapter, you should be able to answer these questions.

- What was Tsarist Autocracy?
- What happened after the coronation of Tsar Nicholas II in 1896?
- Who was Tsar Nicholas II?
- Long-term political problems: how was tsarism implemented?
- Long-term social and economic problems: why did the social structure promote privilege?
- What attempts were made to reform Russia's economic backwardness?

Digital resources for this chapter

In the *Interactive Textbook*:

-  Video and audio sources and questions
-  Digital activities

Flow of chapter



Chapter timeline

What are the key events of the Russian Revolution covered in this chapter?

r. 1881–1894

Tsar Alexander III



26 NOVEMBER 1894

Nicholas marries Alexandra



18 MAY 1896

Khodynka Tragedy in Moscow



1 NOVEMBER 1894

Nicholas becomes the new ruler of Russia



14 MAY 1896

Official coronation of Tsar Nicholas II



1896

Witte's reforms

2.1 What was Tsarist Autocracy?

Defining Tsarist Autocracy

Tsarist Autocracy is a political system whereby the ruler has complete political power, unlimited by a formal **constitution** or parliament. It was introduced during the reign of Ivan III (1440–1505) and had been the dominant political system in Russia for over 400 years. Tsar is the Russian word for ‘ruler’ and autocracy is used to refer to the system of one-person rule. The Fundamental Laws of the Empire were official statements that described the Russian Tsar as being ‘an autocratic and unlimited monarch’ and stated that ‘God himself commands his supreme power be obeyed’. These autocratic powers of the Tsar are explained by Australian historian Marilyn Hoysted:

constitution the set of rules by which a country is governed

Neither a constitution nor other institutions limited the Tsar’s authority. All law emanated from the Tsar. Russian officials swore an oath of loyalty to him personally, not to the state. Civil servants and ministers needed his permission to resign ... Nicholas II believed autocracy to be a sacred trust and Russia the dynasty’s patrimony to be handed on to his own son intact.

Source 2.1 Hoysted, *The Russian Revolution: A Student Handbook* (2001), p. 8

Understanding Russian psychology is essential to understanding the importance of the system of Tsarist Autocracy. Russian culture has, and still does, rely on a strong central leader.

Russian society is very much like a colony of bees, in which royalty is a natural necessity. Just as the colony would cease to exist without its queen so, too, would Russian society cease to exist without the Tsar.

Source 2.2 August Von Haxthausen, *Studies on the Interior of Russia* (1844)



Geography – the difficulty of ruling Russia

Russia is a vast country that crosses two continents, 11 time zones and five vegetation zones. It makes up one sixth of the world’s land mass. As a direct result of the vast size of the country, the ruling elite and upper classes established themselves on the European side of Russia where the major cities of **Moscow and St Petersburg** were located. Interestingly, St Petersburg is closer to New York in the USA than it is to Vladivostok in Russia’s east. The empire included around 20 different nationalities, resulting in only 40 per cent of the population speaking Russian as their first language. The Tsar’s official title was 123 words long, reflecting the complexity and diversity of the empire he ruled.

Moscow and St Petersburg the two major cities in Russia located in the west near Europe



ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 2.1: VISUAL ANALYSIS



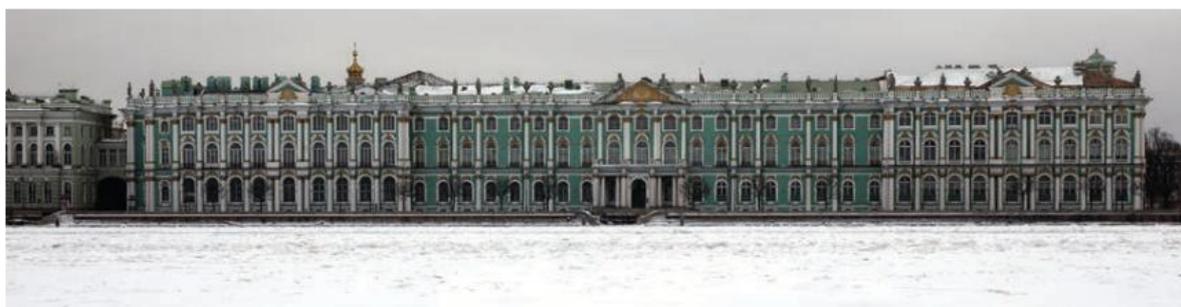
▲ **Source 2.3** Russia is a vast and geographically diverse country. This map shows the extent of the Russian empire by the time of Tsar Nicholas II's reign.

- 1 Find the cities of St Petersburg and Moscow. Which countries are closest to them?
- 2 Why is the location of Germany threatening?
- 3 Find the city of Vladivostok. Which are the closest countries to it?
- 4 What else do you notice about the geography of Russia?

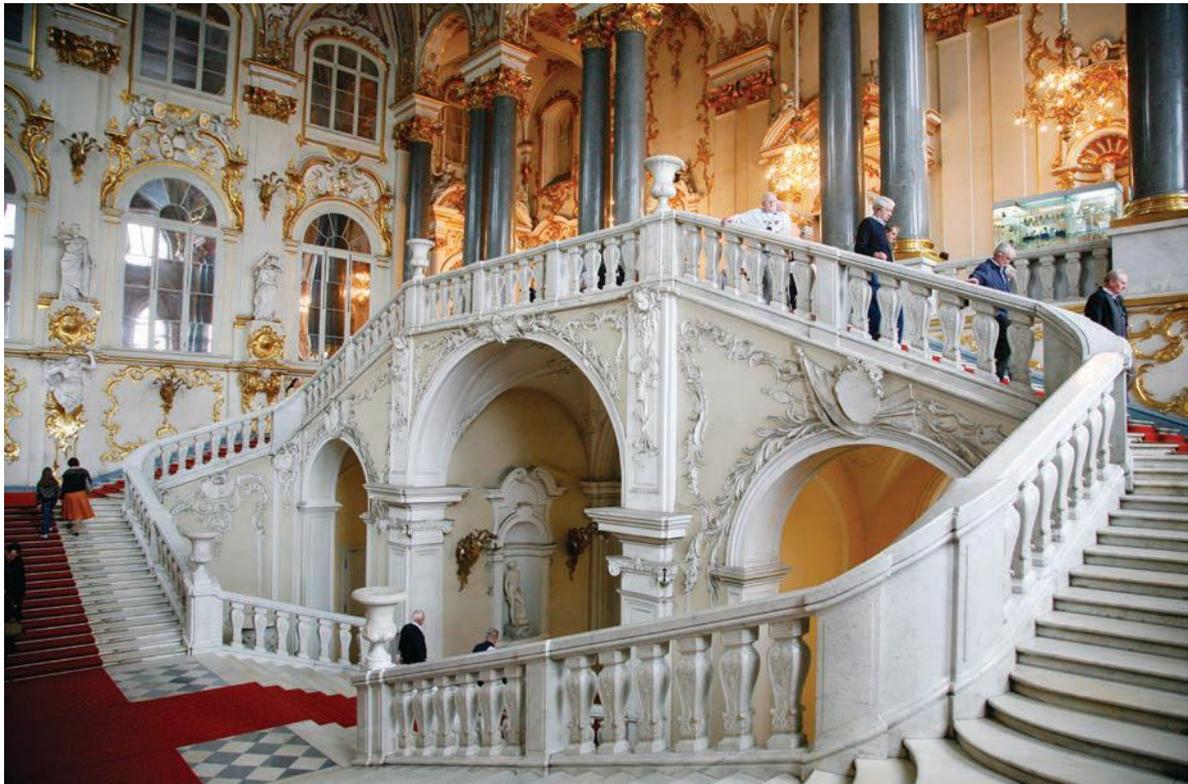
AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

The name 'Russia' probably came from a warrior tribe called the 'Russes'. They inhabited the region west of the Ural Mountains in the 1200s and were related to the Vikings and Normans.

Understanding important locations



▲ **Source 2.4** The official residence of the tsars from 1732 to 1917 was the Winter Palace in St Petersburg. The palace was intentionally built on a massive scale to symbolise the might and power of the Russian monarchy. Tsar Nicholas used the Winter Palace on the most formal occasions.

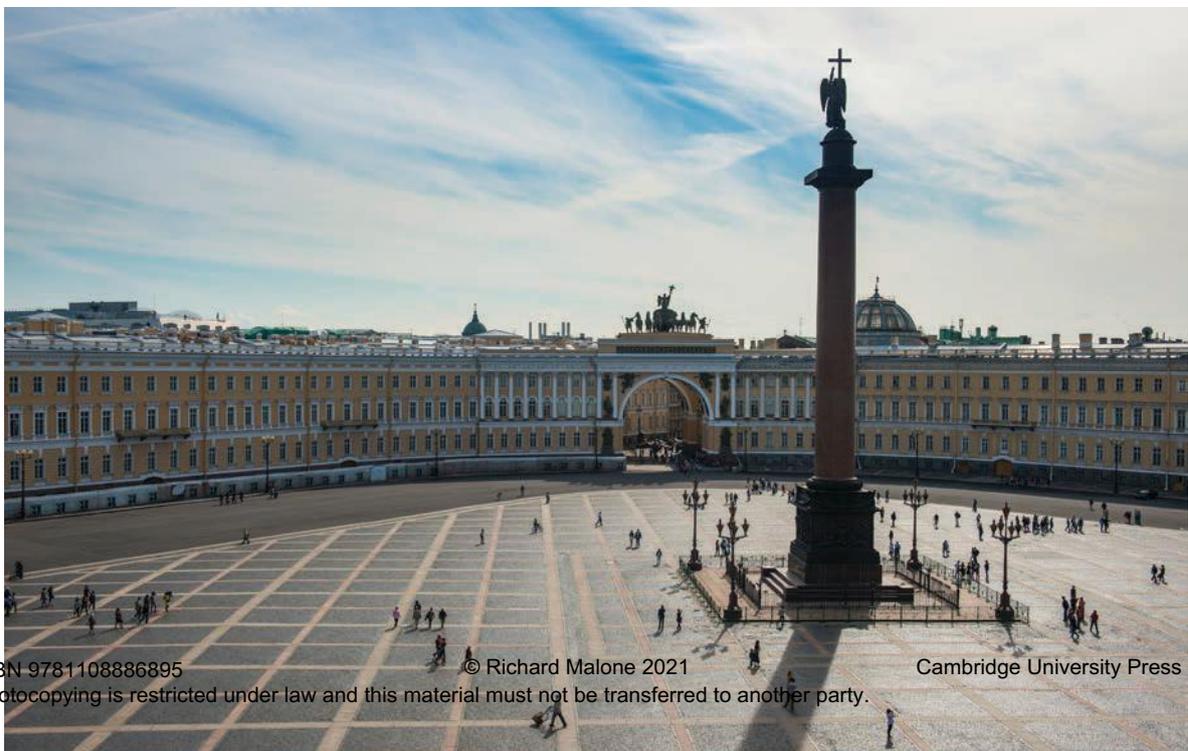


▲ Source 2.5 The main staircase in the Winter Palace

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

The front face of the Winter Palace is over 250 metres long and it has 1786 doors, 1500 rooms and 117 staircases.

▼ Source 2.6 Winter Palace Square, a large gathering place, with the Alexander Column





▲ Source 2.7 The Summer Palace was called Alexander Palace. It was in Tsarskoye Selo, a 30-minute train trip from St Petersburg. Tsar Nicholas II was born there, and it was his favourite residence because it was private, peaceful and traditional, unlike the modern St Petersburg.

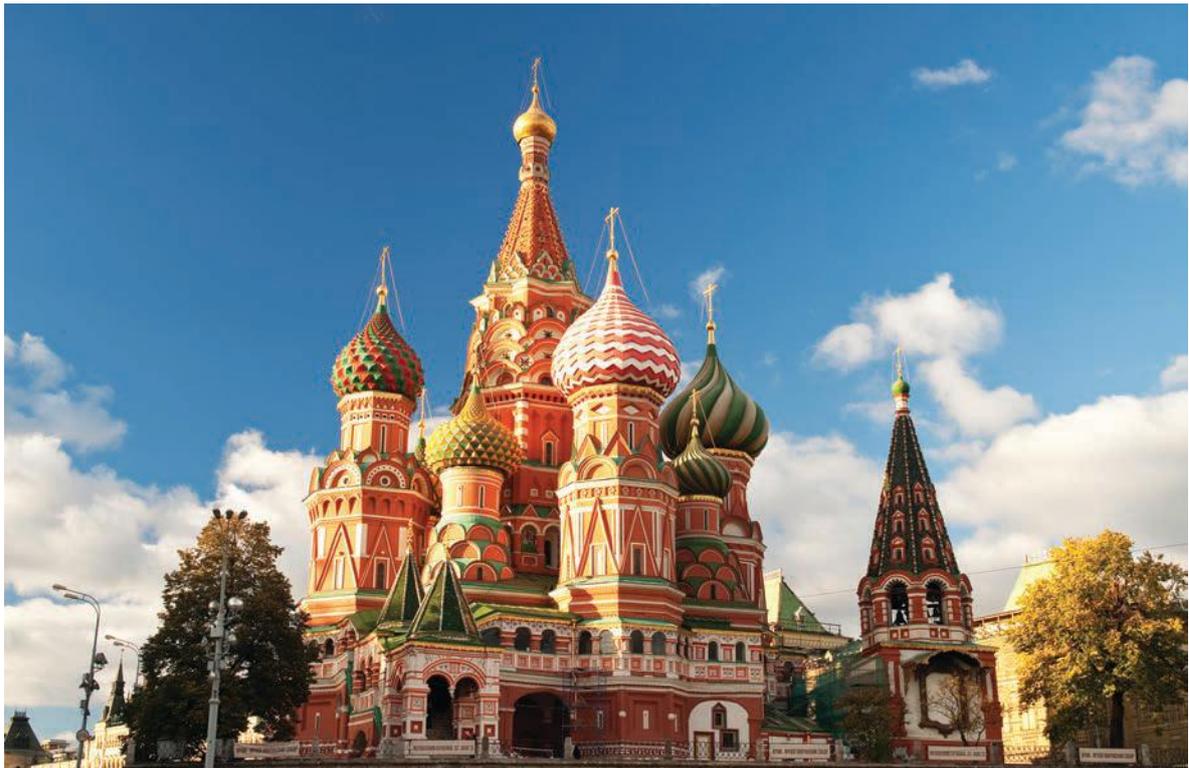


▲ Source 2.8 The Winter Palace backs on to the mighty Neva River that runs through St Petersburg.



▲ Source 2.9 Peter and Paul Fortress is encircled by the Neva River in St Petersburg. Most of the Romanov tsars are buried in its cathedral.

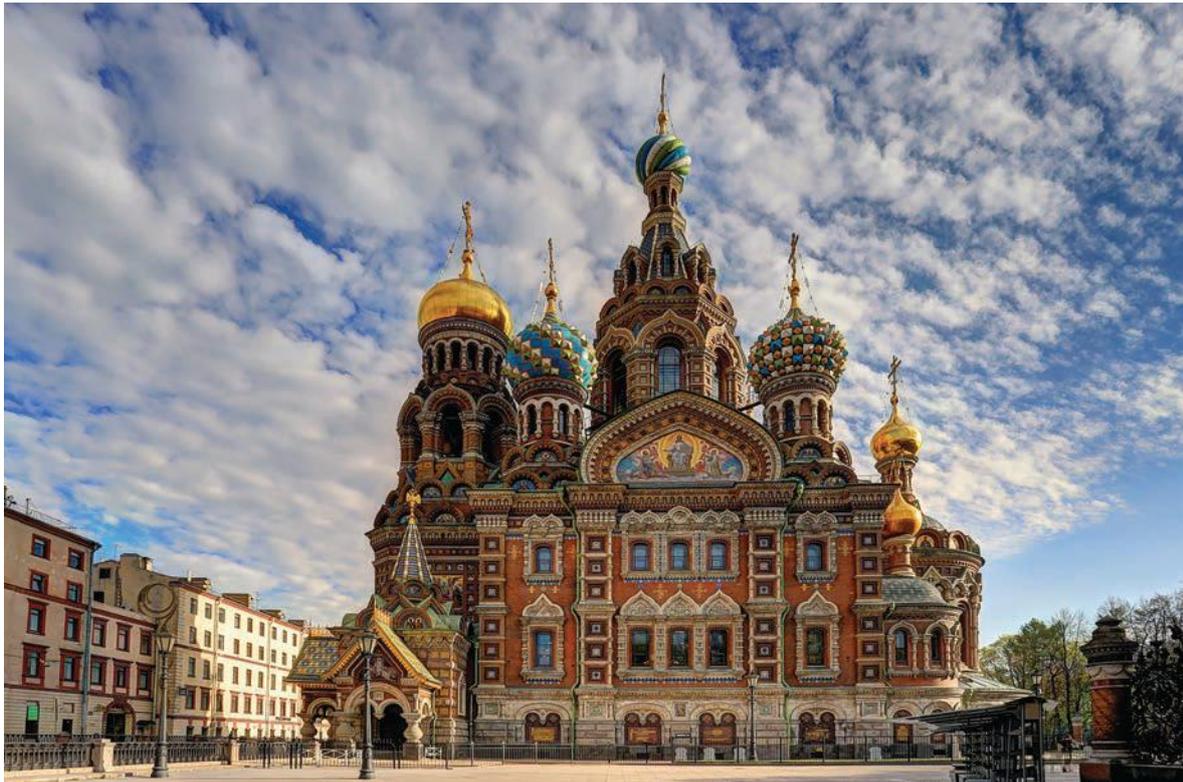
▼ Source 2.10 St Basil's Cathedral is in Red Square in Moscow.





AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

When St Basil's Cathedral was built in Red Square in Moscow in 1560, Tsar Ivan the Terrible thought that it was so beautiful that he had the architect's eyes gouged out so that he could never make another building as impressive ever again. Despite being blind, he did build one final cathedral!



▲ **Source 2.11** The magnificent Church of the Saviour on Spilled Blood was built in St Petersburg to remember the assassination of Tsar Alexander II by the radical People's Will.

▼ **Source 2.12** The Moscow Kremlin had been a secure 'fortress inside a city' since as early as the 1300s. The Soviet government relocated there in 1918. It is the Russian equivalent of the Presidential White House in the United States.



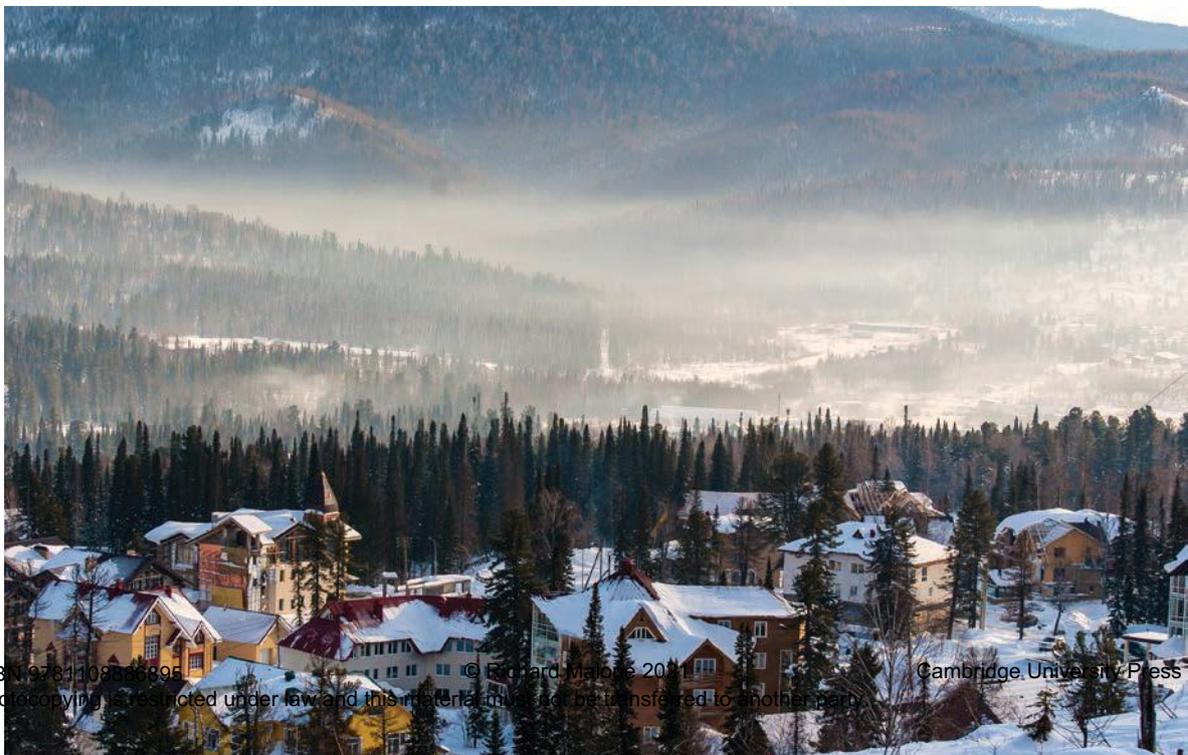
AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Tsar Nicholas II is considered to have been the fifth-richest person to have ever lived in any country in any period. This is because all palaces and royal wealth were considered to be his personal possessions as Tsar. In today's terms, he would be worth US\$300 billion.



▲ **Source 2.13** The mighty Trans-Siberian Railway crosses Russia from Moscow in the west, through remote Siberia, to Vladivostok in the east, a distance of 10 000 km.

▼ **Source 2.14** Siberia makes up 77% of Russia's land area, a vast remote area with an average temperature in winter of -25°C . This was ideal for exiling prisoners but impossible for agriculture or industry.





Romanov Dynasty

The Romanov Dynasty began when Michael Romanov (1596–1645) became Tsar of Russia in 1613. This began a 304-year dynasty, during which his direct descendants ruled Russia. The Romanov Dynasty adopted the double-headed eagle from the Byzantine period for their coat of arms, implying that their family line was as powerful as the Roman Empire.



▲ Source 2.15 Michael Romanov began the Romanov dynasty.



▲ Source 2.16 The Romanov coat of arms

Alexander III (reigned 1881–1894)

Understanding Alexander III is crucial to understanding Nicholas II. Alexander III was Nicholas II's father and ruled during a reactionary period in Russia's history. He was considered the model autocrat – confident, forceful, tall and patriotic, with a dominant will. Given the assassination of his father, it is not surprising that Alexander's rule was characterised by a total belief in autocracy and the brutal suppression of revolutionary movements. Russia was stable, prosperous and peaceful under Alexander's rule. While he came to the throne unexpectedly on the assassination of his father Alexander II, he also died unexpectedly in 1894 of kidney failure. Alexander III's eldest son Nicholas took on the responsibilities of running the nation as the new tsar.

As leaders, they could not have been more different. Alexander was confident and bold whereas Nicholas was shy and reluctant. But it was the model of rigid autocratic leadership that his father had reinforced – which therefore Nicholas was also determined to preserve – that set Nicholas up for failure in a rapidly modernising Europe. Like his father, Nicholas was determined to

maintain autocracy, use force to eliminate opposition and retain traditional values over modern ideas. However, the events of the Russian Revolution meant that Tsar Nicholas II became the last ruler in the Romanov dynasty.

ideas abstract concepts and beliefs that provide hope and solutions to problems



► Source 2.17 Nicholas's father, Alexander III

2.2

SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUALS



Tsar Nicholas II (1868–1918) and the Romanovs

Tsar Alexander III

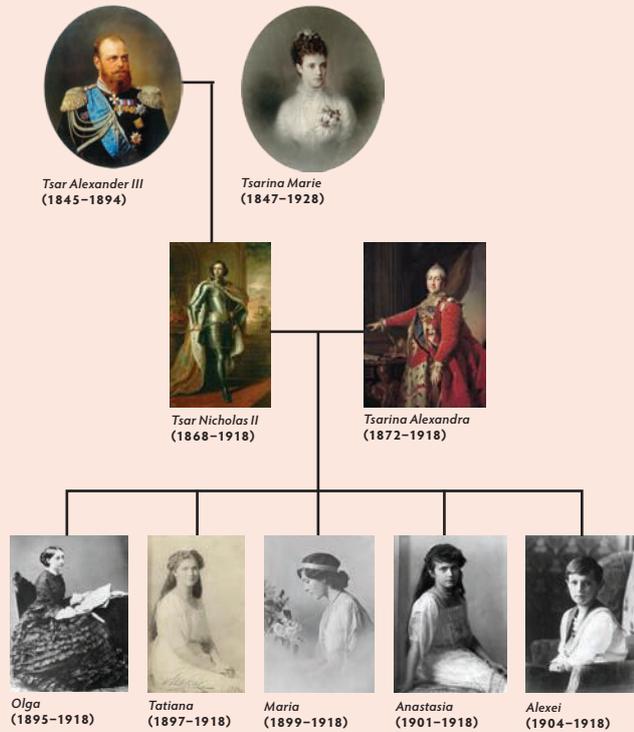
Nicholas’s father was the dominant Tsar Alexander III. Nicholas became tsar at age 26 after Alexander III died unexpectedly of kidney failure in 1894. British Ambassador Sir George Buchanan wrote: ‘The Emperor Nicholas has not inherited his father’s commanding personality nor the strong character and prompt decision making which are so essential to an autocratic ruler.’

Tsarina Maria Feodorovna

Nicholas’s mother had been a Danish princess before marrying into the Russian royal family. Nicholas was the eldest of her five children. She became an influential political adviser and confidant to Nicholas once he became Tsar.

Tsarina Alexandra

Nicholas married the German Princess Alexandra on 26 November 1894, just 25 days after he unexpectedly became Tsar. With strength of character that Nicholas lacked, Alexandra was very determined that autocratic power would be preserved. Alexandra once wrote to her husband: ‘How I wish I could pour my will into your veins.’



▲ Source 2.18 Family tree of Nicholas II

Character strengths

Nicholas was a devoted family man who preferred his private world to public affairs. He loved Russia and had a strong sense of duty. He genuinely wanted to bring happiness to his country.

Character weaknesses

Nicholas was out of touch with his people and knew very little about the reality of life in Russia. He relied on advisers as he never went on tours to visit factories or villages. His sister, Duchess Olga, stated: ‘He was wholly ignorant about governmental matters. Nicky had been trained as a soldier. He should have been taught statesmanship and he was not.’



Belief in autocracy

Nicholas believed totally in Tsarist Autocracy and argued that democratic elections would result in political collapse. In his opening manifesto of 1894, Nicholas declared: ‘I shall adhere as unswervingly as my father to the principle of autocracy.’

Use of violence

Nicholas used violence to suppress opposition to his regime. Alexander Kerensky stated: “Disloyal” workmen, peasants and students who were shot down, executed or exiled seemed to him mere monsters who must be destroyed for the sake of the country.’





FOCUS QUESTIONS 2.1

- 1 Describe Nicholas II's attitude to family and leadership.
- 2 What is your initial attitude to Nicholas II? Are you sympathetic or critical?

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Tsarina Alexandra's first major public appearance was at the funeral of Alexander III, her father-in-law. This was seen to be a bad omen for superstitious Russians who saw the future tsarina as 'coming to us behind a coffin'!

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Nicholas and Alexandra first met at the ages of 16 and 12 but fell madly in love when 20 and 17. They were one of the few royal couples who married for love, maintained a healthy marriage and slept in the same bed! They had pet names for each other including 'Loveykins', 'Sweetest Girly', 'Little Wifey', 'Sunny', 'Nicky' and 'Blue Boy'. Alexandra was pregnant within three months of their wedding.



◀ Source 2.19 Nicholas and Alexandra's wedding ceremony on 26 November 1896, as represented by painter Laurits Tuxen

2.3 Coronation of Tsar Nicholas II in 1896

Nicholas became the new Tsar in November 1894 but had his official coronation two years later. Holding the coronation after the accession of the new Tsar was common practice for two reasons: first, to allow for a time of mourning for the previous Tsar; and second, to allow time to plan the elaborate coronation ceremony. On 14 May 1896, Nicholas was proclaimed Tsar of all Russia. Nicholas's wife, Alexandra, was also crowned during the same ceremony as Tsarina Alexandra Feodorovna. The coronation of a Russian monarch was a highly religious ceremony, where the Tsar was blessed by the Church and presented with symbols of his rule – such as his robe, crown, sceptre and orb. Part of the ceremony was a significant sacred ritual where the Tsar and the priest received communion at the holy altar. Hence, the Tsar was anointed by God. The sacred and secular, the Church and state, and God and government were deliberately and symbolically linked.

Khodynka tragedy – 18 May 1896

As part of the coronation celebrations, Nicholas planned a present to the people of Russia. A free banquet was to be held four days after his coronation in a major park in Moscow, called the Khodynka Field, because it was the largest place that could hold the greatest number of Moscow citizens. Part of the celebration was a giveaway of gifts to each person – a bread roll, a piece of sausage, pretzels, gingerbread and a cup of beer, which was rumoured to have a gold coin at the bottom. Building for this exciting event included 20 new pubs, 150 tables and public theatres. Crowds began gathering the day before to try to get closer to the front, and therefore closer to the gifts. By 5 a.m. on the day of the celebration, estimates suggest that as many as 500 000 people were already gathered on the Khodynka Field, with 1800 police assembled to manage the crowds. But when rumours spread that there were not enough gifts for everyone, there was a catastrophic stampede. In the panic to reach the gift tables, or to flee the scene, 1389 people were trampled to death. Another 1300 were injured.

KEY STATISTIC 



▲ Source 2.20 Portrait of Tsar Nicholas II by Von Liphart



◀ Source 2.21 A painting representing the great crowd gathered at Khodynka Field to celebrate the royal coronation



When the newly crowned Tsar Nicholas and Tsarina Alexandra were informed of the tragedy, they spent the rest of the day visiting the injured in hospital and set up a fund for the families of the dead. Nicholas dismissed the officials who failed to control the situation. However, that evening he attended a celebration ball at the French embassy, which appalled the shocked public. Deeper themes emerged that from the very beginning of Tsar Nicholas's rule, there were concerns over his ability to manage the nation due to his weak leadership and indecisiveness, which meant that he often submitted to the advice of his older advisers.

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Nicholas's birthday on 6 May fell on Saint Job's day. Job was a man in the Bible who, although loved by God, was tested with a series of incredible personal disasters. Did the Khodynka tragedy prove that Nicholas's reign was doomed from the very beginning?

2.4 Long-term political problems

32

How was Tsarist Autocracy implemented?

There were four main pillars that held up tsarist power. It was these pillars that authorised and implemented the power of the Tsar.

The government

The official government system was made up of three key bodies: the Imperial Council, who were the Tsar's personal advisers and answerable only to him; the Cabinet of Ministers, each of whom was given responsibility over a specific department; and the Senate, who transformed the Tsar's ideas into state laws. Rather than sharing the Tsar's powers, these three bodies simply implemented his will. As they were directly appointed by the Tsar, the system promoted hostile infighting rather than collective responsibility or accountability.

The bureaucracy

bureaucracy a system of officials and administrators that manages a country

Okhrana the name given to the Tsar's secret police service to deal with opposition to the royal government

masses the general name given to the anonymous crowds of ordinary workers and peasants

Cossacks a fiercely independent people from the region on the Don River near the Black Sea

Every government requires a civil service to put official policies into practice. By 1900, this **bureaucracy** had been allowed to regress into a complex web of inefficiency and undeserved privilege. There were 14 levels of bureaucrats, each distinguished by unique uniforms, who relied on a varying scale of bribes in addition to their wages. Instead of fulfilling its desperately needed administrative function, the system merely created a noble upper class. The most crucial problem, however, stemmed from the arbitrary nature of autocracy, which was called *proizvol*. This caused significant issues because, in order to make decisions and address public grievances, the civil service, unable to develop policies officially, arbitrarily interpreted how the Tsar's laws were to be applied.

The police

The police system was divided into two groups. The first was the Tsar's secret police – the **Okhrana** – who protected the interests of the state. They were involved in surveillance of suspected enemies of tsarism such as socialist agitators and anarchists. The second group maintained law and order among the people. On average, there was only one police officer for every 3850 peasants. This meant that oppressive measures had to be introduced to keep the **masses** under control in times of significant unrest. To do this, the Tsar used the **Cossacks**. Their savage fighting on horseback prompted the government to offer them land in return for their loyalty to the Tsar and service in his army.

The Church

Orthodox Christianity had been the official religion of Russia since 989 CE and played a crucial role in legitimising the Tsar's autocratic powers. It was claimed that the authority of tsarism originated directly from God. The Church was used to further the power of the Tsar as the most important function of the Church was to preach obedience to the Tsar; spirituality came second. In fact, the Russian national anthem from 1833 to 1917 affirmed the link between God and the Tsar:

*God, save the Tsar!
Mighty and strong reign for our glory,
Reign for the dread of our enemies,
O Tsar of the Orthodox faith!
God, save the Tsar!*

Rather than being an independent voice, the **Orthodox Church** had been under state control since 1721. This relationship became more evident from the 1880s. Then, the social influence of the Church was used to reinforce conservative values in order to stifle receptiveness to revolutionary ideas and **movements**.

Orthodox Church

the traditional Russian Church that had both supported and benefited from the rule of the tsars

movements popular outbreaks of mass action by ordinary people

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

By 1900, half of the nation's primary schools were run by the Church, where children were trained to be loyal to the Tsar. The official book of religious teaching included the phrase: 'God commends us to love and obey from the inner most recesses of our heart every authority and particularly the Tsar.'

The image in Source 2.22 was produced on the 300th anniversary of the Romanov Dynasty in 1913 and provides a rich resource of how tsarism saw itself. The central title says 'Tercentenary of the Romanovs' and the main symbol is the double-headed eagle of power. On the right, there is a line of robed rulers and on the left, the influence of the Orthodox Church. Angels on each side and at the top represent God's ordination of the tsarist system.



FOCUS QUESTIONS 2.2

- 1 What is being conveyed in Source 2.22?
- 2 What makes you think that? What symbols are used?



2.5 Long-term social and economic problems

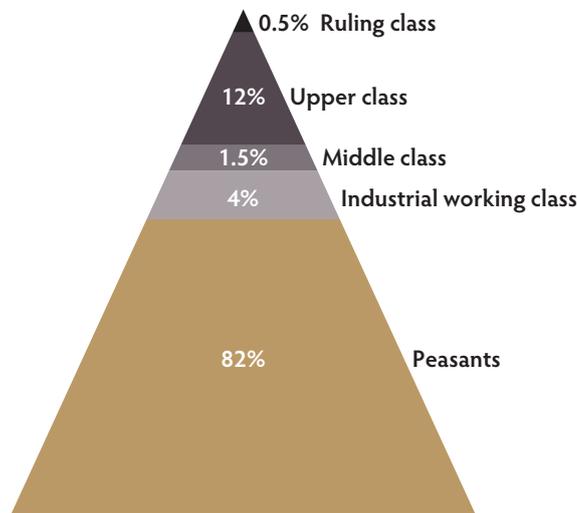
The official census of 1897 quantified the Russian population as the largest in Europe, with 122.9 million people. Two key categories emerged: 60 different nationalities (from Great Russians to nomadic Asian tribespeople) and five general social classes (from the royal family to the landless peasants). This was compounded by the fact that the Russian population was growing at a phenomenal rate and, by 1910, had increased to 161 million.

KEY
STATISTIC



The most significant problem, however, was not the size of the Russian population but its social structure of privilege. There are two important concepts here: 'utility' means value or usefulness to society; and 'merit' means personal skills and abilities. But Russian society was based on privilege by birth, not on utility or merit.

Breakdown of social structure



▲ Source 2.23 Russia's social structure according to the 1897 official census

FOCUS QUESTIONS 2.3

- 1 What percentage of the population are the privileged classes (ruling and upper)?
- 2 What percentage of the population are the 'working classes' (industrial and peasants)?
- 3 What surprises you about any of the percentages in this table?

Ruling class

The ruling class was the name given to the Tsar and the rest of the royal family, together with the members of government. The ruling class made up only a tiny fraction of the population, just 0.5 per cent.

Upper class

'Gentry' or 'nobility' are alternative terms for the privileged class, which made up 12 per cent of the population, and included hereditary landowning nobles, wealthy merchants, Church leaders, leaders in the bureaucracy and the higher ranks within the army. This class was unified by its total protection from the harsh reality of Russian life, with members' incomes disproportionately high given their low workload.

The famous Russian novelist and Nobel prize for Literature winner Count Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), who was himself born into a wealthy family, wrote:

In that house two women hardly manage to wash up all the crockery for the gentlefolk who have just had a meal, and two peasants in dress coats are running up and down stairs serving coffee, tea, wine, and seltzer water. Upstairs a table is spread: they have just finished eating and will soon eat again till midnight, till three o'clock, often till cock-crow. Some of them sit smoking and playing cards, others sit and smoke talking liberalism; others move about from place to place, eat, smoke, and not knowing what to do decide to go out for a drive. There are some fifteen healthy men and women there and some thirty able-bodied men and women servants working for them.

Source 2.24 *What Then Must We Do?* (1886), Leo Tolstoy



▲ Source 2.25 An upper-class lunch on the patio of a country house

Middle class

This middle class is difficult to categorise because of its lack of unity or common function. It began developing towards the end of the 1800s, along with the growth of heavy industries in the major cities and light industries in the towns. It was made up of professions like small-scale manufacturers, factory managers, technical specialists, clerks and white-collar workers. This class also included the educated thinkers, writers and artists, sometimes referred to as ‘the intelligentsia’.

Industrial working class

This growing industrial working class was called the **proletariat** by Marxist revolutionary theory. The lives of the families that made up this class are discussed later in this chapter, in reference to the impact of Sergei **Witte**’s industrial reforms.

proletariat the name Karl Marx gave to industrial workers

Witte the influential Finance Minister and later Prime Minister, who rapidly increased Russian industry and completed the Trans-Siberian Railway



▲ Source 2.26 A photograph from 1912 showing the town of Hughesovka, Russia. Workers' housing can be seen in the foreground, and the local Orthodox Church is in the background on the left.

Peasants

Agriculture was the largest part and therefore, the foundation of the Russian economy. But despite the estimated 82 million peasants who produced over half of the nation's income, the **agrarian** economy was underdeveloped. It was simply one of the worst in Europe. The system of agriculture lacked capital investment and technological advancement. Raising and utilising livestock for labour was limited. Any advancements, such as building new railways, were often at the expense of farming land. Agricultural problems limited the potential growth of the Russian economy.

agrarian relating to the production of foodstuffs in the countryside

peasants the lowest class in the social system who were dependent on working the land, which they either owned or rented; also called serfs

feudal the medieval social system whereby the privileged nobles controlled the hard-working peasants

famine a desperate situation where food is scarce, resulting in severe malnutrition and often death

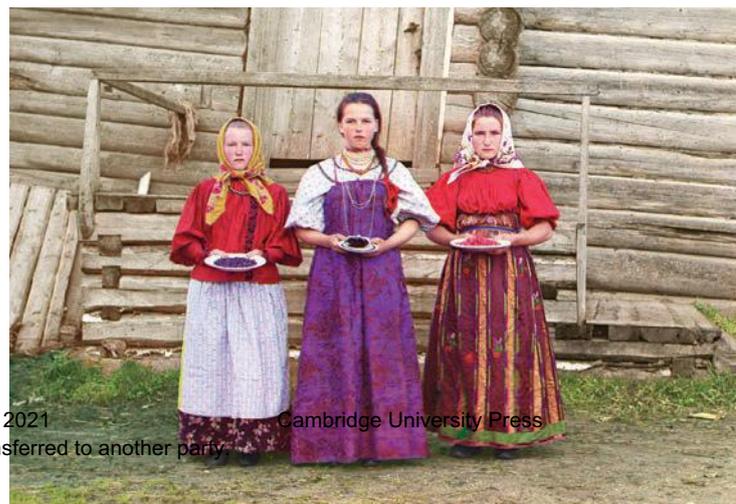
illiteracy the inability to read or write

The most suitable land for growing crops and grazing livestock was in European Russia. The majority of the remaining land was located too far north in freezing climates. Because there was not enough productive land to go around, rather than benefiting the system, the huge **peasant** population created overcrowding and poor conditions. What land peasant families did have was divided equally among all members. The cold climate also meant that, in most areas, the growing season was only between four and six months, as opposed to the eight to nine months in warmer Western Europe. The climate also influenced the system of farming narrow strips of land and this resulted in the ongoing use of outdated equipment and techniques. Such a **feudal** agrarian system meant that the amount of food produced rarely met the nation's demands and was especially scarce in times of **famine**. Added to this was the conservative nature of the rural peasantry, whose high **illiteracy** rate meant that many were resistant to change. The ruling classes were content with the backward nature of the 'dark masses', fearing that educating them might be socially or politically dangerous. The difficulty of rural life meant that there was often social discontent and a push for government reforms.

▼ Source 2.27 *A Busy Time for the Mowers*, a painting by Grigoriy Mjassojedow of peasants in the grain fields in 1887



▼ Source 2.28 One of Prokudin-Gorskii's (Tsar Nicholas's official photographer) stunning colour photos of Russian peasant girls from around 1909





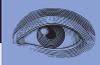
▲ **Source 2.29** Peasants planting potatoes near the Volga River in 1910. Peasants worked hard in difficult conditions. (Photo by Prokudin-Gorskii)

The poor condition of the peasantry was worsened by another severe famine that began in 1891. Despite public appeals, relief agencies and sponsored soup kitchens, over 350 000 peasants died from starvation and disease during this famine. Semenov, a literate and radical peasant, suggested that grievances about social inequality intensified during the famine period:

The scenes of starvation were deeply distressing, and it was all the more disturbing to see that amidst all this suffering and death there were sprawling huge estates, beautiful and well-furnished manors, and that the grand old life of the squires, with its jolly hunts and balls, its banquets and its concerts, carried on as usual.

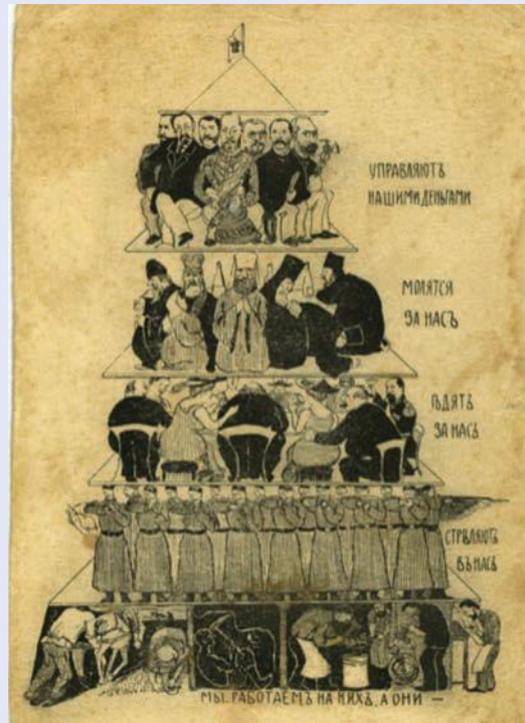
Source 2.30 Cited in Oxley, *Russia: From Tsars to Commissars*, p. 46

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 2.2: VISUAL ANALYSIS



This sarcastic socialist cartoon from 1900 highlights the divisions between the classes and the inequality of the social structure, with the Tsar at the top and the workers at the bottom. There is also an alternative cartoon that is drawn in the shape of a wedding cake, mockingly symbolising the fragmentation of privilege within Russian society instead of the unity and harmony of marriage.

- 1 Identify the class or group represented in each layer of the cartoon. What are they doing?
- 2 What is this cartoon criticising about the social structure?



► **Source 2.31**
*They rule with our money,
 They pray for us,
 They eat for us,
 They shoot at us,
 We work for them all...*

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

If a peasant had an insulting nickname (like 'smelly' or 'ugly') for enough years, it would be written down and formalised as their surname. It could not be changed without the Tsar's official consent.



2.6 What attempts were made to reform Russia's economic backwardness?

urban of the city

Analysis of the proportions of the population in each social class provides an insight into the lack of economic progression. Making up only 1.5 and 4.0 per cent, respectively, of the total population, the **urban** middle class and their industrial worker employees operated on a remarkably small scale in comparison to the 82 per cent of agricultural 'peasant' workers. The immense size of Russia was compounded by its poor transport networks and low available capital for attracting foreign investors. In every way, Russia was a backward and outdated agricultural society in comparison to the aggressive growth experienced by enterprising industrial countries like Germany, Britain and the United States. In the 1890s, the Russian government finally accepted that if Russia was to remain a great power it could not remain a country of peasants surrounded by countries who had industrial power. Russia had to modernise. Three crucial periods of reforms under Nicholas II attempted to address this: Witte in industry (this chapter); Dumas in politics (see Chapter 6); and Stolypin in agriculture (see Chapter 6).

2.7 SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL



Sergei Witte (1849–1915)

Witte's industrial reforms

For a tsarist finance minister, Witte's background was unusual. He was not a member of the upper-class gentry but instead had made a career in business and railway administration. His reforms mirrored these interests, which encouraged closer contact between the government and business.

▲ Source 2.32 Tsarist Minister of Finance Sergei Witte

Position	Minister of Finance, 1892–1903
Aims	Witte has been described as the architect of Russia's industrialisation. He aimed to modernise Russia's industry in order to improve Russia's military strength by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ attracting foreign capital to invest in Russian industry ▪ dramatically expanding the railway system to improve exports and trade, communication and movement of troops ▪ stimulating the increase of independent entrepreneurs

continued ...

... continued

Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sought advice from experts in modernised countries 	
Opposition to reforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Russian industrial practices and equipment were backward suspicion from royal court and elements of government who were resistant to change military often disrupted building of railways 	
Key achievements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> stabilised the Russian economy oversaw dramatic increase in industrial production the centrepiece of Witte's reform strategy was building the Trans-Siberian Railway from Moscow in the west to Vladivostok in the Far East 	<p>Trans-Siberian Railway constructed by Witte and opened in 1905; travelled across the length of Russia from Moscow to Vladivostok and therefore had major benefits for trade, the transport of goods and troop movements</p> <p>rouble Russian currency</p> <p>industrialisation the process of making a country more modern through the development of machines and factories</p>
Negative social impact of industrialisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> poor working conditions severe overcrowding imposition of heavy taxes with high interest rates 	
Historian perspectives	<p>Favourable perspective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> dramatic improvement to Russian industry attracted large investments from foreign countries, from 98 million roubles in 1880 to 911 million roubles in 1900 <p>Critical perspective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> made Russia too dependent on foreign investment only focused on industrialisation to the detriment of Russia's agricultural needs improvements a result of worldwide industrial boom, not just Witte's reforms <p>Many historians still doubt the 'success' of Witte's reforms.</p>	
Career outcome	Promoted to Prime Minister in 1905 but dismissed in 1906	

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Witte's projects were expensive. But 30–40 per cent of the Russian government revenue came from sales of vodka. So, the vodka trade provided part of the money for economic reforms!

Results of Witte's industrial reforms

The growth in industry between 1890 and 1900 was remarkable:

- Production of iron and steel rose from 9 to 76 million poods a year (1 pood = 36.11 pounds).
- Coal output tripled.
- Cotton cloth production increased by two-thirds.
- Major cities increased in size: Moscow was the fastest growing city outside of New York and one of the 10 biggest cities in the world.



Source 1: Population growth in cities, 1881–1910

	St Petersburg	Moscow
1890	1 033 600	1 038 600
1900	1 439 600	1 345 000
1910	1 905 600	1 617 700

Source 2: Railway growth in kilometres of track

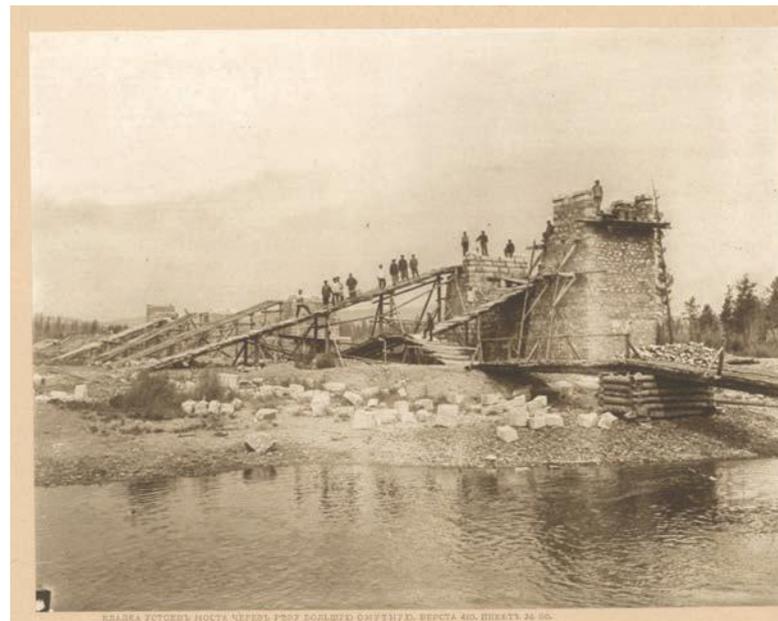
Year	Kilometres of track
1866	4 800
1881	21 232
1891	31 216
1900	53 232
1913	70 160

FOCUS QUESTIONS 2.4

- 1 Using any figures in Source 1, write a sentence that you can use in assessment. Think about the dates, statistics, calculate percentage increases etc. For example, 'Witte's reforms promoted population growth in St Petersburg of 25 per cent between 1900 and 1910.'
- 2 Similarly, using any figures in Source 2, write a sentence that you can use in assessment. For example, 'Witte's reforms more than doubled the railway tracks between 1891 and 1913.'
- 3 Why are statistics helpful evidence to use in your written responses?



▲ Source 2.33 Building the Trans-Siberian Railway



▲ Source 2.34 Building the railway bridge at Amur in the early 1900s

Summary of long-term causes of the Revolution

Long-term causes	Explanation
Political problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ System of autocracy ▪ Weak and reluctant leadership of Tsar Nicholas II
Economic problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Backward agrarian practices based around manual labour of peasants
Social problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rigid social structure that promoted privilege ▪ Government willingness to use violence against opponents

THE STORY SO FAR

- Russia's political system was based on autocracy where the Tsar's powers were not shared or limited.
- The Tsar's autocratic powers were believed to have been granted by God. They were implemented through an intertwined system of government and bureaucracy, enforced by strict police oppression and legitimised by the Orthodox Church.
- Tsar Nicholas II was a reluctant leader who began his rule in 1894 after the unexpected death of his dominating father, Alexander III. Nicholas was officially crowned as a Tsar in the Romanov Dynasty in 1896.
- The social system featured the privilege of the upper classes and the exploitation of the urban industrial workers and rural peasants.
- Sergei Witte, Minister for Finance from 1892 to 1903, initiated progressive reforms that rapidly increased industrial growth.

Use the QR code or visit the digital version of the book and watch the video summarising the chapter.



Develop your historical thinking skills

Define key terms

Use information from this chapter to define these key terms.

- agrarian
- industrialisation
- privilege
- Romanov Dynasty
- Tsarist Autocracy

Establishing historical significance

Use evidence from this chapter to write short paragraph answers.

- 1 Explain the nature of Tsar Nicholas II and his leadership.
- 2 How was Tsarist Autocracy implemented?
- 3 What were the long-term social and economic problems?
- 4 What were the aims and results of Sergei Witte's industrial reforms?



Using quotes as evidence

Write a sentence using a short phrase from one of the quotes below or contrast the views from a few quotes. You can also use any of the quotes in this chapter. Quotes can be used directly or paraphrased in your own words.

I will preserve the principle of autocracy as sternly and as unflinchingly as my late father. **Tsar Nicholas II**

The Emperor Nicholas II is one of the most pathetic figures in history ... it was he who was to cause the catastrophe which has brought it to utter ruin and misery. **British Ambassador Buchanan, eyewitness**

[Nicholas] lacked in grasping the realities of Russia. **John Hite, historian**

Nicholas II ... was less fit for the role of an autocrat than any sovereign ... he was a man of weak character, limited intelligence, and singular lack of initiative. **W.H. Chamberlin, historian**

I pity the Tsar. I pity Russia. He is a poor and unhappy sovereign. What did he inherit and what will he leave? He is obviously a good and quite intelligent man, but he lacks willpower, and it is from that character that his state defects developed, that is, his defects as a ruler, especially an autocratic and absolute ruler. **Sergei Witte, Russian Finance Minister**

The tsarist regime was pregnant with irreconcilable internal contradictions that it had no capacity to resolve. **Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, historian**

Constructing historical arguments

Write an essay using evidence from this chapter to develop your own argument.

- 1 'Nicholas was not the main problem. It was the long-term political, economic and social problems.' To what extent do you agree with this view? Use evidence to support your argument.
- 2 'The backward economy in Russia was the most significant factor that weakened Nicholas II's rule.' To what extent do you agree with this view? Use evidence to support your argument.

Analysing historical sources as evidence

Compare the following two sources produced by the last two Russian tsars.

Source 1: Manifesto of Alexander III (Nicholas's father)	Source 2: Statement by Tsar Nicholas II
'The voice of God commands Us to place Ourselves with assurance at the head of the absolute power. Confident in the Divine Providence and in His supreme wisdom, full of faith in the justice and strength of the autocracy which We are called to maintain, We shall preside serenely over the destinies of Our empire, which henceforth will be discussed between God and Ourselves alone.'	'I have a firm, an absolute conviction that the fate of Russia – that my own fate and that of my family – is in the hands of God who has placed me where I am. Whatever may happen to me, I shall bow to His will with the consciousness of never having had any thought other than that of serving the country which He has entrusted to me.'

- 1 Using both sources, describe who Alexander and Nicholas believe is the source of their absolute power. Use direct quotes from the extracts to support your response.
- 2 What does Source 1 state is the role of the Tsar?
- 3 What does Source 2 state was Nicholas's main focus?
- 4 Compare the tone and message of both sources. Which do you find more convincing and why?

Analysing historian's interpretations

Debate: Why was modernisation such a threat to Nicholas?

David Christian (1946–present)

Nationality: Born in America but taught and lives in Australia

Helpful book: *Power and Privilege*, Pitman Publishers, 1986

He initiated the 'Big History' project in Australian and American secondary schools, sponsored by founder of Microsoft Bill Gates.

Point of view

Christian argues that Tsar Nicholas II found himself trapped in a traditional society facing the challenge of a modern capitalist industrialised world. Christian argues that Nicholas was nervous and half-hearted about pursuing modernisation because it would require too many changes to the country he had inherited.

Reasons (evidence)

Russia's agrarian society was based on its social structure of privilege. So, the first option to modernise Russia was a focus on *intensive growth*, which would mean transforming its social structure which would, in turn, undermine its political structures. The second option was pursuing *extensive growth*, which would preserve traditional structures, but was limited in scope because it ran the risk of running out of resources.

Quote

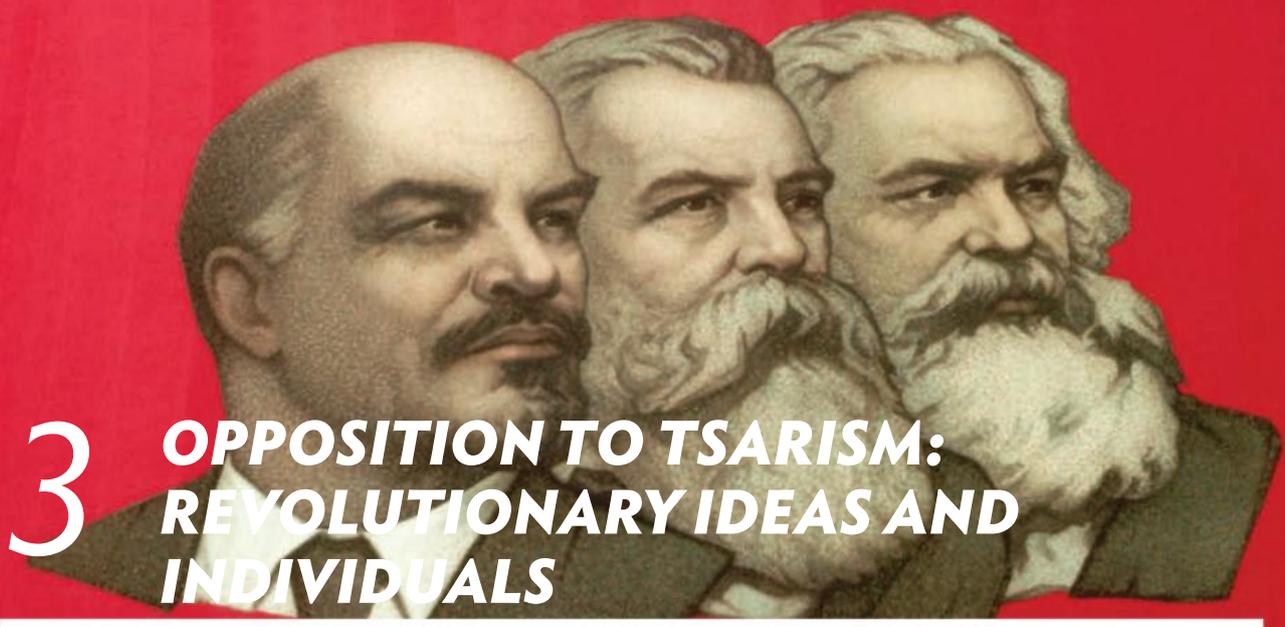
To compete successfully with capitalist societies, traditional governments had to destroy the social structures on which they were based. Not surprisingly, most traditional governments found this conclusion unacceptable.

What's your point of view?

What's your point of view about how Tsar Nicholas II and Sergei Witte responded to the need to modernise?



▲ Source 2.35 David Christian



3 **OPPOSITION TO TSARISM: REVOLUTIONARY IDEAS AND INDIVIDUALS**

Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communist Revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working men of all countries unite.

– Final sentences of MARX AND ENGELS'S 1848 *THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO*

ISBN 9781108886895

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Overview

Historians argue about the role ideas, **leaders** and movements play in causing revolutions. Do revolutions begin because radical ideas become increasingly influential? Do they arise out of many years of protesting against the current regime by intelligent leaders? Do popular movements or political parties simply force rapid change? Or perhaps it is the relationship between each of these factors. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the significant ideas, individuals and movements that opposed the system of tsarism, so that you can begin to determine for yourself how these factors interlinked.

Key issues

After completing this chapter, you should be able to answer these questions.

- What were the revolutionary ideas?
- How was revolutionary leadership expressed?
- Who was Vladimir Lenin?

Digital resources for this chapter

In the *Interactive Textbook*:

-  Video and audio sources and questions
-  Digital activities

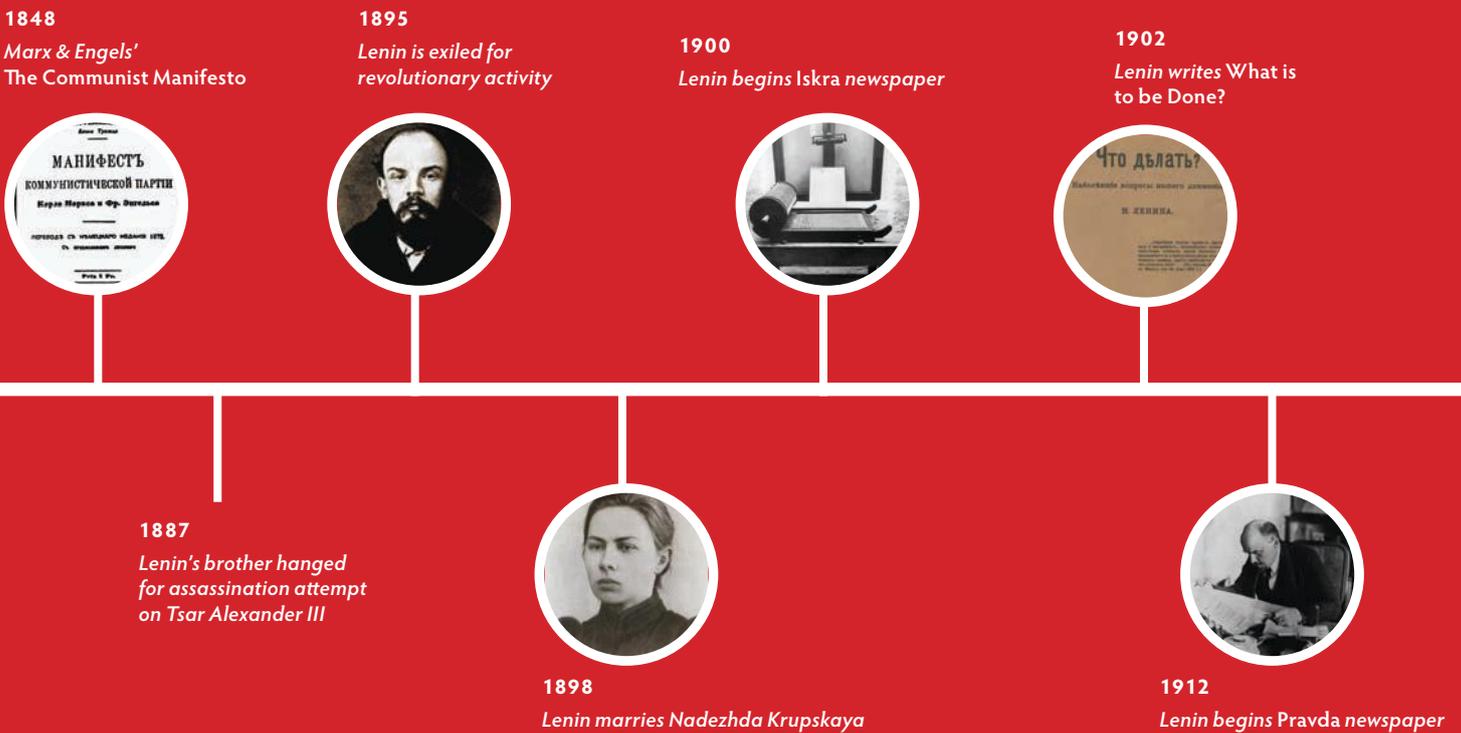
◀ Source 3.0 A wall hanging of Lenin, Engels and Marx in Red Square, Moscow

Flow of chapter



Chapter timeline

What are the key events of the Russian Revolution covered in this chapter?



3.1 What were the revolutionary ideas?

Defining ideology

Ideology is the set of ideas or beliefs that characterise a particular revolutionary movement. Revolutionary leaders often adopt a specific ideology to explain to the masses their dreams for the country's future. Such ideas need to be attractive to the wider population by directly addressing and providing readily achievable solutions to society's problems.

Revolutionary ideologies have a number of important features: they harness mass philosophies, like nationalism, equality or peace; they sometimes deliberately exaggerate or distort the truth; they are often a source for slogans and revolutionary symbols, and they are a means of social control.

ideology the set of ideas or beliefs that characterise a particular revolutionary movement

Introducing Marxism

A solid understanding of Marxist theory is crucial for understanding the Russian Revolution. An appreciation of **Marxism** helps us to empathise with the revolutionaries who devoted their lives to implementing it in Europe. Writers who lack such historical empathy often describe **communism** as a mere 'experiment', the implications being that it was always a flawed idea, and therefore doomed.

Marxism the devotion to and practice of the communist ideology of Karl Marx

communism a system of economic and social organisation in which industry, capital, land and other means of production are owned and controlled by the community as a whole

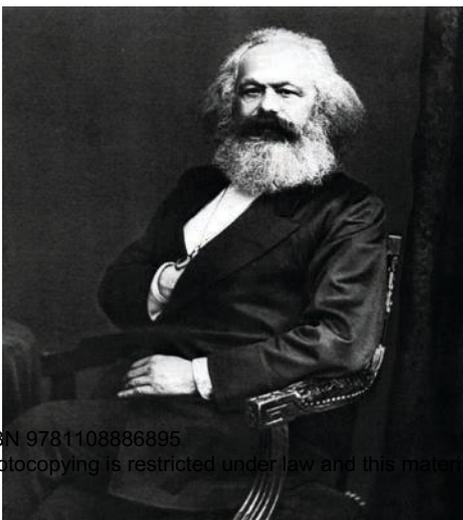
Background observations of Marx and Engels

Karl **Marx** and Friedrich **Engels** were German revolutionaries whose thinking changed the world. Since the Industrial Revolution, the aim of business had been to lower costs and raise profits. As the largest cost was often employee wages, labour was exploited by factory owners. Visiting factories together in northern England formed strong conclusions that the life of the industrial worker in 1846 at best was one of 'utter monotony; it is his mission to be bored every day', but at worst 'children [are] deformed, men enfeebled, limbs crushed, whole generations wrecked, afflicted with disease and infirmity, purely to fill the purses of the **bourgeoisie**'. Observation of similar exploitation in Germany convinced Marx and Engels that this was an unjust international problem requiring a radical solution.

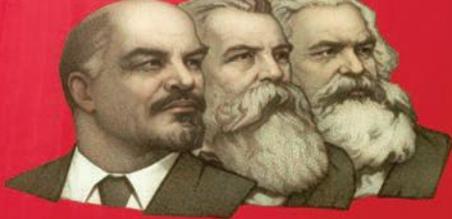
Marx Karl Marx was a German theorist who, along with Friedrich Engels, wrote *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848

Engels Friedrich Engels was a German theorist who, along with Karl Marx, wrote *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848

bourgeoisie the upper middle class, including factory owners. To Marx and Engels (and then later, Lenin) the bourgeoisie was the natural class enemy of the proletariat



◀ Source 3.1 Left: Karl Marx Right: Friedrich Engels



AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Though remembered today as an intellectual, as a 17-year-old student at the University of Bonn in Germany, Marx was known as a rebel who ran up heavy debts, was imprisoned for drunkenness, and even participated in a duel!

The Communist Manifesto (1848)

In 1847, Marx (aged 28) and Engels (aged 26) became two of the founding members of the Communist League. At the League's request, the two drafted a pamphlet criticising the capitalist system and explaining the communist understanding of human history. The pamphlet was only 12 000 words long and was written hurriedly in six weeks after the turmoil of the 1848 revolutions. It was not edited and therefore contained many errors. Despite this, Marx was always confident that he had 'solved the riddle of man's existence'. He believed that his writings were scientific because it implied that his ideas were moving closer to certainty. Published in 1848 and called *The Communist Manifesto*, this now universally recognised document revealed their philosophical answer to society's problems – a new political system called

The Communist Manifesto published by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848, it promoted the end of capitalism and the inevitable rise of communism

communism. Marx wrote: 'The theory of communism may be summed up in one sentence: abolish all private property.'



▲ Source 3.2 The Russian edition of Marx and Engels's *The Communist Manifesto*, published in 1882

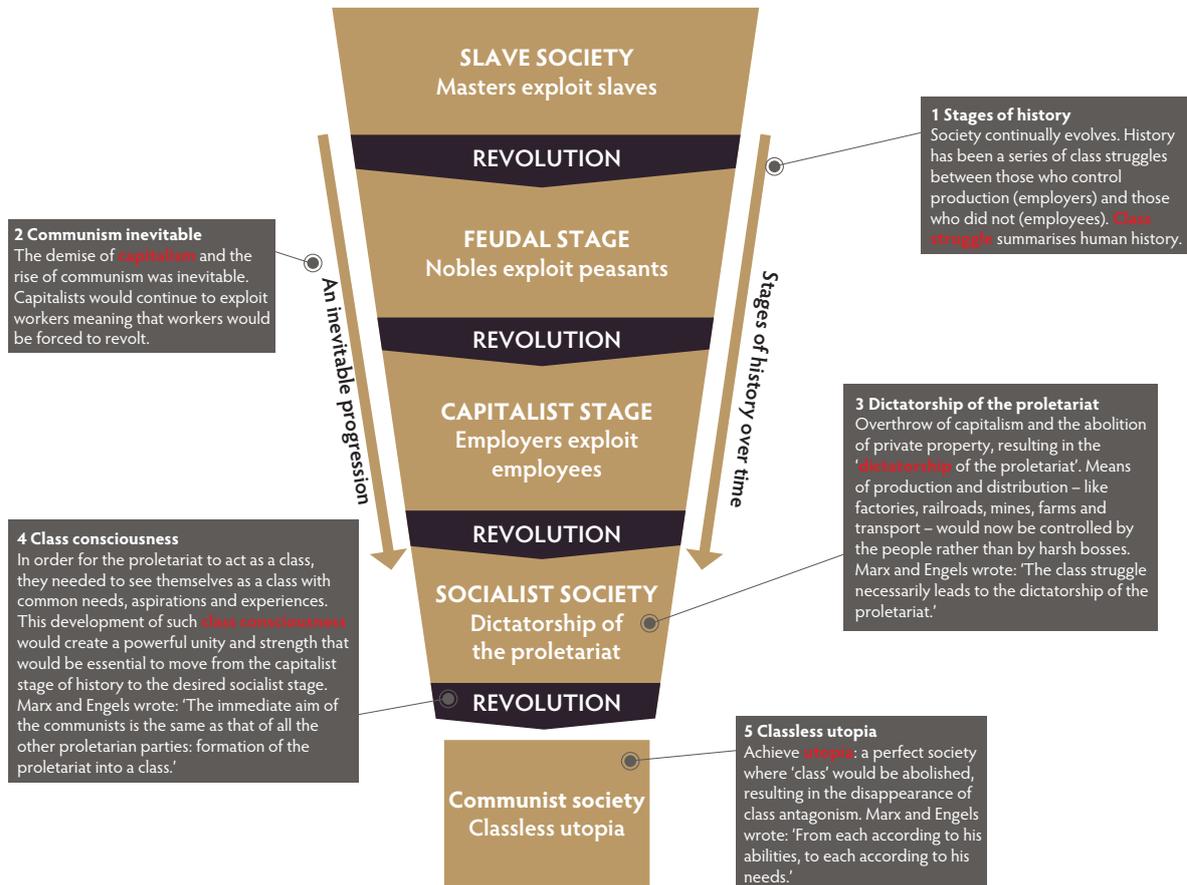


▲ Source 3.3 A statue of Marx and Engels in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

European system: Definition of capitalism	Marx and Engels's system: Definition of communism
An economic system in which investment in, and ownership of, the means of production, distribution and exchange of wealth is in the hands of private individuals and businesses.	A system of economic and social organisation in which industry, capital, land and other means of production are owned and controlled by the state.

Marxist theory explained

Marxist theory identifies several stages of human history, each with the ruling class exploiting the working class. The overthrow of this oppression was inevitable to create a pure communist society.



▲ Source 3.4 Marx's stages of history

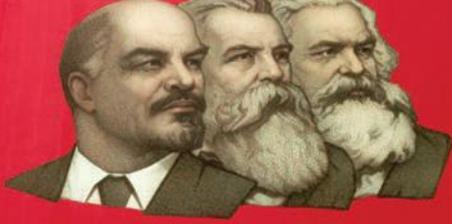
class struggle the inevitable conflict between the working and ruling classes due to the exploitation of the former by the latter

capitalism an economic system in which investment in and ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange of wealth is in the hands of private individuals and corporations

class consciousness the process of the workers developing such a deep discontent with their exploitation that they are willing to unite to create a revolution

dictatorship a system where a single leader has dominant control over the government and country

utopia a perfect society without social problems



What is the difference between socialism and communism?

Socialism – dictatorship of the proletariat

Communism – classless utopia

Communism and socialism share many similarities, but communism can be considered as a 'higher' or more advanced form of socialism. Socialism is the necessary economic pre-step to reaching such a politically classless and stateless society. While focusing on the dictatorship of the proletariat, socialism is managed from a centralised government. In pure communism, the central government is not needed because class is abolished. Hence, property is owned collectively under communism, where all people are considered equal and are provided for equally.

PHILOSOPHER'S CORNER



Socialism

You have two cows and give one to your neighbour.

Communism

You have two cows; the government takes both and gives you the milk.

Fascism

You have two cows; the government takes both and sells you the milk.

Nazism

You have two cows; the government takes both and shoots you.

Bureaucratism

You have two cows; the government takes both, shoots one, milks the other and throws the milk away.

Capitalism

You have two cows; you sell one and buy a bull.

Assumptions of Marxism

Underlying Marx and Engels's writings about communism were five core assumptions.

Assumption 1: Conflicts are only *between* classes and never *within* them.

Assumption 2: Human nature, and therefore human behaviour, are always consistent.

Assumption 3: Class loyalty is significantly more important than national loyalty.

Assumption 4: Capitalism is an unstable system that will get worse before collapsing.

Assumption 5: With the inevitable demise of capitalism, the rise of communism is therefore also inevitable.

FOCUS QUESTIONS 3.1

- 1 To what extent do you agree with the descriptions of political systems in the Philosopher's Corner?
- 2 To what extent do you think each of these assumptions of Marxism are true? Explain why you think that.

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Marx never did manual work himself, despite writing about the lives of working families. In fact, he only worked for two years and then was financially supported by his friend Engels. Marx's mother once said, 'If only Karl made capital instead of just writing about it'.

3.2 How was revolutionary leadership expressed?

Defining leadership

Revolutions become synonymous with their leaders: Robespierre symbolises the French Revolution; Mao, the Chinese; and **Lenin**, the Russian. In reality, the control of revolutionary leaders over events and policies was far more tenuous and fragile than the word itself suggests. Years of planning were not successful in inspiring the outbreak of revolution. Instead, the model for revolutions suggests that after missing the initial outbreak of revolution through exile or imprisonment, the leader's main role begins in harnessing the power of the crowds after their return. A common perspective among historians is that revolutions are begun by spontaneous popular movements that are then directed by powerful leaders through the use of influential ideas. Historian William Doyle argued: 'It would be truer to say that the revolutionaries had been created by the revolution.'

KEY
QUOTE



Lenin the most recognised Marxist revolutionary who led the Bolshevik Party and eventually overthrew the government in October 1917

51

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Lenin's real surname was Ulyanov. He used more than 160 code names to disguise his writing. He began using the name 'Lenin' consistently from 1901 because it was the most popular of his writing names. The name 'Lenin' may have come from the Lena River in Siberia.

What is Marxism–Leninism?

The theory of communism was primarily proposed for industrialised countries like Germany, France and England, rather than the agrarian-based Russia. Whereas Marx and Engels simply believed that a classless utopia would spontaneously occur, Lenin believed that it needed to be planned and coordinated. Lenin's arguments about how Marx and Engels's theoretical ideas should be interpreted were called **Leninism**. Lenin wanted Marxism implemented in Russia in his lifetime, by organising the transfer of power from capitalism to socialism. But the major problem in transitioning power to the working class was first defeating Tsarist Autocracy.

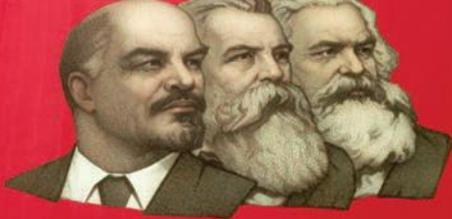
Leninism Lenin's interpretation of how Marxism could be achieved in Russia

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Despite his immense stature in monuments depicting him, Lenin was only 165 centimetres (5 feet, 5 inches) tall. Tsar Nicholas was only just taller at 170 cm.

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

As oppression of women and prostitution was based on exploitation, Marxists believed that it would decline and disappear once a communist state was established.



3.3 SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL



Vladimir Lenin (1870–1924)

1870–89

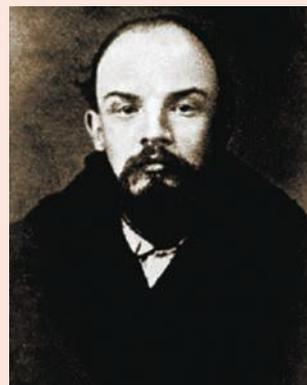
- Born into a middle-class family in the province of Kazan in 1870 as Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov.
- Excelled throughout high school, with one report card reading: 'Quite talented, invariably diligent, prompt and reliable.'
- Revolutionary impulses developed after brother hanged in 1887 for assassination attempt on Tsar Alexander III, father of Nicholas II.
- Was on the Tsar's list of 'dangerous persons' from the age of 17 onwards.
- Managed the family farm in Samara from 1889, where he once successfully sued the neighbouring peasant family for letting their cattle walk over his crops.
- Was officially reported to the Ministry of Education while at Kazan University for 'secretiveness, inattention and impoliteness'.
- Graduated as a lawyer.



▲ Source 3.5 Lenin (far right, seated) with his family, 1879 (aged 9)

1890–99

- Avid reading of Marx had turned him into a committed Marxist revolutionary.
- During the 1891–92 famine he was not in favour of providing aid, hoping it would 'cause the peasant to reflect on the fundamental facts of capitalist society' and 'destroy his faith in the Tsar'.
- Did only two years' paid work, in 1892–94, as an assistant to a barrister. Lived off his mother's pension, a party salary and private supporters. Writings and newspapers brought only a meagre income.



▲ Source 3.6 Lenin, 1896 (aged 26)

- Arrested in St Petersburg for 'subversive activity' in 1895.
- Exiled to Siberia in 1895–99, which provided the opportunity to study and write.
- Adopted the pen name 'Lenin' (the most famous of his 160 revolutionary aliases).
- Met and married Nadezhda **Krupskaya** in Siberia in July 1898, but had no children with her.

- Lenin's wife, Krupskaya, wrote her own revolutionary book called *The Woman Worker* in 1900, which focused on Marxist solutions to the use of female labour.

1900–09

Iskra revolutionary newspaper started by Lenin in 1900; meaning 'Spark'

- Released from exile in 1900 and began revolutionary newspaper called **Iskra**, meaning 'Spark', taken from a phrase used by the troops who had rebelled against the Tsar, known as the Decembrists of 1825, 'a spark will start a big blaze'.
- Published *What Is to Be Done?* in 1902.
- Led the Bolshevik faction of the Social Democratic Party in 1903.
- Played no role in the 1905 Revolution and only returned to St Petersburg in December.
- Exiled again from 1906 to 1917.

continued ...

... continued

1910–17

- Began a relationship with the young and enthusiastic revolutionary Inessa **Armand** in Paris from 1910, forming an accepted trio with Lenin's wife.
- Began a daily newspaper called **Pravda**, meaning 'Truth', in 1912.
- Was exiled to Switzerland during the war years while his wife Krupskaya continued her own revolutionary work from Sweden.
- Badly shaken by his mother's death in July 1916.
- Returned to Petrograd in April 1917 after the February Revolution and then initiated the Bolshevik takeover of October 1917.

Armand Inessa Armand, a passionate revolutionary who met Lenin in Paris in 1910 and became his mistress

Pravda Lenin's daily newspaper, meaning 'Truth', begun in 1912



▲ Source 3.7 Nadezhda Krupskaya in her youth in the 1890s



▲ Source 3.8 Inessa Armand in 1910



▲ Source 3.9 Lenin, 1918 (aged 48)

For details on Lenin's life after 1917, see Chapter 16.

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Marx is buried in a prominent position in Highgate Cemetery in London. Ironically, his grave screams of capitalism with a massive granite tomb complete with his head modelled in bronze. Inscribed in gold letters are the words: 'Workers of all lands unite: philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways – the point however is to change it.' Interestingly, visitors to his grave peaked during the global economic recession in 2008.

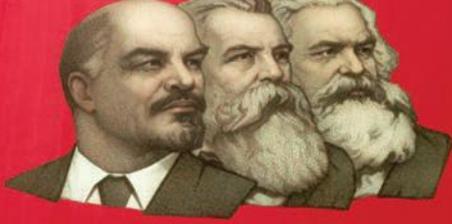
THE STORY SO FAR

- Opposition to tsarism was not new in the 1900s. The fortunes of revolutionary ideas and leaders rose and fell throughout the 1800s.
- The key idea that inspired many revolutionaries was Marxism, an economic and political theory proposing that history was a series of class struggles inevitably resulting in the downfall of capitalism and the victory of the workers.
- Lenin, leader of the Bolshevik Party from 1903, had been politically active and agitating for revolution since his brother's death.



Use the QR code or visit the digital version of the book and watch the video summarising the chapter.





Develop your historical thinking skills

Define key terms

Use information from this chapter to define these key terms.

- ideology
- *Iskra* and *Pravda*
- Marxism
- Marxism–Leninism
- Proletariat

Establishing historical significance

Use evidence from this chapter to explain these issues.

- 1 Explain the theory of Marxism. In your response, you must include the words ‘inevitable’, ‘stages of history’, ‘proletariat’ and ‘utopia’.
- 2 Explain how Lenin’s background made him an ideal revolutionary.

Using quotes as evidence

Write a sentence using a short phrase from one of the quotes below or contrast the views from a few quotes. You can also use any of the quotes in this chapter. Quotes can be used directly or paraphrased in your own words.

In tsarist Russia the capitalist yoke was aggravated by the yoke of tsardom. The workers not only suffered from capitalist exploitation, from inhuman toil, but, in common with the whole people, suffered from a lack of all rights. **History of the CPSU Short-course, official history written by the Russian Government**

Without a revolutionary theory, there cannot be a revolutionary movement. **Vladimir Lenin, Marxist revolutionary**

A revolution is impossible without a revolutionary situation; furthermore, not every revolutionary situation leads to revolution. **Vladimir Lenin, Marxist revolutionary**

Nicholas II inherited from his ancestors not only a giant empire, but also a revolution. **Leon Trotsky, Marxist revolutionary**

Nothing is more fatal than a belief that history’s course was inevitable. **Dominic Lieven, historian**

Communism rested on a faulty philosophy of history as well as an unrealistic psychological doctrine. **Richard Pipes, historian**

Constructing historical arguments

Write an essay using evidence from this chapter to develop your own argument.

- 1 ‘The idea of Marxism was totally opposite to the idea of Tsarist Autocracy. It was impossible for both to exist in the same society.’ To what extent do you agree with this view? Use evidence to support your argument.

Analysing historical sources as evidence

Lenin’s *What Is to Be Done?* (1902)

Lenin’s prolific writing became his main and most influential form of communication with other revolutionaries. This document was written in the context of a debate with the Mensheviks as to what type of group would be most likely to achieve the goal of revolution.

A small, tight, solid nucleus of the most dependable, experienced and hardened workers having trustworthy representatives in the main regions and connected by all the rules of secrecy with the organization of revolutionaries can quite capably, with the widest support of the masses and without any formal organization, fulfil all functions of a professional organization, in a manner desirable to a Social-Democratic movement ...

The moral from this is simple: if we begin with a solid foundation of strong organization of revolutionaries, we can guarantee the stability of the movement as a whole and realize the goals of Social-Democracy and of trade unions. If we, however, begin with a wide workers' organization, supposedly the most accessible to the masses (but in fact is the most accessible to the gendarmes, and makes revolutionaries most accessible to the police) we shall not achieve one goal nor the other ...



▲ Source 3.10 The cover of Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?* (1902)

- 1 In the opening sentence of this extract, Lenin outlines what type of worker was needed to achieve revolution. Make a list of the words Lenin uses to describe the ideal revolutionary workers group.
- 2 In the final sentence, Lenin provides a warning about the danger of big or 'wide' revolutionary groups. What is this warning?

Analysing historian's interpretations

Debate: How valuable is the idea of Marxism?

A.J.P. Taylor

Nationality: British

Helpful book: Taylor wrote the introductions to British editions of Marx's *The Communist Manifesto*

Point of view

Despite their promises, Marxist revolutions do not benefit the proletariat, the workers.

Reasons (evidence)

Revolutions are not made by the proletariat. Instead, revolutions are made by a minority educated middle class – in the name of the proletariat – for their own benefit. It's not 'dictatorship of the proletariat' but instead 'dictatorship over the proletariat'.

Quote

In any society, a few men will aspire to run things, and the great majority will allow them to do it ... The Communists, from Marx onwards, were the chosen few who really knew what the proletariat wanted. They knew only because they said they knew. This was enough to convince them that they would always be right. Someone called Marxists 'god's prompters'. Lenin was the most persistent of those prophets.

– A.J.P. Taylor in his introduction to *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 46

What's your point of view?

What's your point of view about the value of Marxism?



▲ Source 3.11 A.J.P. Taylor



4 **OPPOSITION TO TSARISM: REVOLUTIONARY POLITICAL PARTIES**

I am absolutely convinced that you will come to the conclusion that it is impossible to work with the Mensheviks.

– VLADIMIR LENIN

Overview

Radical ideas were adopted by revolutionary leaders and expressed through the emergence of revolutionary political parties. What such groups had in common was their opposition to tsarism but their solutions to Russia's problems emerged through different leaders, policies and supporters. In this way, radical debate grew as an illegal underground movement. This chapter discusses the range of political parties that opposed Tsar Nicholas II and his government.

Key issues

After completing this chapter, you should be able to answer these questions.

- Who were the main revolutionary political parties?
- Who was Leon Trotsky?
- What did revolutionaries actually do?
- What were the obstacles to revolution?

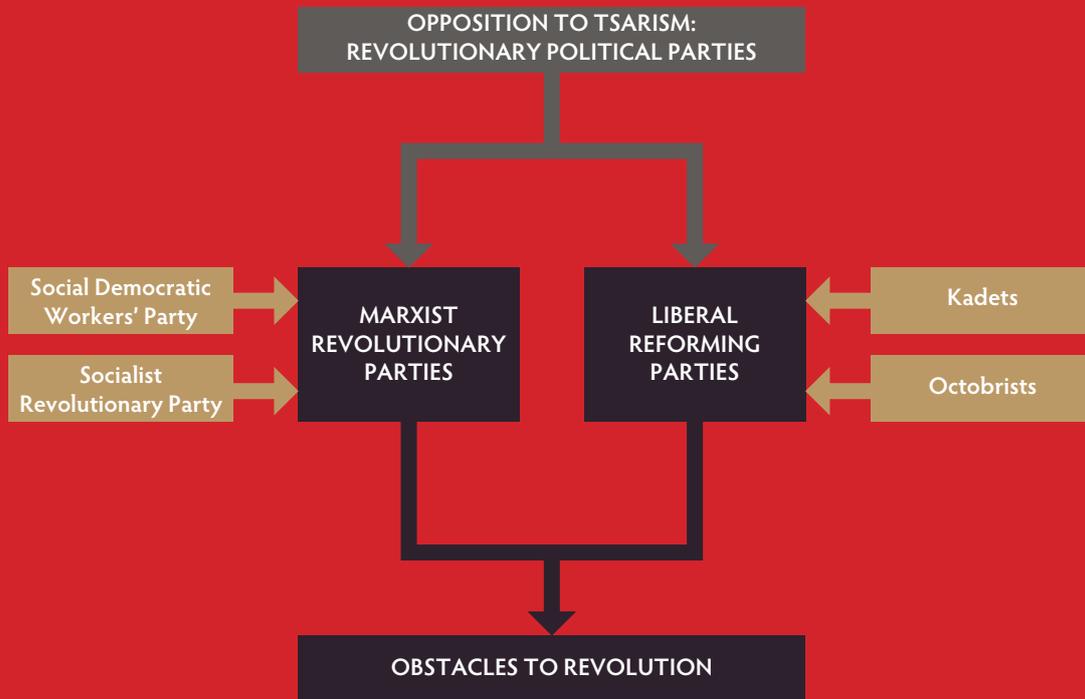
Digital resources for this chapter

In the *Interactive Textbook*:

-  Video and audio sources and questions
-  Digital activities

◀ Source 4.0 'Bolshevik and Menshevik'. Poster depicting the two Marxist revolutionary parties. The Bolshevik (majority) is the larger figure on the left, the Menshevik (minority) the smaller figure on the right.

Flow of chapter



Chapter timeline

What are the key events of the Russian Revolution covered in this chapter?

1898

Social Democratic Workers' Party formed



1901

Socialist Revolutionary Party formed



1905

Kadets and Octobrists formed



1898

*Trotsky exiled for
revolutionary activity*



1903

Bolsheviks and Mensheviks formed



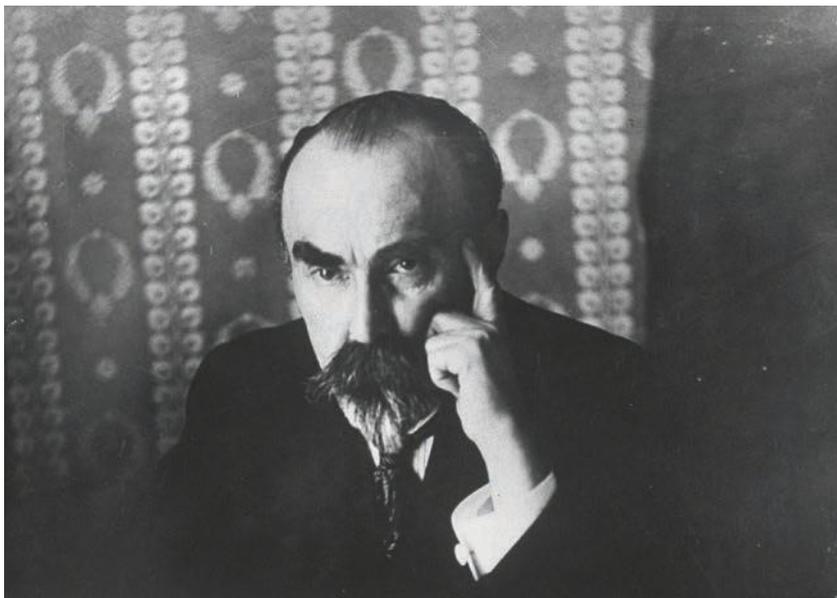
1912

*Bolsheviks and Mensheviks
become separate parties*

4.1 Marxist revolutionary parties: Bolsheviks and Mensheviks

Social Democratic Workers' Party

Marxist principles were spreading throughout Russia in the 1890s, prompting George **Plekhanov**, now considered the father of Russian Marxism, to found the **Social Democratic Workers' Party** in 1898 on socialist principles. In 1903, delegates met safely in London where Lenin deliberately confronted Plekhanov and prominent *Iskra* co-editor, Julius **Martov**, on the issue of party membership and organisation. The subsequent series of aggressive debates and votes resulted in two factions being formed: Lenin and his supporters, who called themselves the **Bolsheviks** (meaning majority); and Martov and his supporters, who became the **Mensheviks** (minority). These became separate political parties in 1912.



◀ Source 4.1 George Plekhanov



◀ Source 4.2 Members of the revolutionary St Petersburg League of Struggle in 1897. Lenin is seated in the centre; Martov is on his left.

Plekhanov George Plekhanov is considered to be the father of Russian Marxism

Social Democratic Workers' Party a revolutionary party founded by Plekhanov in 1898 on Marxist principles

Martov Julius Martov. A serious disagreement with Lenin led to the establishment of the Mensheviks in 1903 and Martov was elected their first leader

Bolsheviks a revolutionary political party begun by Lenin after splitting with the Mensheviks in 1903

Mensheviks a Marxist revolutionary party that was formed, along with the Bolsheviks, when the Social Democratic Workers' Party split in 1903



AMAZING BUT TRUE...

The fierce debates between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks made Lenin so stressed that he fell ill. His recovery was taking himself on a hiking holiday in rural Switzerland!

	Bolsheviks	Mensheviks
Key leader	Vladimir Lenin	Julius Martov
Key influence	Marx's writings	Marx's writings
Stages of history	Believed they could bypass capitalist stage and move straight to socialist society.	Believed that capitalist stage was necessary before evolving into a socialist society.
Party organisation	Membership for dedicated workers only and decisions made by leaders alone.	Membership open to all workers and decisions made after open debate and majority vote.
Attitude to proletariat	Party needs to plan revolution and seize power as the 'vanguard of the proletariat'.	Party needs to educate workers to develop a class consciousness that unleashes a spontaneous struggle for equality.
Political influence	Due to their small numbers, perhaps only as high as 10 000 members before 1914, the Bolsheviks were not influential. Lenin was also in exile, leaving the party without direct leadership.	It was in fact the Mensheviks, not the Bolsheviks, who were more closely monitored by the <i>Okhrana</i> as the major revolutionary threat to tsarist authority.

AMAZING BUT TRUE...



The Bolshevik Party quite openly stole in order to get money to survive. Young Joseph Stalin was responsible for bank robberies, the most well known being when he captured a wagon going to the bank and ran away with bags of money while firing over his shoulder.

◀ Source 4.3 Young Stalin

AMAZING BUT TRUE...



The Bolsheviks were more popular amongst the younger revolutionaries. In 1903, the average age of the Bolsheviks was 30, while the average age of the Mensheviks was 39!

◀ Source 4.4 The Russian workers that the Marxist parties represented

4.2 Socialist Revolutionary Party

The **Socialist Revolutionary Party** (SR) had the longest political tradition of any party. The Populist movement grew out of the economic reforms of Alexander II in the 1860s and was based upon a type of agrarian socialism. The movement lost popularity during radical years of terrorism and assassination of the 1880s before re-forming in 1901 as the Socialist Revolutionary Party. It was led by Viktor Chernov who was involved with the Socialist Revolutionaries and later the Mensheviks. The Socialist Revolutionaries policies benefitted the peasants: they proposed the radical plan of socialising all privately owned land and redistributing it to democratically organised communes; and promoted regional independence through the introduction of representative governments elected by universal male suffrage that placed emphasis on the issues of rural communities.

Socialist Revolutionary Party the most popular Marxist revolutionary party in Russia because it represented the interests of the peasants

4.3 Liberal reforming parties: Kadets and Octobrists

There was also a growing **liberal movement** in Russia which argued that the dire need for change did not require an overthrow of the tsarist system. It advocated reform rather than revolution; continuity with the past rather than a painful break from it. The movement was welcomed by the progressive middle class of industrialists, lawyers and financiers that had emerged from Witte's industrial reforms of the 1890s. There were two main political parties that emerged during 1905 that subscribed to this liberal approach: the Kadets and the Octobrists.

liberal movement argued that the dire need for change did not require an overthrow of the tsarist system

Kadets

The Constitutional Democratic Party, or **Kadets** for short, was the largest of the liberal parties. Its main policy was promoting a system of constitutional monarchy. It did have a large popular base of support. Kadets were strong advocates of a democratically elected constituent assembly that would limit the power of the Tsar. This representative body would then be able to address Russia's problems by introducing reforms like universal education, civil rights for all citizens, the legalisation of trade unions and striking, and the end of censorship.

Kadets a conservative revolutionary group that played an important role in the First Duma in 1906 and in the Provisional Government in 1917



◀ **Source 4.5** Members cast votes in the constituent assembly. From the right stands a Bolshevik, a Menshevik and a Kadet.



AMAZING BUT TRUE...

Revolutionary Ariadna Tyrkova helped Pavel Milyukov establish the Kadets and became one of the most important leaders of the women's liberation movement in Russia. A popular joke was that 'there was only one real man among the Kadets, and she was a woman'.

October Manifesto

document produced by Tsar Nicholas II in 1905 promising to grant an elected Duma in return for an end to the general strikes that had paralysed the economy

Rodzianko

Mikhail Rodzianko was the head of the Fourth Duma (1912–17), which formed the Provisional Government after the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II

Octobrists

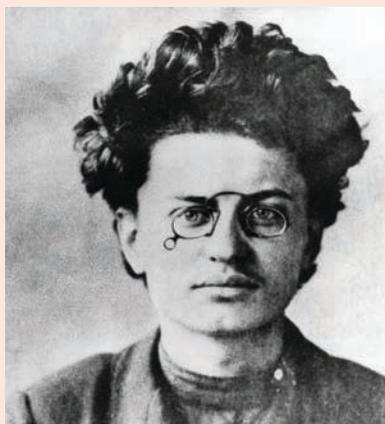
Given their name because of their readiness to accept the **October Manifesto** in 1905, their loyalty to the Tsar meant that they embraced the Dumas as a significant constitutional reform. They were originally known as the Union of October 17. Led by Mikhail **Rodzianko** in 1905 and Alexander Guchkov in 1906, they were more conservative than the Kadets. Their limited objectives primarily focused on constitutional and legislative reform.



► **Source 4.6** Octobrist leader Mikhail Rodzianko, Chairman of the Fourth Duma, pictured sitting on the right. Behind him is Alexander Kerensky.

4.4

SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL



▲ **Source 4.7** Police photo of young Trotsky when arrested in 1898

Leon Trotsky (1879–1940)

Part 1

Family background: After Lenin, Leon Trotsky was the most important revolutionary in the Russian Revolution. He was born in the Ukraine on 7 November 1879 to a successful farmer and his wife who was from the educated middle class and therefore pushed for Leon to be well educated.

Beliefs: Leon left home at the age of eight to be educated in Odessa, a bustling cosmopolitan port city that embraced modern ideas. There he lived with his mother's nephew, a liberal intellectual, who inspired Leon's active mind. At 16, he discovered underground socialist movements and was introduced to Marxism, which dominated his life from then after.

Exile: Marxism inspired his activism, resulting in his arrest by the Tsar's secret police *Okhrana* in 1898. The consequence was the first of his exiles to remote Siberia.

Marriage and children: As a 21 year old in 1900, he married Aleksandra Sokolovskaya, with whom he had two daughters. They became permanently separated after he escaped from exile without his wife in 1902. He made his way to England to join Lenin and the Social Democrats. There **Trotsky** met and married Natalya Sedova in 1903 with whom he had two sons.

Trotsky Leon Trotsky;
a radical Marxist
revolutionary

Influence: Trotsky was incredibly intelligent and spoke five languages – Ukrainian, Russian, French, English and German. His main impact was as an influential Marxist revolutionary reader, writer, speaker and leader. Like Lenin, his main role developed on his return to Russia in 1917.

AMAZING BUT TRUE . . .

Young Leon enrolled in a maths degree at university but totally abandoned his studies after only a few months to become a revolutionary!

63

Conflict between Lenin and Trotsky

Lenin and Trotsky initially had a very positive connection due to their intellect and shared passion for Marxism. Trotsky was even a main writer for Lenin's *Iskra* newspaper under the false name 'Pero', which in Russian meant 'pen', and was voted in to be one of its six main editors. Lenin described Trotsky as being 'Unquestionably a man of rare abilities, he has conviction and energy, and he will go much farther'. But this harmony ended quickly during the Social Democratic Workers' Party debates of 1903 about what type of political revolutionary party was most like to achieve revolution. The consequence was Lenin formed the Bolsheviks, while Trotsky supported the Menshevik position. Lenin's reaction was immediate. Lenin rapidly split from Trotsky calling him 'Judas', 'swine' and 'scoundrel'. A fellow leader of the Social Democrats and editor of *Iskra*, Alexander Potresov, argued at the time that 'Lenin could not bear any opinion different from his own ... His opponent would become a personal enemy, in the struggle with whom all tactics were permissible'. The conflict between the two lasted 15 years until, at Lenin's request, Trotsky joined the Bolsheviks in 1917.

AMAZING BUT TRUE . . .

Lenin and Trotsky were both of Jewish descent. Lenin's Jewish grandfather changed his name to the Russian 'Dmitrievich' and converted to Christianity so he could further his medical career. Trotsky was born into a Jewish family and was badly bullied at school for being Jewish. He became an active revolutionary as a teenager and celebrated his 20th birthday in prison. He changed his name from 'Lev Bronstein' to 'Leon Trotsky'. Why 'Trotsky'? It was one of the jailer's names when he was in prison!



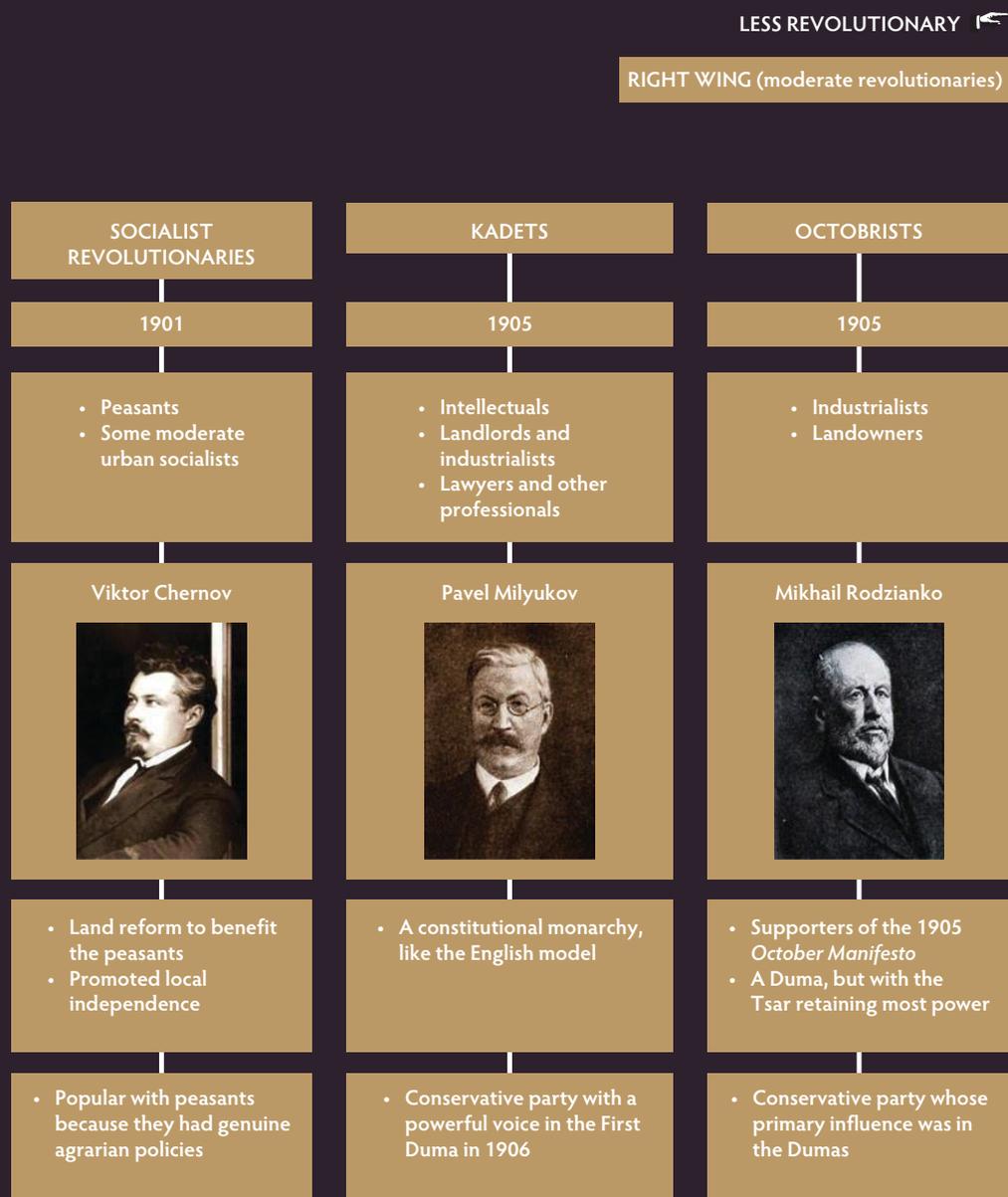
Revolutionary Political Parties

➔ MORE REVOLUTIONARY

LEFT WING (radical revolutionaries)

SOCIAL DEMOCRATS formed in 1898 but split into

	BOLSHEVIKS	MENSHEVIKS
NAME	BOLSHEVIKS	MENSHEVIKS
FOUNDED	1903	1903
SUPPORT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban working class • Soldiers in the army during World War One 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban working class • Some lawyers and other professionals • Cautious socialists
PERSONALITIES	<p>Vladimir Lenin</p> 	<p>Julius Martov</p> 
POLICIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alliance between working class and peasants • Rapid overthrow of the Tsar and the middle class to attain socialism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperation with the middle class to overthrow the Tsar, followed by steady progress to socialism
SUMMARY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marxist party focused on workers with tight membership led by central leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marxist party focused on workers with open membership, debates and voting





4.5 What did revolutionaries do?

exile many revolutionaries were imprisoned by Tsar Nicholas in Siberia, or banished from Russia altogether

Siberia the vast and remote location in central and eastern Russia where many revolutionaries were exiled

Revolutionaries in Russia were forced to live secret lives. They made up names, created false passports, wrote articles, edited newspapers, lectured students, spread Marxist ideas to workers and peasants, promoted strikes and smuggled revolutionary literature back into Russia. Some were men, some were women, but all were intellectuals who were committed to the cause of political revolution. Many revolutionaries were caught by the tsarist secret police, the *Okbrana*. Punishment for captured revolutionaries was commonly imprisonment or being sent into **exile** in the remote region of Russia called **Siberia**, where isolation and harsh conditions limited population numbers and made it ideal for exiling revolutionaries and dangerous prisoners. Other revolutionaries were banished from Russia altogether, or chose to live in other countries.

Lenin in exile

1895–96 arrested and imprisoned for 'sedition'.
1897–1900 exiled in Siberia.
1900–05 left Russia to live in Switzerland and Germany.
1906–07 returned to Russia but escaped when the Tsar started executing revolutionaries.
1907–17 lived in France, England, Austria-Hungary and Switzerland.
April 1917 returned to Russia after Tsar Nicholas II abdicated.

Trotsky in exile

1898–99 imprisoned in Moscow.
1900–04 exiled in Siberia.
1905 in St Petersburg for 1905 revolution.
1906 convicted for 'supporting armed rebellion', but escaped on the way to exile in Siberia.
1907–14 lived in England and Austria-Hungary.
1914–17 lived in Switzerland, France, Spain and United States.
May 1917 returned to Russia after Tsar Nicholas II abdicated.

▼ Source 4.8 Significant individuals: Bolsheviks Joseph Stalin, Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky in 1918



ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 4.1: RESEARCH REPORT



Revolutionary groups around the turn of the 19th century were made up of both men and women. Research one of the female revolutionaries from the early 1900s and write her biography.

- Vera Figner – a violent activist who became a political prisoner for 22 years. Joined the Socialist Revolutionaries
- Vera Zasulich – an influential Marxist who helped found the Social Democrats and was an editor of *Iskra* with Lenin and Trotsky. She supported the Mensheviks
- Vera Karelina – member of the Social Democrats who joined the Bolsheviks and was a leader of the Assembly of Russian Workers to fight for female workers
- Ariadna Tyrkova – helped found the Kadets and became a leading campaigner for equal rights for women
- Nadezhda Krupskaya – translated English works into Russian, married Lenin in exile and joined the Bolsheviks
- Rosa Luxemburg – an active Marxist thinker and writer, and member of the Social Democrats
- Alexandra Kollontai – a member of the Social Democrats who did not join either faction, but offered her help to both for the cause of revolution.



▲Source 4.9 Vera Figner



▲Source 4.10 Vera Zasulich



▲Source 4.11 Rosa Luxemburg

AMAZING BUT TRUE . . .

In 1911, Rosa Luxemburg wrote about her meetings with Lenin. She described him as clever and well educated but with an ugly face! Lenin was impressed with her cat, Mimi, who 'flirted with him, rolled on her back and behaved enticingly toward him, but when he tried to approach her, she whacked him with a paw and snarled like a tiger'.

4.6 What were the obstacles to revolution?

It was very difficult for political movements under tsarism because political parties in the modern sense did not exist. Gaining support, influence and power was problematic because of the obstacles to change that existed in Russia, which had the effect of strengthening the status quo – in this case, tsarism.

Even the expression ‘The Russian Revolution’ presents a problem because we know that a revolution did actually occur. It is too easy to look for evidence to prove that it was obvious that Nicholas’s regime was going to collapse. The existence of professional revolutionaries like Lenin, socialist groups like the Bolsheviks and SR, and alluring ideologies like Marxism do not mean that revolution was necessary or inevitable. As history is based on the unpredictability of real people, it is never that simple. If political disillusionment, economic hardship and social inequality were the sole criteria for revolution, most societies would be in revolution most of the time. Instead, it is more valuable to reflect on the significant obstacles that limited the likelihood of revolution under tsarism.

Obstacle 1: Police repression – The *Okhrana* played a vital role in dispersing opponents of tsarism through stringent policies of social control. Censorship, imprisonment, exile and execution all limited the degree to which criticism of tsarism was spread. Chapter 6 describes Prime Minister Stolypin’s severe repression of Nicholas’s enemies between 1906 and 1911.

Obstacle 2: Division – It is inaccurate to assume that the underground socialist movements were unified. Leaders often had disagreements, exemplified by the divisions between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. Divisions weaken power.

Obstacle 3: Cohesion – The role of the revolutionaries was to convince the majority of the general population that they were a better alternative to tsarism. This did not occur within the sympathetic industrial or peasant workforces, let alone the unified ruling and upper classes that benefited so profitably from the current system.

Obstacle 4: Isolation – As discussed in Chapter 2, Russia’s sheer size and cultural diversity made the country extremely difficult to rule, let alone sabotage. The inefficiency of communication and transportation that was to severely impact on Russia during World War One (see Chapter 7) also made revolutionary **propaganda** difficult to disseminate. Added to these constraints was the illiteracy and isolation of the majority of the peasant population.

Obstacle 5: Concession – Reforms, even of a limited or temporary nature, diffuse tension and conflict within a society; opposition softens and cooperation increases. Chapter 5 discusses the Tsar’s *October Manifesto* in response to the crises in 1905.

propaganda the creation of powerful visual or verbal material that presents an issue from only one dominant point of view

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 4.2: SUMMARY REPORT TO TSAR NICHOLAS



Pretend that you are a minister in the Tsar’s government in 1903. Write him a report that truthfully summarises the problems in his country. Using information from the last three chapters, include the following topics in your report:

- Inefficient and corrupt government, bureaucracy and Church
- Condition of the peasants in an outdated system
- Contrast between rich and poor in an unequal social structure
- Emerging support from individuals for the idea of Marxism
- Activities of the revolutionary political parties.

THE STORY SO FAR

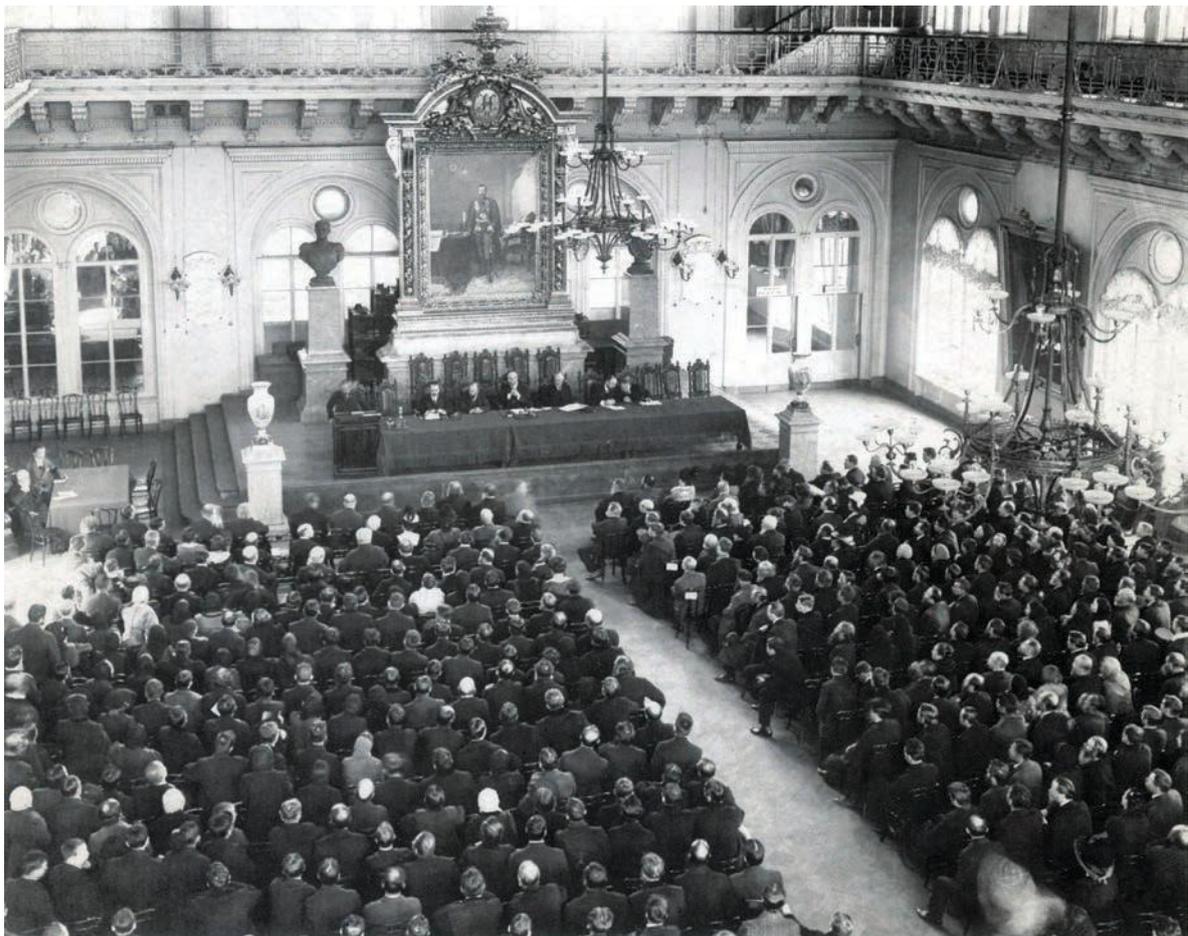


- Marxist ideology was adopted by the Socialist Revolutionaries and the Social Democrats.
- The Social Democrats split into the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions in 1903 due to opposing interpretations of how revolutionary parties should be organised and led.
- The liberalism movement that favoured reforms rather than revolutionary change produced two main parties, the Kadets and Octobrists, both formed during the 1905 Revolution.
- Despite the existence of revolutionary ideas, leaders and movements, there were several significant obstacles in the tsarist regime that made it more difficult for revolutionary political movements to gain mass support.
- Active revolutionaries like Lenin and Trotsky spent nearly all of the period before 1917 in exile.



Use the QR code or visit the digital version of the book and watch the video summarising the chapter.

▼ Source 4.12 Meeting of the Octobrist Party, 1913





Develop your historical thinking skills

Define key terms

Use information from this chapter to define these key terms.

- Bolsheviks
- Kadets
- Mensheviks
- Octobrists
- Socialist Revolutionaries

Establishing historical significance

Write an extended response using evidence from this chapter.

- 1 Explain the differences between the Bolshevik and Menshevik parties.
- 2 Explain the focus of the Kadets and Octobrists.
- 3 What obstacles limited the growth of opposition to tsarism? How likely were the revolutionaries to overthrow Tsarist Autocracy?

Constructing historical arguments

Write an essay using evidence from this chapter to develop your own argument.

- 1 'There were more points of division than of unity between the revolutionary parties.' To what extent do you agree with this view? Use evidence to support your response.
- 2 'Revolution in Russia was totally unlikely given all of the obstacles.' To what extent do you agree with this view? Use evidence to support your response.

Analysing historical sources as evidence

This is an extract about life in exile in Siberia by Leon Trotsky in his autobiography *My Life*.

The Lena was the great water route of the exiled. Those who had completed their terms returned to the south by way of the river. But communication was continuous between these various nests of the banished which kept growing with the rise of the revolutionary tide. The exiles exchanged letters with each other ... The exiles were no longer willing to stay in their places of confinement, and there was an epidemic of escapes. We had to arrange a system of rotation. In almost every village there were individual peasants who as youths had come under the influence of the older revolutionaries. They would carry the 'politicals' away in boats, in carts or in sledges, and pass them along from one to another. The police in Siberia were as helpless as we were. The vastness of the country was an ally, but an enemy as well. It was very hard to catch a runaway, but the chances were that he would be drowned in a river or frozen to death in the primeval forests.

Source 4.13 Leon Trotsky, *My Life*

- 1 Why was a communication network important to exiles?
- 2 How were the 'politicals' helped by local peasants?
- 3 Why was Siberia chosen as the prison for revolutionaries?
- 4 How effective do you think exile was as a punishment? Compare its advantages and disadvantages for revolutionaries.

Analysing historian's interpretations

Debate: Why did Marxist ideas become more popular than liberal ideas?

E.H. Carr (1892–1982)

Nationality: British

Helpful book: *From Napoleon to Stalin and Other Essays*, Macmillan, 1980. Particularly Chapter 7 'Liberalism in alien soil'

Point of view

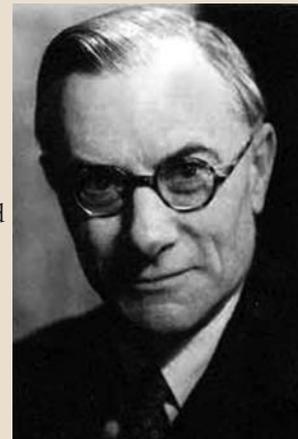
Carr argues that the idea of radical Marxism, rather than the more moderate liberal school of thought, became more popular because it adapted to Russian conditions better.

Reasons (evidence)

The liberal parties of the Kadets and Octobrists had three main problems: first, they were divided within themselves; second, they lacked broad mass appeal, and third, they could not fulfil their programme so long as they accepted the regime.

Quote

The point is that Marxism could be made to serve [Russian conditions] and that liberalism could not. For Marxism proved to have the appeal which liberalism lacked ... No sane analysis can [deny] the fact that by the early years of the twentieth century Russia was ripe for revolution. It was the dilemma and the tragedy of Russian liberalism that it could not provide the fuel and motive power for that revolution.



▲ Source 4.14 E.H. Carr

What's your point of view?

What's your point of view about why Marxist ideas became more popular than liberal ideas?



5 OPPOSITION TO TSARISM: POPULAR MOVEMENTS OF 1905

Suddenly, without any warning and without a moment's delay, we heard the dry crack of many rifle-shots ... Horror crept into my heart. The thought flashed through my mind, 'And this is the work of our Little Father, the Tsar'.

– FATHER GAPON

Overview

Growing tension within Asia due to the Tsar's imperialist mindset created an external crisis in 1904. The Russian Navy's eventual defeat in the **Russo-Japanese War** in 1904–05 resulted in a massive psychological and military dent in the nation's fragile mindset. Added to this was the growing internal crisis caused by the negative impact of reforms initiated over the previous decade by tsarist Finance Minister Sergei Witte.

Revolutionary discontent normally grows and becomes established in main towns and cities. The Russian Revolution was no different. The growth of industrialisation at the turn of the nineteenth century attracted thousands of peasants to the major industrial centres. The rising expectations of a better life were unmet with the reality of poor living conditions and then, later, lack of jobs. This new industrial working class presented revolutionary agitators with a fertile pool of discontent, forming a simmering pot of social grievance that boiled over in 1905. While significant ideas and individuals are important in shaping and directing revolutions, it is popular movements that typically begin revolutions and provide the force needed to threaten the existing regime.

Russo-Japanese War a war that began in 1904 and ended disastrously for the Russian navy in 1905 with a comprehensive defeat in the Tsushima Strait

Key issues

After completing this chapter, you should be able to answer these questions.

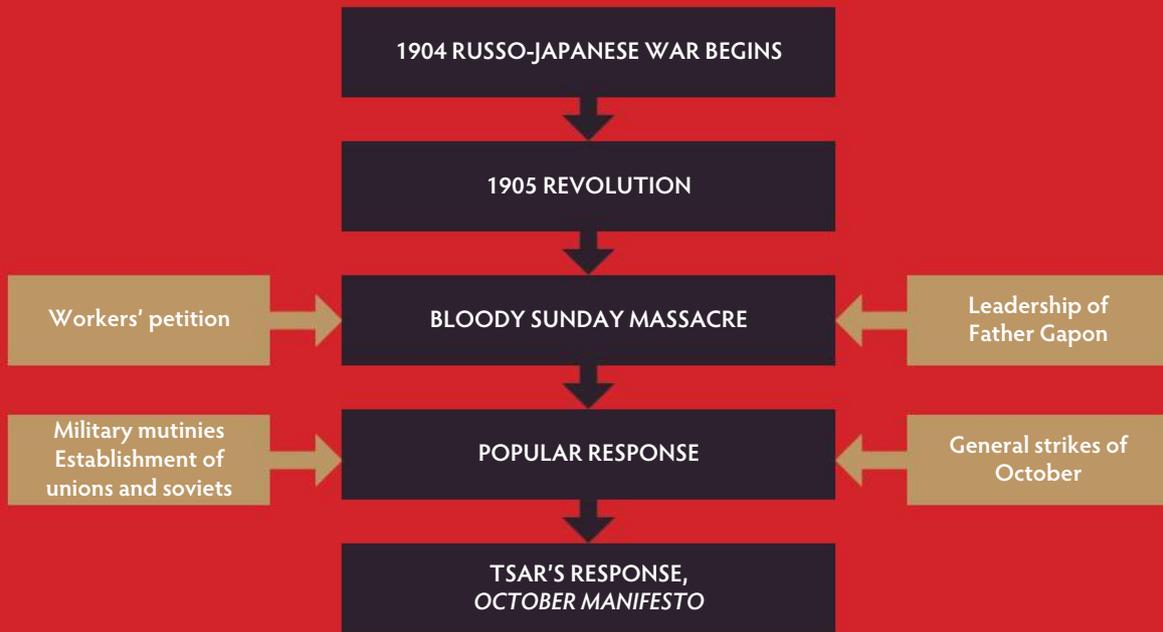
- What was the impact of the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05)?
- What was the impact of the Bloody Sunday massacre (1905)?
- What were the key crises of 1905?
- What was the Tsar's response?

Digital resources for this chapter

In the *Interactive Textbook*:

-  Video and audio sources and questions
-  Digital activities

Flow of chapter



Chapter timeline

What are the key events of the Russian Revolution covered in this chapter?

1904
Russo-Japanese War begins



MAY 1905
Defeat at Battle of Tsushima



OCTOBER 1905
St Petersburg Soviet established
General strikes
Tsar's October Manifesto



JANUARY 1905
Bloody Sunday massacre



JULY 1905
Mutiny of the battleship Potemkin

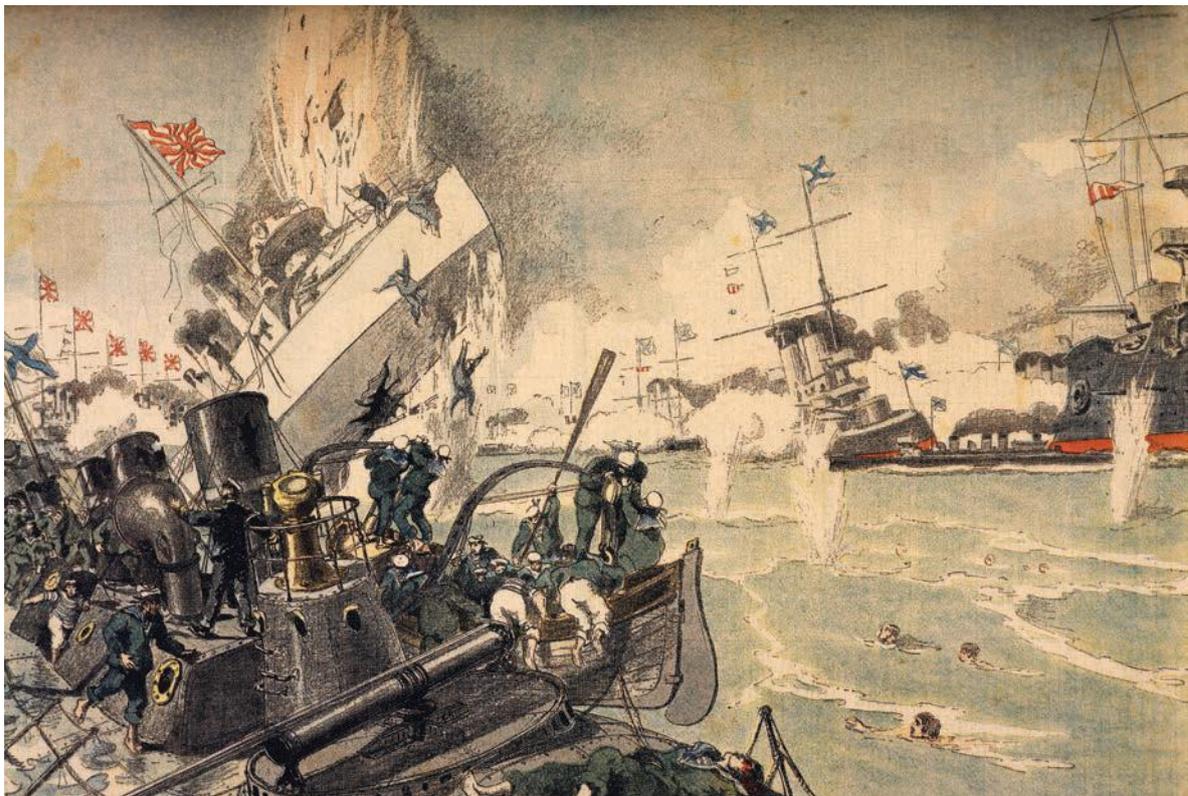
5.1 External crisis: the Russo-Japanese War, 1904 to 1905

Causes – The Tsar’s imperialist mindset led to a series of conflicts around the turn of the twentieth century in Asia, most notably his unsuccessful wars in Korea and the Russo-Japanese War. Russia’s authority in Asia was built upon its alliance with France and growing interest from Germany and Britain in negotiating with the Tsar. Japan’s victory over China in 1895 resulted in China being divided amongst five nations. China attempted to remove the invaders in 1900 in the Boxer Rebellion. Forces from Russia, Europe, Japan and the United States combined to restore order in northern China. But upon victory, the 150 000 Russian troops did not withdraw in a bid to protect their new Trans-Siberian railway. This was the immediate catalyst for the Russo-Japanese War.

War is sparked – Russia’s military presence threatened nearby Japan and built tension between the two nations. Aggression erupted at Port Arthur in China in 1904 and began a 12-month conflict that resulted in a stalemate. With no winning army, the war would be decided by the navies.

KEY STATISTIC

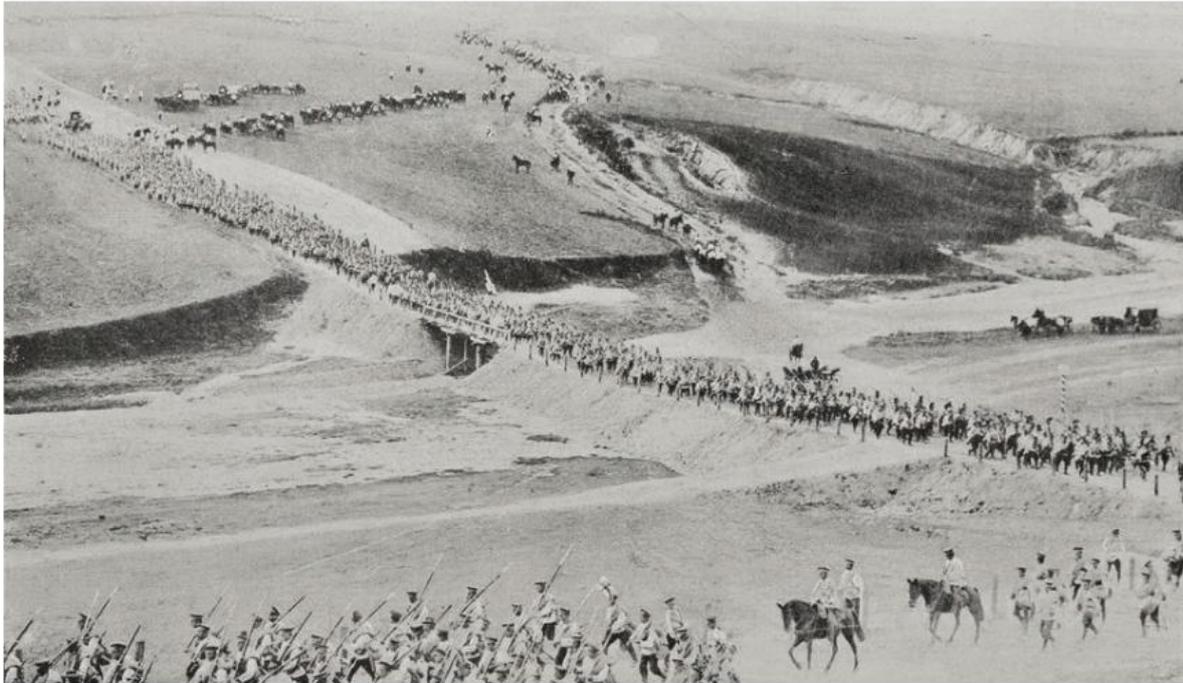
After a six-month voyage sailing from Russia to Japan – more than 33 000 kilometres – the Russian Baltic Fleet was decisively defeated. In the brief Battle of Tsushima on 27 May 1905, the powerful Japanese warships sank or captured 35 of the 45 Russian warships. More than 10 000 Russian sailors were killed or captured, compared with Japan’s 690. Thus, Russia’s expansion into Southeast Asia was abruptly halted.



▲ Source 5.1 Illustration of the Battle of Tsushima



Consequence – Facing international pressure for a diplomatic resolution combined with the internal pressure of the 1905 revolution, Tsar Nicholas II allowed US President Theodore Roosevelt to mediate between Russia and Japan. The result was Russia’s withdrawal and acknowledgement of Japan’s supremacy in the region. This humiliating military disaster became a crucial spark for the revolutionary uprisings of 1905 because it exacerbated the existing problems of the tsarist regime.



▲ Source 5.2 Russian soldiers retreating at the end of the Russo-Japanese war

▼ Source 5.3 Major battles of the Russo-Japanese War, 1904–05



5.2 Internal crisis: Bloody Sunday, January 1905

Causes of Bloody Sunday: problems caused by Witte's reforms

Sergei Witte's reforms while Minister for Finance and the Interior were outlined in Chapter 2. It was the unintended consequences of Witte's reforms that erupted into the major revolutionary event of Bloody Sunday by January 1905.

Economic and social problems – The famine and recession of the 1890s, and the subsequent rapid migration to the cities, resulted in significant shortages of food and housing. Both crises were compounded by the economic impact of the losses in the war against Japan in 1904. A core problem was the readily available labour force in the main cities. Working conditions were poor, with low wages, irregular and insecure employment, 12-hour days and, by 1914, an average of 60 working hours per week. There were inadequate rest breaks and unsafe equipment, women and children working underground, and the threat of arbitrary fines from factory managers for random 'crimes' like singing or uncleanliness.

KEY STATISTIC 

Additionally, insufficient housing and low wages meant that families were forced to live in severely overcrowded conditions. A 1904 survey revealed an average of 16 people per apartment with six people per room. The development of a permanent and skilled industrial labour force was hampered by workers returning to their peasant villages every summer to help with **harvest** and haymaking.

harvest the collection of mature grain for eating, storage or market

77



▲ Source 5.4 An overcrowded workers' flat in St Petersburg



Political problems – While modernisation was beneficial, it did introduce some direct problems for Tsar Nicholas II. First, with millions of workers moving from the countryside, there was an inevitable increase in discontent. This created a new volatile environment in which mass action became possible. Second, Witte favoured the spread of technical education. A more educated workforce meant that people were more willing and able to challenge the government. Third, industrialisation created a growing middle class such as factory and company owners. In many countries it was the emerging middle class that created pressure for political change and a desire for accountable and representative government. This tension between the benefits and negatives of modernisation were addressed by historian Hans Rogger in the following extract:

FOCUS QUESTIONS 5.1

- 1 What are the two tensions that Rogger outlines in the first sentence?
- 2 What were the threats of industrialisation?

Witte hoped and believed that industrialization would transform Russian society, but to become industrialized Russia had first to be transformed. At the least both processes had to move at comparable speeds, but this demanded that the country, its people and indeed the world hold still, so to speak, for an unknown length of time while industry performed its work of transformation. Tranquility at home and peace abroad were essential, and the former especially would be difficult to maintain in the midst of the strains to which the country was being subjected. Even if there had been a greater supply of political intelligence or flexibility on the part of Russia's rulers, industrialization was bound to threaten political stability, and instability to endanger Witte's policies.

Source 5.5 Rogger, *Russia in the Age of Modernisation and Revolution 1881–1917* (1983), p. 108

Strikes at Putilov Steel Works

Putilov Steel Works

one of the largest factories in St Petersburg, employing more than 8000 men

Economic distress drove workers to action. The sacking of five men from the **Putilov Steel Works** in St Petersburg resulted in virtually the entire workforce of the factory going on strike on 3 January 1905. Massive strikes in sympathy followed throughout the city, growing up to 150 000 workers in 382 factories by Friday 7 January. By 8 January, the city had no electricity and no newspapers, and all public areas were declared closed.



▼ **Source 5.6** Strikers outside the Putilov Steel Works



Petition and march

On a freezing Sunday morning on 9 January 1905, the largest strike in Russia's history occurred. Historian David Christian estimates the numbers of protesters at 111 000 men, women and children who started in different sections of the city with the intention of marching to the Tsar's **Winter Palace** on the **Neva River**. The initial Putilov strikes and Sunday march were organised by Father **Gapon**, a priest from the Orthodox Church and head of the radical Assembly of Russian Factory and Mill Workers.



Winter Palace the Tsar's main palace in the heart of St Petersburg

Neva River the majestic river that flows through St Petersburg directly behind the Tsar's Winter Palace

Gapon Father Gapon was an active revolutionary who led the peaceful march to petition the Tsar for political representation and better working conditions

◀ Source 5.7 The peaceful march just before the Bloody Sunday massacre

Gapon described the demoralising condition of the industrial workers in 1905: 'The grey faces seemed dead, or relieved only by eyes blazing with the rage of desperate revolt ... Badly clad and underfed, waiting in the terrible frosty mornings of the St Petersburg winter, they present a sight that makes one shudder.' (Hoysted 2001).



◀ Source 5.8 An artist's representation of Father Gapon leading the crowd on Bloody Sunday



petition a written document signed by large numbers of people recommending a specific plan of action be undertaken by the government

The marchers carried crosses and religious icons, sang the Tsar's hymn called 'God Save Thy People', and carried portraits of the Tsar and Tsarina. The ultimate aim of the march was to present a **petition** signed by 135 000 workers outlining their grievances and reverently requesting significant reforms. The idea of a petition was strongly supported by the workers as a respectful and traditional method of bringing problems to the attention of the Tsar.



ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 5.1: PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS



Workers' petition to Tsar Nicholas II

We working men of St Petersburg, our wives and children, and our parents, helpless, aged men and women, have come to you, O Tsar, in quest of justice and protection. We have been beggared, depressed, overburdened with excessive toil; we are humiliated. We are not recognised as normal human beings, but are dealt with as slaves who have to bear their bitter lot in silence. Patiently we endured this; but now ... O Tsar, we have no strength left.

We are ... [denied] a single human right, even that of speaking, thinking and meeting to talk over our needs, and of taking measures to better our condition. Any one of us who should dare lift his voice in defence of the working class is thrown into prison or banished ...

Sire, refuse not to help your people ... Give them a chance of accomplishing their destiny. Deliver them from the intolerable oppression of the bureaucracy. Demolish the wall between yourself and the people, and let them govern the country in conjunction with yourself ... Consider our demands attentively and without anger. They have been uttered not for evil, but for good; for our good, Sire, and yours ...

Give orders without delay to representatives of all classes in the land to meet together. Let capitalist and workmen be present; let officials, priests, physicians and teachers all come together and choose their own delegates. Let all be free to elect whom they will, and for this purpose let the elections to the Constituent Assembly be organized on the principle of universal suffrage voting. This is our principal request, on which everything else depends ...

Give orders and swear that they shall be fulfilled, and you will make Russia happy and glorious, and will impress your name on our hearts and on the hearts of our children, and our children's children for all time. But if you withhold the word, if you are not responsive to our petition, we will die here on this square before your palace ... For us there are but two roads, one leading to liberty and happiness, the other to the tomb. Point, Sire, to either of them; we will take it, even though it lead to death.

Signed by George Gapon and 135 000 workers.

Source 5.9 Gapon, *The Story of My Life*, pp. 257–61

- 1 Describe the tone of this petition. What does this reveal to us about the workers' attitude towards the Tsar?
- 2 What was the workers' 'quest' or ultimate hope in presenting the petition to the Tsar?
- 3 How do the workers describe their situation?
- 4 What is the workers' 'principal request'?
- 5 The petition concludes with the powerful image of two roads. Explain the workers' two options.
- 6 Many primary sources included in history texts have been edited in some way by the author. The purpose of this is often to reduce the length and complexity of the document. If words have been left out, then ellipses or three dots (...) are added to indicate this. What problems might such alterations create?



The massacre

Some groups joined together and reached the square outside the Winter Palace where reports vary dramatically as to what actually occurred. In his autobiography, titled *The Story of My Life*, Father Gapon recorded that upon entering the square they were confronted with a line of the Tsar's troops and a company of mounted Cossacks: 'Suddenly the company of Cossacks galloped rapidly towards us with drawn swords ... I saw the swords lifted and falling, the men, women and children dropping to the earth like logs of wood, while moans, curses and shouts filled the air.'

Maxim **Gorky**, an influential socialist, witnessed the brutal death of a fellow worker: 'The Cossack circled round him and, shrieking like a woman, waved his sabre in the air ... swooping down from his dancing horse ... he slashed him across the face, cutting him from the eyes to the chin.'

In comparison, the Tsar's *Okhrana* security police wrote defensively in their official report of the incident: 'Despite pleas by local police and cavalry charges, the crowd did not disperse but continued to advance ... as this had no effect a number of volleys were fired into the crowd.'

The irony was that the Tsar was not in the Winter Palace that day. He had left St Petersburg when the first signs of trouble began appearing. The Tsar recorded what happened in his personal diary.

A painful day. There have been serious disorders in St Petersburg because workmen wanted to come up to the Winter Palace. Troops had to open fire in several places in the city; there were many killed and wounded. God, how painful and sad! Mama arrived from town, straight to church. I lunched with all the others. Went for a walk with Misha. Mama stayed overnight.

Source 5.10 Tsar Nicholas's diary, 22 January 1905

Nine days later the government published an official account of the march in the journal *Pravo*, which means 'Justice', claiming that the petition contained 'rude demands of a political nature'. While the *Okhrana* report admitted that final deaths were unknown due to the crowd carrying off the victims, this later government report declared that 96 people had died and 333 were wounded. Modern historians estimate that 200 were killed and 800 wounded.



The devastating social impact of the massacre, however, was not contested and it immediately became known as 'Bloody Sunday'. The fundamental crisis was that the Tsar did not consider the requests in the workers' petition 'attentively and without anger', but instead responded with violence.

▼ Source 5.11 Painting by Ivan Vladimirov depicting the Tsar's troops shooting at protestors





FOCUS QUESTION 5.2

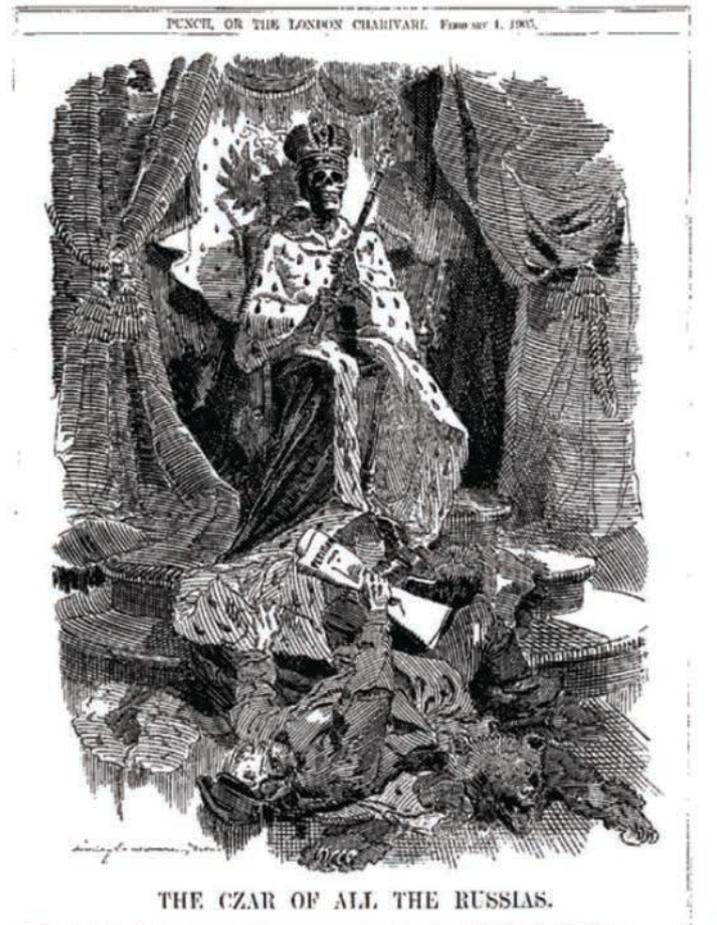
1 What is your reaction to Nicholas's summary of this critical day?

AMAZING BUT TRUE...

After Bloody Sunday, Father Gapon escaped to nearby Finland. While in hiding, he wrote a bitter public letter criticising the Tsar's bloody response to the peaceful demonstration. One year later his body was found hanging in an abandoned cottage.

Analysis of Bloody Sunday

The cartoon reproduced in Source 5.12 vividly shows how Bloody Sunday changed the popular perception of Nicholas from a benevolent, trustworthy 'Little Father' to the hated 'Nicholas the Bloody'. It was originally produced in an English magazine, *Punch*. The Tsar is surrounded by symbols of privileged royalty – his jewelled crown, sceptre, mink robes, expensive heavy curtains, bear-skin floor rug and the image of the traditional Romanov double-headed eagle hanging behind him. Yet it is an image of destructive power rather than kind provision. The Tsar's attitude to his people is one of death, represented by his skeleton body. The face of the industrial worker reveals his unexpected and horrifying death just as he had got to the steps of the throne and was within reach of God's appointed representative. Instead of being armed and dangerous, he clutches a petition, the large size showing it to be of crucial importance. The mystical union tying the Tsar to his people was forever severed.



► Source 5.12 'The Czar of all the Russias' (*Punch*, 1 February 1905); Redmond Barry Collection, State Library of Victoria

In a newspaper opinion piece in late January 1905, Lenin wrote:

Russia of January 10 is no longer the Russia of January 8. Here in Russia, a priest found himself at the head of the movement. One day he appealed for a march with a peaceful petition to the tsar himself, and the next day he issued a call for revolution. 'Comrades, Russian workers!' Father Georgi Gapon wrote in a letter read at a meeting of liberals after that bloody day. 'We no longer have a tsar. Today a river of blood divides him from the Russian people. It is time for the Russian workers to begin the struggle for the people's freedom without him.'

Source 5.13 Lenin, 'Our Father the Tsar' and the Barricades, *Vperyod*, No. 4, January 31, 1905.

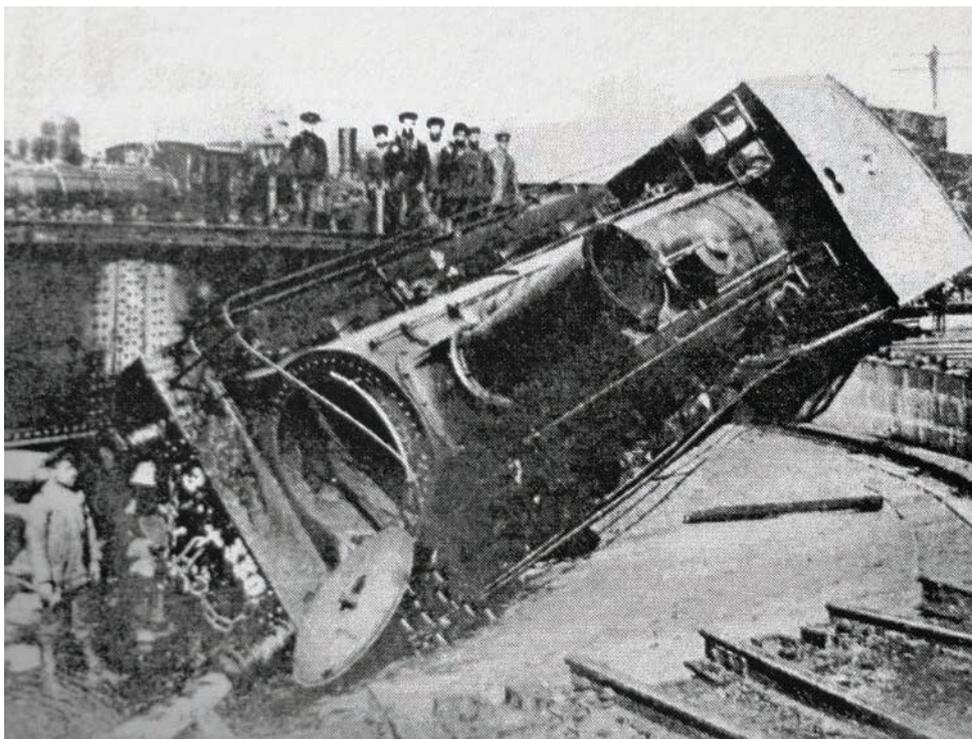
Described in modern terminology, the march to the Winter Palace was one of civil rights petitioners appealing to the supreme power for greater social and economic freedoms. Some historians propose that the cause of the march was a rise in national consciousness due to the twin factors of urbanisation and the spread of literacy. Yet this proves a difficult argument to support given that Russian consciousness was an extremely diverse phenomenon. First, there was a chasm in material conditions; and second, the spread and acceptance of socialist theories were limited and disjointed, certainly not hypnotising the majority of the population and forging them into a united force.

5.3 What were the key crises of 1905?

The march on the Winter Palace in January sparked further protests against the economic and political problems in Russia. The most significant protests were the general strikes in October 1905 because that was the final act that forced the Tsar to promise much-needed reforms. Lenin wrote about the events of 1905:

The uprising has begun. Force against Force. Street fighting is raging, barricades are being thrown up, rifles are cracking, guns are booming. Rivers of blood are flowing, the civil war for freedom is blazing up. Moscow and the South, the Caucasus and Poland are ready to join the proletariat of St. Petersburg. The slogan of the workers has become: Death or Freedom!

Source 5.14 Lenin, quoted in Rice, Christopher (1990), *Lenin: Portrait of a Professional Revolutionary*



◀ Source 5.15
Protesting workers overturn a train in the city of Tiflis.



Month (1905)	Event	Significance
January	Bloody Sunday – a peaceful march to present a petition to Nicholas was crushed by mounted Cossacks. Industrial workers went on strike from Bloody Sunday onwards throughout 1905.	Began the breakdown of trust between the Tsar and his people.
May	Battle of Tsushima – after six months of travel, the Russian navy was demolished in 24 hours.	Japan sealed the military defeat of Russia in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05.
June	There were several navy mutinies, of which the mutiny of the battleship <i>Potemkin</i> by the crew in the Black Sea was the most important. The sailors forcibly took over control and leadership from the captain.	<i>Potemkin</i> mutiny spread to other units in the army and navy. However, most troops stayed loyal to Nicholas, thereby saving the regime from being overthrown.
July	Spontaneous peasant revolts resulted in attacks on landowners, looting and burning estates. A common demand was to transfer all land to the peasantry.	Nicholas was not only losing control of the cities and military but also the wider countryside.
September	On return from fighting the Japanese in the east, army troops mutinied and controlled a section of the Trans-Siberian Railway.	Spontaneous opposition to tsarism often too disorganised and violent.
May to October	Popular protests led to the establishment of Union of Unions in May, the All-Russian Union of Peasants in June and St Petersburg Soviet by Trotsky in October. Over 50 soviets were formed throughout Russia.	Workers and peasants were now formally represented so their grievances could be heard.

St Petersburg Soviet
a powerful political body to represent the workers

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Sailors on the battleship *Potemkin* protested against being served rotten meat infested with maggots. When the captain ordered that the ringleaders be shot, the firing squad refused and the sailors took control. Seven officers were killed and the rest thrown overboard.



◀ Source 5.16 Painting of the *Potemkin* mutiny by Pyotr Timofeyevich Fomin

General strikes in October

All of these reactionary events led to arguably the most significant event of 1905, the General Strikes in October. Strikes had been the most common form of protest throughout 1905 but the largest began in St Petersburg, quickly spreading to Moscow, and included the railway men which stopped the whole railway network from operating. Businesses, universities, railways, shops, banks all closed. The widespread nature of these strikes halted the economy. Russian anarchist Pyotr Kropotkin recognised the political power of the strike, arguing that ‘a new weapon, more terrible than street warfare, had thus been tested and proved to work admirably’. Unlike any other event in 1905, these strikes forced the Tsar to act.

5.4 What was the Tsar's response?

Powerful action provokes significant reaction. The economy was paralysed by general strikes in Moscow and St Petersburg that closed banks, printing shops, bakeries, railway stations, and post and telegraph offices. This control over finance, transport, communication and food supplies forced a reluctant Nicholas to submit to popular demand for political reform.

There were four main alternatives available to Nicholas in an attempt to solve the nation's problems.

- Option 1: Nicholas's preferred solution – maintain Tsarist Autocracy.
- Option 2: The ‘Bismarck’ solution – the Tsar retains complete power but satisfies the demands of the peasants by cancelling their debts, the workers through welfare measures, and the middle class through a Duma with limited powers.
- Option 3: The liberal solution – power is shared equally between the Tsar and an elected parliament based on property ownership.
- Option 4: The British solution – real power is given to a democratically elected parliament, with the Tsar as the constitutional Head of State.

Underpinning all the revolutionary action against the Tsar during 1905 was the desire to have an elected parliament, a Duma, to represent the Russian people. Sergei Witte was a key player in 1905. First, the Tsar called upon him to negotiate the peace settlement with Japan. Second, Witte held the position as chairman of the Council of Ministers, which was the equivalent of Prime Minister. Witte radically argued for the creation of an elected parliament, the formation of a constitutional monarchy and the establishment of a Bill of Rights. Hence, Tsar Nicholas II called on Witte, with Alexei Obolensky the Minister of Education, to implement his reforms and draft the actual wording of the *October Manifesto*. Tsar Nicholas II reluctantly signed the manifesto, published on 17 October 1905, which granted the establishment of a Duma. Nicholas was motivated by the urgent need to save his regime from collapse rather than by a sincere desire to reform the political practices of the nation.

AMAZING BUT TRUE . . .

Nicholas's second cousin, Grand Duke Nikolai Romanov, was so frustrated by the Tsar's reluctance to support Witte's proposal that he drew his pistol, pointed it at his head, and threatened to shoot himself immediately if the Tsar refused to approve a Duma.



▲ Source 5.17 A painting of the surprised and delighted crowd reaction to the Tsar's *October Manifesto*, 17 October 1905, by Ilya Repin

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 5.2: DOCUMENT ANALYSIS



The Tsar's *October Manifesto* document, 1905

By the grace of God, We Nicholas II, Emperor and Autocrat of all Russia, Tsar of Poland, Grand Duke of Finland etc.

sovereign supreme ruler

*Make known to all Our loyal subjects: Rioting and disturbances in the capitals and in many localities of Our Empire fill Our heart with great and heavy grief. The well-being of the Russian **sovereign** is inseparable from the national well-being; and the national sorrow is His sorrow. The disturbances which have appeared may cause a grave national tension in Our state.*

By the great vow of the Tsarist service We are obligated to use every resource of wisdom and Our authority to bring a speedy end to an unrest dangerous to Our state ... We impose upon the government the duty to execute Our inflexible will:

- 1 To grant the population the inviolable foundation of civic freedom based on the principles of genuine personal inviolability; freedom of conscience, speech, assemblies and associations.*
- 2 Without postponing the scheduled election to the State Duma, to admit in the participation of the Duma insofar as possible in the short time that remains before its scheduled meeting, all those classes of the population which presently are completely deprived of voting rights, and to leave further development of general elective law to the future legislative order.*
- 3 To establish as an unbreakable rule that no law shall become effective without the confirmation by the State Duma, and that the elected representatives of the people shall be guaranteed an opportunity of real participation in the supervision of the legality of the acts by authorities whom We shall appoint.*

We summon all loyal sons of Russia to remember their duties towards their country, to assist in terminating this unprecedented unrest, and together with Us to make every effort to restore peace and tranquility in Our native land.

Given in Peterhof, October 30, the year of Our Lord 1905, and eleventh of Our reign. [Nicholas]

Source 5.18 Dmytryshyn (Ed.), *Imperial Russia: A Source Book 1700–1917*

continued ...

continued ...

- 1 What did Nicholas want to 'make known' to his loyal subjects?
- 2 What was Nicholas trying to achieve by issuing the manifesto?
- 3 What were the three key reforms or promises in the manifesto?

5.5 What were the reactions to the October Manifesto?

Reaction 1: the Tsar

Nicholas was reluctant about the manifesto written by Witte due to his total belief in the value of autocracy. Nicholas's reflections on his options of how to deal with the general strikes and why he issued the manifesto were revealed in one of his long, regular letters to his 'dearest Mama' on 2 November 1905:

There were only two ways open: to find an energetic soldier and crush the rebellion by sheer force. There would be time to breathe but then, as likely as not, one would have to use force again in a few months and that would mean rivers of blood, and in the end we should be where we had started ... and no possibility of progress achieved. The other way out would be to give the people their civil rights, freedom of speech and press, also to have all laws confirmed by a State Duma – that, of course, would be a constitution.

Witte defends this very energetically. He says that while it is not without risk, it's the only way out at present ... He and Alexei drew up the Manifesto. We discussed it for two days, and in the end, invoking God's help, I signed. My dear Mama, you can't imagine what I went through before that moment; in my telegram I could not explain all the circumstances which brought me to this terrible decision, which I nevertheless took quite consciously. From all over Russia they cried for it, they begged for it, and around me many – very many – held the same views.

Source 5.19 Bing (Ed.), *The Letters of Tsar Nicholas and Empress Maria*, pp. 185–9

Reaction 2: Marxist opponents of tsarism

KEY QUOTE



The official history records of the Communist Party were called the *History of the CPSU (b.) short-course*. About 1905 it claimed boldly: 'The revolution disclosed that tsardom was the sworn enemy of the people, that tsardom was like the proverbial hunchback whom only the grave could cure.'

Trotsky was instrumental in establishing the St Petersburg **Soviet**, which was an elected council of workers. The executive committee was composed of 22 workers and three representatives from each of the Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries. One aggressive statement published by the Soviet stated: 'The autocracy never enjoyed the confidence of the people and was never granted any authority by the people'. Similarly, Trotsky was extremely critical of the Tsar's manifesto and voiced the following objections as Vice Chairman of the St Petersburg Soviet:

So a Constitution is granted. Freedom of assembly is granted; but the assemblies are surrounded by the military. Freedom of speech is granted, but censorship exists exactly as before. Freedom of knowledge is granted, but the universities are occupied by troops

KEY QUOTE



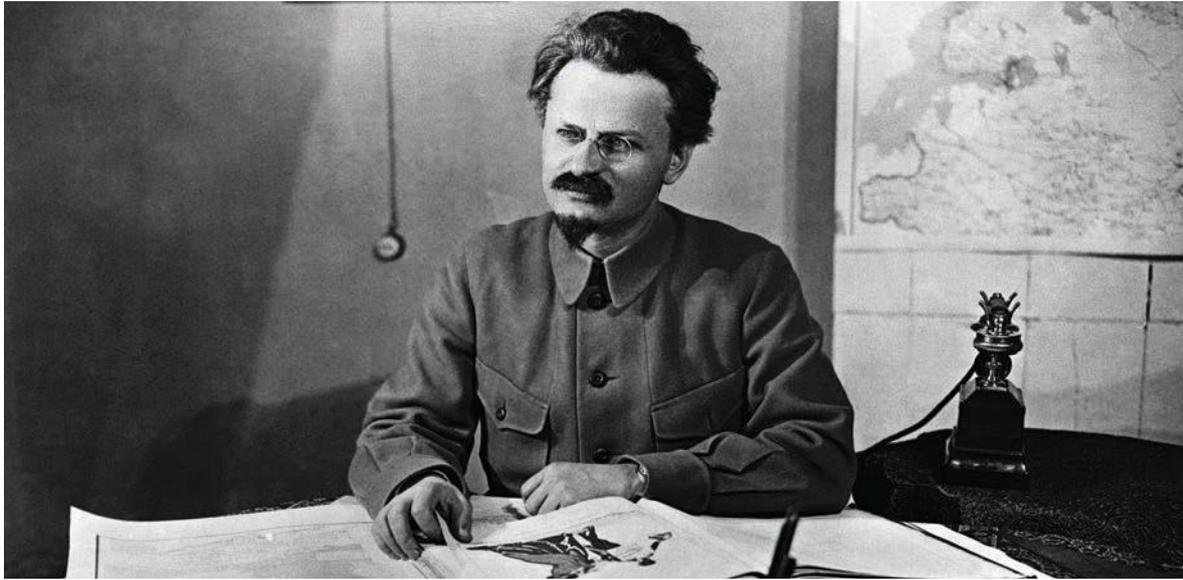
... A constitution is given, but the autocracy remains. Everything is given and nothing is given.

Source 5.20 Trotsky, 1905, p. 123

FOCUS QUESTIONS 5.3

- 1 What did Nicholas consider were his two main options?
- 2 Why did he claim that he chose the second?

soviet a local revolutionary group formed to listen to ordinary people's debates



▲ Source 5.21 Leon Trotsky

Lenin quickly returned to Russia from exile and urged the workers to continue the struggle rather than break the strikes and peacefully return to work. Trotsky advocated that all workers withdraw their money from the banks in order to make the state bankrupt. Witte, now declared as Russia's first Prime Minister, arrested the entire St Petersburg Soviet and jailed half, and put Trotsky on trial in 1906 with the resulting sentence being life exile to Siberia. The armed uprising in Moscow and the peasant revolts were brutally crushed.

AMAZING BUT TRUE...

Trotsky and 13 other prisoners were taken by 52 soldiers to exile in Siberia. With the help of a sympathetic doctor, Trotsky faked serious illness and was taken to the local hospital where he escaped using a reindeer sleigh!

Reaction 3: Liberal opponents of tsarism

A significant split occurred within the revolutionary coalition, leading to the formation of the Octobrists and Kadets. Representatives from the Octobrist liberal reforming party publicly welcomed the reforms, declaring that they signalled an end to the political and social conflicts that had developed within the country. The Kadets complained that the reforms did not go far enough and continued to campaign against the government.

The satirical cartoon by Chemodanov, reproduced in Source 5.22, mocks the weak impact of the Russian liberals in 1905. Chemodanov drew the liberal



◀ Source 5.22 The lion, the bear and the rabbit, 1905

'bourgeoisie' parties as a tame rabbit pathetically trying to attack a fierce lion, which represented the Marxist-motivated industrial strikers. The lion's courage and strength was illustrated through the clawing of the bear's back and the showing of its teeth after killing the bear, which symbolised the tsarist regime. The royal crown has rolled off and is upside down in the grass. The cartoon contends that the traditional power structure in Russia has been overturned due solely to the power of the proletariat.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 5.3: COMPARING VISUAL SOURCES



The images on this page were produced separately and provide very different perspectives of the role and impact of the revolutionaries during the 1905 Revolution. Source 5.23 portrays the 1905 revolutionaries as a bloody skeleton crashing through streets, destroying both people and buildings.

Source 5.24, a painting by Boris Kustodiev, portrays the 1905 revolutionaries as a heroic giant leading the proletariat through the streets.



▲ Source 5.23 'Death stalks the barricades'



▲ Source 5.24 *The Bolshevik*, Boris Kustodiev

- 1 How are the actual revolutionaries drawn in each of these two images? What is the symbolic meaning of the body language of each caricature?
- 2 Compare what is happening in each image.
- 3 In your opinion, which image more accurately reflects the true events of 1905? Explain your reasoning.
- 4 Design and produce your own visual representation of the events of 1905.

THE STORY SO FAR



- Deep internal tensions and crises had developed by the end of 1904 due to economic and social problems. Social discontent was significantly heightened in the overcrowded cities as a result of the rapid industrialisation introduced by Sergei Witte, Minister for Finance from 1892 to 1903.
- The situation was compounded by the external crisis of military defeats in the Russo-Japanese war.
- Opposition to tsarism erupted onto the streets of the major cities after the Bloody Sunday massacre in St Petersburg in January 1905, signifying that a permanent loss of faith was developing between the Tsar and his people.
- Strikes, mutinies and violence were common throughout 1905, but due to their random and isolated nature they were able to be suppressed by troops loyal to the Tsar.
- The mass general strikes forced the Tsar to grant major reforms towards an elected political Duma and civic freedoms in his *October Manifesto*.

Use the QR code or visit the digital version of the book and watch the video summarising the chapter.





Develop your historical thinking skills

Define key terms

Use information from this chapter to define these key terms.

- Father Gapon
- *October Manifesto*
- Russo-Japanese War
- St Petersburg Soviet
- Workers Petition

Establishing historical significance

Use evidence from this chapter to write short paragraph answers.

- 1 Explain the significance of the Bloody Sunday massacre.
- 2 Outline the further key crises of 1905.
- 3 Describe how the Tsar responded to the crises of 1905.

Use quotes as evidence

Write a sentence using a short phrase from one of the quotes below or contrast the views from a few quotes. You can also use any of the quotes in this chapter. Quotes can be used directly or paraphrased in your own words.

It was their [the workers] faith in the Tsar that was riddled by bullets on that day. They came to realise that they could win their rights only by struggle. **History of the CPSU Short-course, official history written by the Russian Government**

Mixture of cowardice, blindness and stupidity. **Government minister Witte about how Nicholas mismanaged the crises of 1905**

The monarchy had been saved; the economy was prosperous; and Russia had – shall we say – half a constitution. **Bernard Pares, eyewitness, an English diplomat in Russia**

Although the regime succeeded in restoring order, it could not hope to put the clock back. 1905 had changed society for good. **Orlando Figes, historian**

Although with a few broken ribs, tsarism came out of the experience of 1905 alive and strong enough. **Trotsky**

Constructing historical arguments

Write an essay using evidence from this chapter to develop your own argument.

- 1 'The events of 1905 showed that opposition to the Tsar came from every part of Russian society.' To what extent do you agree with this view? Use evidence to support your response.
- 2 'The 1905 revolution failed because of the weakness of the revolutionary movement rather than from the strength of the Tsar.' To what extent do you agree with this view? Use evidence to support your response.

Analysing historian's interpretations

Debate: How revolutionary were the popular movements of 1905?

Sheila Fitzpatrick

Nationality: Australian

Helpful book: *The Russian Revolution*, Oxford, 1982

Point of view

The popular movements of 1905 were a very militant industrial working class. Their demands were not just economic, but political.

Reasons (evidence)

The workers organised strikes, mutinies and soviets for an entire year and weren't satisfied with the Tsar's final compromise of the Duma.

Quote

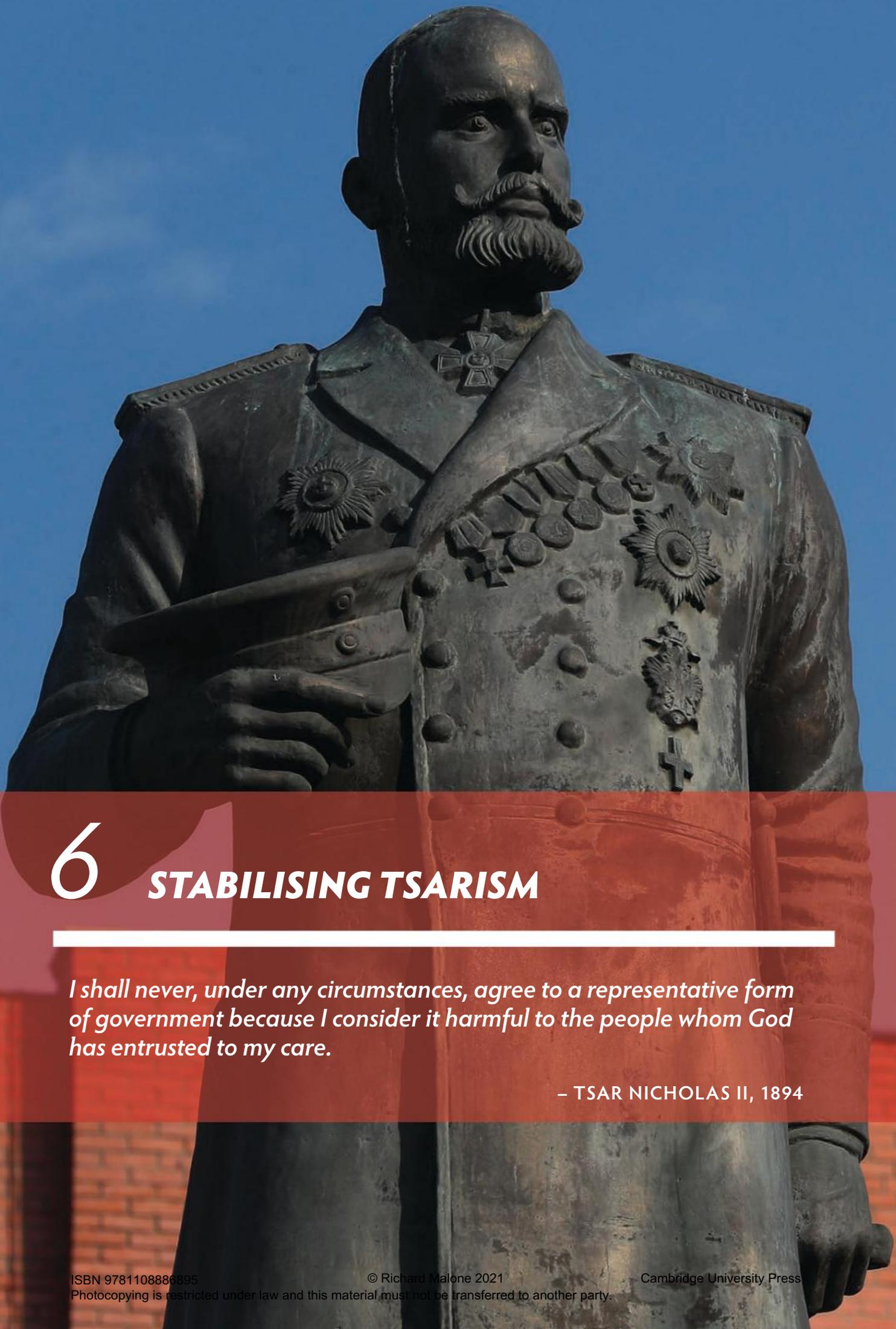
Russia's working class, despite its close links with the peasantry, was exceptionally militant and revolutionary. Large-scale strikes were frequent, the workers showed considerable solidarity against management and state authority, and their demands were usually political as well as economic. In the 1905 Revolution, the workers of St Petersburg and Moscow organized their own revolutionary institutions, the soviets, and continued the struggle after the Tsar's constitutional concessions in October and the collapse of the middle-class liberals' drive against the autocracy.



▲ Source 5.25 Sheila Fitzpatrick

What's your point of view?

What's your point of view about how revolutionary the popular movements were in 1905?



6

STABILISING TSARISM

I shall never, under any circumstances, agree to a representative form of government because I consider it harmful to the people whom God has entrusted to my care.

– TSAR NICHOLAS II, 1894

Overview

This chapter explores the key strategies employed by the Tsar and his new Prime Minister, Pyotr Stolypin, to stabilise tsarism after the radical events of 1905. The formula that evolved was cunningly simple. First, Nicholas asserted his autocratic powers through his Fundamental Laws. Second, he consolidated his personal power by dismissing the radical First and Second Dumas and changing the electoral laws so that a majority of his conservative supporters were elected. Third, Stolypin initiated significant agrarian reforms aimed at solving the land crisis. Fourth, any remaining opposition was dealt with swiftly and severely.

Key issues

After completing this chapter, you should be able to answer these questions.

- Why didn't the Dumas fulfil the nation's expectations?
- How did Stolypin attempt to restore tsarism?
- What was the impact on opponents of tsarism?
- What was the impact of the Lena Goldfields massacre?
- How stable was Russia by 1913?

Digital resources for this chapter

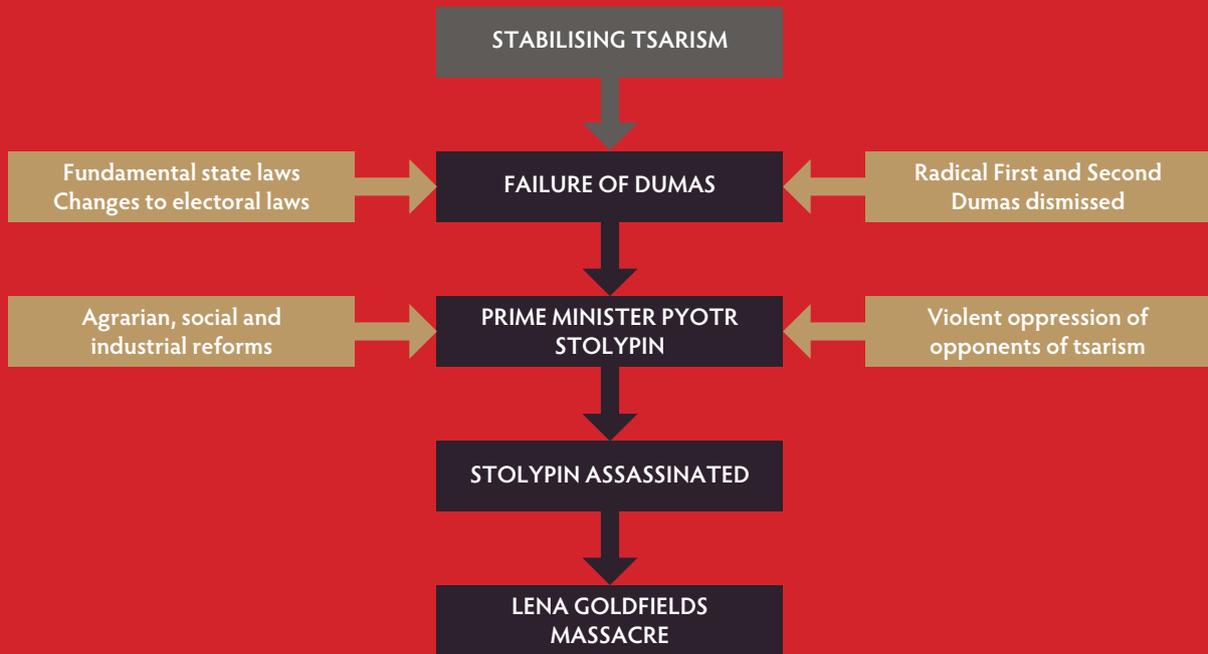
In the *Interactive Textbook*:

-  Video and audio sources and questions
-  Digital activities

◀ Source 6.0 A monument to Pyotr Stolypin outside the Saratov Region Duma

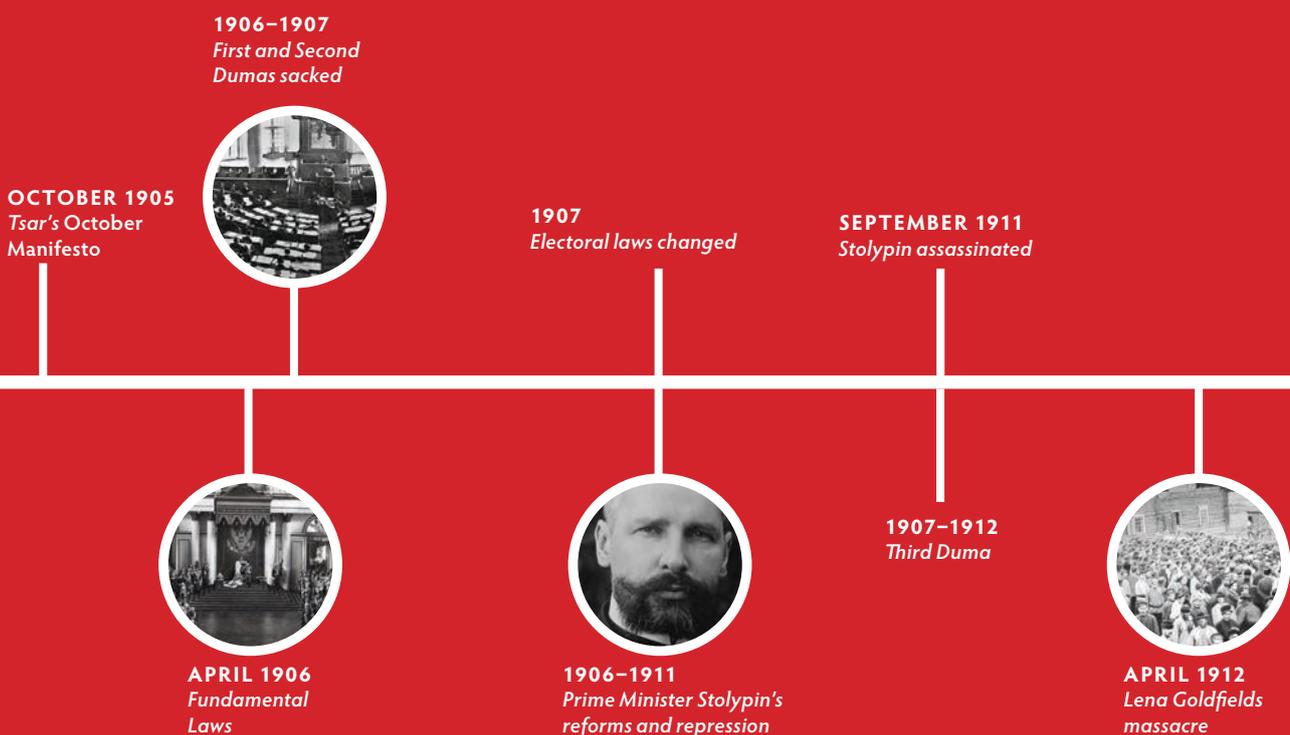
Flow of chapter

How is this chapter structured?



Chapter timeline

What are the key events of the Russian Revolution covered in this chapter?



6.1 The Tsar acts: Fundamental Laws and the Dumas

As for the Tsar's manifesto, look, it's only a scrap of paper. Here it is before you – here it is crumpled in my fist. Today they have issued it, tomorrow they will take it away and tear it into pieces!

Source 6.1 Trotsky's correct prediction to workers and students in October 1905

The Tsar acts 1: Issues his Fundamental Laws

On 23 April 1906 – a mere four days before the opening of the First Duma – Nicholas published the Fundamental Laws. This was an official statement that reasserted the Tsar's autocracy, as had been done in times of conflict by Peter the Great in 1716 and again by Nicholas I in 1832. Articles 4 and 9 stated, respectively, that 'Supreme Autocratic power belongs to the Emperor' and that 'no law can come into force without his consent'. Importantly, these laws removed the sharing of power with an elected Duma, as promised in the *October Manifesto*. Nicholas also created a State Council, which was an upper chamber of the Duma where he could elect half its members, plus reserve the right to declare war, appoint government ministers, control the Orthodox Church and the right to dissolve the Duma. Nothing was going to take away from Nicholas's authority, certainly not a Duma.

Opening of the First Duma

Source 1: Vladimir Gurko of the Internal Affairs Ministry

The hostility of the majority of the First Duma toward the throne was clearly shown on the first day of its sessions. All the Duma members attended the Imperial reception in the throne room of the Winter Palace dressed in a deliberately careless fashion. Be it said, however, that there was a certain lack of tact on both sides. The court had decided that this reception was to be particularly solemn and brilliant ... Velvet ropes down the centre of the room formed a sort of corridor through which the Imperial suite was to pass. On one side of this corridor were members of the State Duma and on the other side members of the State Council, senators, and the other high ranking civil and military officials. The contrast was striking. The court and the government, flourishing gold-laced uniforms and numerous decorations, was set opposite the grey, almost rustic group representing the people of Russia ... What it did was to set in juxtaposition the boundless Imperial luxury and the poverty of the people.

Source 6.2 Vernadsky and Fisher, *A Source Book for Russian History from Early Times to 1917*, p. 775

Source 2: Duma deputy Obolensky

The court side of the hall resounded with orchestrated cheers as the Tsar approached the throne. But the Duma deputies remained completely silent. It was a natural expression of our feelings towards the monarch, who in the twelve years of his reign had managed to destroy all of the prestige of his predecessors. The feeling was mutual: not once did the Tsar glance towards the Duma side of the hall. Sitting on the throne he delivered a short, perfunctory speech in which he promised to uphold the principles of autocracy 'with unwavering firmness' and, in a tone of obvious insincerity, greeted the Duma deputies as 'the best people' of his Empire. With that he got up to leave.

Source 6.3 Obolensky's memoirs, published in 1925



FOCUS QUESTIONS 6.1

- 1 Summarise the feelings of the two sides: the Tsar and his court ministers, and the new Duma deputies.
- 2 Compare these two first-hand accounts. What is similar? What is different?

The Tsar acts 2: Dismisses the First and Second Dumas

Duma	Dates	Issues
First Duma	April to July 1906	Both were dominated by radical deputies whose demands were considered too extreme. Both were dismissed within months of opening.
Second Duma	February to June 1907	

Radical demands – Left-wing political parties dominated the elections for the first Duma. The radical demands of the elected deputies in the First and Second Dumas were:

- writing a constitution to limit the powers of the Tsar
- major land reform by transferring state, Church and private land to the peasants
- universal and free education
- greater equality of all citizens before the law
- more equitable distribution of the tax burden.

First Duma – In response to these radical proposals, on 13 May 1906 the conservative government ministers replied that these demands were ‘completely unacceptable’. They argued that the Duma did not have the right to consider these proposals because they ‘imply a huge change in the Fundamental Laws’. In reply, the radical deputies argued that ‘by its refusal to fulfil the people’s demands, the government is displaying obvious contempt for the true interests of the people’. The subsequent outbreak of violence and assassinations resulted in the Tsar dismissing the First Duma and calling for new elections. ‘Curse the Duma. It’s all Witte’s fault’, Nicholas declared.

KEY QUOTE



Second Duma – With an increased number of Mensheviks and National Minority groups, the same radical demands were pressed upon the unreceptive government. The Tsar described the deputies as trying to undermine his government and creating an ‘obstacle to fruitful work’. Lenin and his fellow Bolshevik leaders were making aggressive speeches from exile. Lenin encouraged the Bolshevik deputies in the Duma to use their parliamentary protection to push for an armed uprising. In desperation, evidence was forged suggesting a plot to kill the Tsar by some of the radical deputies, which gave Nicholas the excuse to again close the Duma.

Count Witte about how Nicholas dismissed him in 1906:

We talked for two solid hours. He shook my hand. He wished me all the luck in the world. I went home beside myself with happiness and found a written order of dismissal lying on my desk.

The Tsar acts 3: Prime Minister Witte sacked

Sergei Witte was made Russia’s first Chairman of the Council of Ministers in November 1905, which was the equivalent of the role of Prime Minister. Nicholas reasoned that this would enable Witte to oversee the implementation of his reforms as included in the *October Manifesto*. But the election of radical deputies to the First Duma, combined with the continual disturbances in St Petersburg and Moscow, meant that Nicholas forced him to resign in May 1906. Witte was replaced in July 1906 by Pyotr Stolypin. Disgraced after his sacking as Prime Minister, Witte never again held a high position in the government. A bomb discovered in his home in January 1907 was proven to have been planted by the secret police, *Okhrana*!

The Tsar acts 4: Changes the electoral laws

KEY STATISTIC



In order to decrease the representation of radical deputies in the Dumas, the method of how they were elected was changed. The electoral laws were illegally changed by the Tsar in 1907 straight after he

dismissed the Second Duma. The new ‘college’ system was deliberately complex and aimed to reduce the number of deputies representing the workers, peasants and national minority groups while significantly increasing the numbers from the conservative upper classes and landed gentry. Voting power was unequal; to elect one deputy now took 230 landowner votes, 60 000 peasant votes or 125 000 industrial worker votes. The result was that more conservative deputies were elected which meant that conservative ideas were discussed. Within a mere 20 months after the crisis of October 1905, the Tsar had regained political control over his nation.

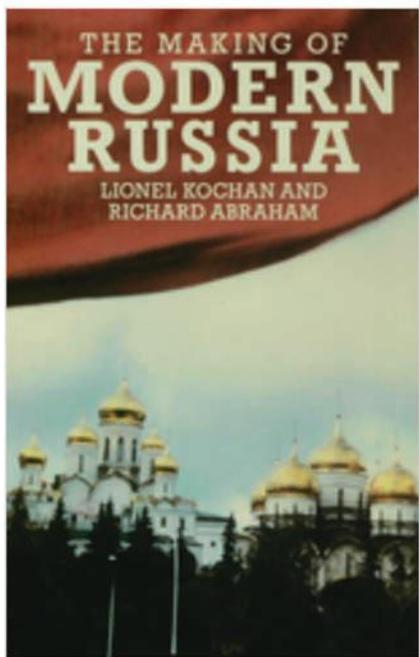
The Tsar acts 5: Minimises the influence of Third and Fourth Dumas

As a result of the changes in electoral laws, the Third and Fourth Dumas were totally unrepresentative of the Russian people. Limiting the number of radical deputies limited the number of radical ideas. Both Dumas were therefore permitted by the Tsar to serve their full five-year terms because they no longer challenged his autocracy.

Duma	Dates	Issues
Third Duma	1907–12	Both completed full five-year terms. Dominated by conservative deputies.
Fourth Duma	1912–17	

However, to regard these final two Dumas as purposeless is to miss the point. The Dumas also heightened the political consciousness of the population as they received greater exposure to national issues. Radical deputies like Alexander Kerensky were able to gain invaluable experience being exposed to the inner workings of the government and political system. Crucially, in February 1917, it was actually the Fourth Duma that became the new government with Kerensky as a key leader.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 6.1: HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS



Historians Lionel Kochan and Richard Abraham in *The Making of Modern Russia* (1983), p. 265, state:

The year of revolution had shown the astonishing resilience of the regime. It could yield ground on every front, face the bitter opposition of almost all the articulate strata of society, endure a crippling general strike, see outbursts of mutiny in the army and navy, lose a disastrous war in the Far East, be discredited internationally – and still survive. And not only survive; it could also go over to the offensive.

- 1 What is Kochan and Abraham's opinion of tsarism?
- 2 What 'offensive' (meaning 'attacking') decisions did the Tsar make to limit the power of the Dumas?

▲ Source 6.4 Kochan and Abraham, *The Making of Modern Russia* (1983), p. 265

6.2

SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL



Pyotr Stolypin (1862–1911)

Pyotr Stolypin replaced Witte as Prime Minister in July 1906. He was a traditional statesman for tsarism but also a political realist. Stolypin's primary motivation driving his reforms was to strengthen the position of the Tsar: 'As the revolution is so strong ... I must carry through effective measures of reform, and at the same time I must face revolution, resist it, and stop it.'



KEY QUOTE

The most crucial issue facing the government was solving the problem of land. Stolypin initiated the land, social and industrial reforms listed below with the overall aim of increasing the size of peasants' landholdings without alienating the landlords. It was a political attempt to create a wealthy class of land-owning peasants whose growing independence would stimulate the agrarian economy.

▲ Source 6.5 New Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin

Stolypin's reforms	Results
Land reforms	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> All royal and government land was made available to the Peasants Land Bank to be purchased by enterprising peasants. Land was to be sold at a price consistent with its value and the buying power of the farmer. A large-scale system of credit was initiated so that peasants had the money to buy more land and equipment and improve their cultivation techniques. Peasants were permitted to leave the previously compulsory village commune, or <i>mir</i>, in order to combine their separate strips of land. Between 1906 and 1914, 25% of peasants left the <i>mir</i>s. 	<p>Stolypin's reforms were welcomed. By 1913, almost two million peasant families had left village communes to farm independently, while another three million accepted government offers of land and financial aid if they relocated to Siberia. Most, however, preferred the security of the <i>mir</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1905–15: 20–50% of peasants owned land. 1906–13: 45.9 million–61.7 million tonnes increase in agricultural production. 1906–07: 15% peasants accepted new opportunities offered by Stolypin. Lenin saw Stolypin's reforms as a threat to gaining support of peasants in any future revolution. Some peasants who owned land became more loyal to the tsar.

Stolypin's reforms	Results
Social reforms	
5 Aid was offered to insure peasants from potential sickness, mutilation, disablement or old age.	1906–12: number of primary schools doubled between 1906 and 1912, as did the local council's expenditure on health, poor relief and agriculture advice.
6 Proportional taxation was introduced that exempted the majority of landless peasants from facing the burden of new taxes.	
7 Religious tolerance and freedom of conscience were granted.	
8 Compulsory primary education was introduced.	
Industrial reforms	
9 Night and underground labour was banned for children, teenagers and women.	Little was done to improve living conditions for workers in the cities. The reforms began to slowly meet the demands of the 1905 Workers' Petition.
10 The maximum working day was shortened for adult workers.	

FOCUS QUESTIONS 6.2

- 1 Which reform do you think might have been most welcomed? Suggest why.
- 2 Choose **three** reforms and **one** statistic and write them into **one** sentence explaining Stolypin's reforms.
- 3 Considering the results, do you think that Stolypin's reforms could be considered 'successful'?

6.3 What was the impact on opponents of tsarism?

As tsarism regained in strength, opposition to tsarism weakened. After the *October Manifesto*, the opponents of Nicholas's regime were crushed and their leaders demoralised. Lenin had been forced to return to Finland, Trotsky was serving a life sentence in Siberia, and Stalin was desperately robbing bank wagons to gain funds for the struggling Bolsheviks.

Executing opponents to tsarism

To steady tsarism, Stolypin made it his business to increase *Okhrana* vigilance and to wipe out opponents of the regime in both the cities and the countryside. Many revolutionaries were put on trial and executed for 'terrorist activities'. The actual hangman's noose rope was given the name 'Stolypin's Necktie' because of the large number of civilians who were executed.

AMAZING BUT TRUE . . .

Only one month after becoming prime minister, three assassins wearing military uniforms bombed a function at Stolypin's home. Twenty-eight people were killed and Stolypin's 15-year-old daughter had both legs broken! Stolypin survived but moved into the Winter Palace for safety.



Year	Number of executions
1905	19
1906	236
1907	627
1908	1330
1909	537
1910	129
1911	352
1912	123
1913	23

KEY STATISTIC

▲ Source 6.6 Figures from a report by the Ministry of War Military Justice Department of Civilian Executions from 1905 to 1913. Note that this figure does not include the large number of deaths of military personnel for mutiny over these years, nor the thousands of political prisoners who were also captured at this time.

FOCUS QUESTIONS 6.3

- 1 What surprises or interests you about these figures?
- 2 What do you think the impact of these executions might have been?



◀ Source 6.7 Stolypin by Ilya Repin, 1910

6.4 Turning point 1 – What was the impact of Stolypin's assassination?

This period under Stolypin seemingly sounded the death knell for all revolutionary parties, ideologies and movements. Stolypin's successful repression of political opponents and the growing economy made revolutionary action less likely every year – until 1911. Two incredibly significant turning points occurred – neither thanks to Lenin. The first was the assassination of Stolypin in 1911. The second was the devastating Lena Goldfields massacre in 1912. These events were turning points as they reinvigorated Lenin's revolutionary fortunes. At the same time, Lenin began his influential Marxist newspaper *Pravda* in 1912, and his passion for revolution was reignited through an affair with enthusiastic French revolutionary and feminist, Inessa Armand.



▲ Source 6.8 Lenin reading a copy of *Pravda*, the newspaper he founded in 1912

Stolypin's assassination, September 1911

KEY
EVENT



The royal family and imperial party attended a gala performance at the Kiev Opera House in Ukraine in September 1911. During the interval, Stolypin was shot twice in the chest by a young man in a dinner suit who had calmly walked down the central aisle. The assassin was Mordka Bogrov, who cleverly combined being a revolutionary with acting as a police informer. The historian Robert Massie explains that the most accepted theory was that Bogrov used his police connections to gain entry into the opera, claiming that he needed to protect Stolypin because there was a plot to assassinate him. Bogrov was therefore allowed to enter so that he himself could fulfil his revolutionary goal of removing the government oppressor. After being shot twice – in the arm and the chest – Stolypin said that he was proud to die for the Tsar and made the sign of the cross towards Nicholas. Stolypin died in hospital four days later. Bogrov was hanged within the week. The significant impact of Stolypin's assassination is that Nicholas stopped all of his land and social reforms, demonstrating a deeper desire to maintain the status quo.

▼ Source 6.9 Double agent Bogrov who assassinated Prime Minister Stolypin





AMAZING BUT TRUE...

Given several attempts on his life, Stolypin wore a bullet-proof vest and surrounded himself with security. The first line of his will, written immediately after he had become Prime Minister in 1906, read: 'Bury me where I am assassinated.'

6.5 Turning point 2 – What was the impact of the Lena Goldfields massacre?

The Lena Goldfields massacre, 4 April 1912

KEY EVENT 

102

The Lena region was named after the massive Lena River, which flows for 4800 kilometres through Siberia to the Arctic Ocean. In the early 1900s, wealthy Russian and British investors established a company called Lena River Mining to mine for gold in numerous villages along the river. Influential government minister Sergei Witte invested in the potentially lucrative project to promote Russian's modernisation. Several thousand workers were transported to Lena, including migrants, prospectors, land-hungry peasants and outlaws who were attracted by the prospect of work and wealth.

But the mines were not as profitable as promised. The owners therefore attempted to increase profits by cutting costs. Workers were forced to work 16-hour days, often in unsafe conditions. As a result, many workers suffered serious injuries and illness. It was reported that 70 per cent of the workers had suffered a serious injury. Salaries were also reduced by regular random fines, and prices for food supplies at the company's store were ridiculously high.

All of these grievances over a long period of time erupted into a widespread spontaneous strike among the gold miners. A strike committee was formed and a list of demands was presented to the company, including eight-hour working days, a 30 per cent increase in wages, a decrease in fines, and set prices on the food in the company shop. After the company openly rejected these demands, the strike intensified, further crippling production at the mines. To break the stalemate, the company owners asked the Russian government to send soldiers to stop the strike. When the troops arrived in early April, they immediately arrested 11 of the main leaders of the strike. This led to even more unrest and a crowd of around 2500 workers marched on company headquarters demanding their release. They were met by a thick line of waiting soldiers, under the command of Captain Treshchenkov, who were given orders to fire

KEY STATISTIC 

on the unarmed miners. The repression was brutal: 500 men lay dead or wounded, with at least 250 believed to have been killed.

FOCUS QUESTIONS 6.4

- 1 List the main problems at the goldfields.
- 2 List the demands of the protestors.
- 3 How did the company owners respond to the strikes?



▲ Source 6.10 Lena River goldfields in north-eastern Siberia

AMAZING BUT TRUE . . .

On 29 February 1912, the mining company's store sold rotting horse meat to the workers and told them that it was beef! But the scam was discovered. This was the final straw for the workers. Six thousand workers began striking in protest within days.

Reactions to the massacre

The government's Minister of the Interior defended the massacre in *The Russian Review*: 'When an irrational crowd, under the influence of evil agitators, throws itself on the armed forces, the armed forces can do nothing else but shoot ... Thus it has always been, thus it will always be.'

But the workers believed the exact opposite. There were many other options other than direct government violence. Many factories in industrial centres formed committees to write resolutions to formally condemn the massacre. One factory in St Petersburg ended its resolution with the words: 'We were so dazed and shocked that we could not at once find words to express our feelings. Whatever protest we made would be but a pale reflection of the anger that seethed in the hearts of all of us. Nothing can help us, neither tears nor protests, but an organized mass struggle.'

The Duma sent representatives to investigate the massacre, one of whom was Alexander Kerensky who was to become a crucial revolutionary leader during 1917. His official government report still is the main insight from the time into the massacre. He reported that the working conditions at Lena were 'slums' that were 'incompatible with human dignity' and that the blame should fall of the company management. As a consequence of the massacre, Captain Treshchenkov was demoted from an officer to a regular foot soldier.

AMAZING BUT TRUE . . .

The famous luxury cruise ship RMS *Titanic* sank less than two weeks later on 15 April 1912. But the massacre at Lena commanded more public attention and debate in Russia than the *Titanic*!



**FOCUS
QUESTION 6.5**

1 What were the responses and outcomes to the massacre?

The massacre did not end the strike. In fact, the strike continued for another five months as the workers continued to reject the company's new offers. By August 1912, 80 per cent of the workers and their families had left the area for good, which meant that the gold mine was forced to close down. Today, all that remains is a monument in the village of Aprisk commemorating the victims of the massacre.

Michael Melancon is one of the few Western historians to have extensively researched the massacre. His detailed book *The Lena Goldfields Massacre and the Crisis of the Late Tsarist State* (2006) focuses on the massacre from different perspectives, from the despair of the miners at the poor conditions they faced through to the rationale of the soldiers who fired on the miners.



▲ Source 6.11 Workers on strike at the Lena Goldfields

Analysis of the Lena Goldfields massacre

- 1 The situation at Lena was a microcosm of the economic divide in Russia – the company's principal shareholders lived comfortable lifestyles, which compared sharply with the harsh living conditions of the mine workers.
- 2 The shock of the massacre was immediate and reignited revolutionary sentiment. Despite occurring in the remote and unpopulated regions of Siberia, it quickly gripped the Russian consciousness and was hotly debated in news reports, public discussions and in the Duma.
- 3 It was a critical turning point because it highlighted the government's willingness to resort to violence as it had done on Bloody Sunday in St Petersburg in 1905.
- 4 Lena announced the arrival of revolutionary leader Alexander Kerensky. He was sent by the Fourth Duma to investigate the event. Five years later he was leading the revolution of 1917.
- 5 It signified the end of Stolypin's stage of peace and stability, and began a period that Soviet historians called 'the new revolutionary upsurge'.



- 6 Opposition to the Tsarist regime was revived throughout the country. Economic and political strikes – which had dropped to a low of 47 000 participants in 1910 – again flourished. More than 1000 strikes took place in St Petersburg alone in May 1912, and 1 337 000 people went on strike in the first half of 1914.

- 7 The two factions of the Social Democratic Party were so encouraged by this regrowth in activity that they formally separated into the Bolshevik Party and Menshevik Party in 1912. Marxist revolutionaries' main hope was that Stolypin's land reforms would indeed create a bitter division between the poor and rich peasants.



▲ Source 6.12 Bodies of the striking miners killed in the massacre

6.6 How stable was Russia by 1913?

Politically – Nicholas's position was certainly more stable in 1913 than in 1905. But it could not be regarded as secure. Despite the oppression of revolutionaries by Prime Minister Stolypin, political protests had significantly re-emerged due to the Lena Goldfields massacre. But, for the first time, the Russian Tsar officially ruled in conjunction with an elected Duma.

Economically – Russia made enormous and necessary economic progress between 1906 and 1913. The key achievements of this period include

- National debt was reduced.
- Average annual growth rate was more than 6 per cent, the highest in Europe.
- Amounts in savings accounts doubled.
- Exports doubled.
- Government expenditure and income both doubled.

Despite these increases, Russia was still less economically advanced than powerful industrial nations such as France, Germany and Britain.

Socially – With the growing production figures, there were embryonic groups of peasant landowners, a larger industrial workforce and wealthy commercial class.



▲ Source 6.13 Celebrations of 300-year anniversary of the Romanov Dynasty in 1913. It was the first time that Tsar Nicholas had appeared in public since 1905!



▲ Source 6.14 Commemorative Fabergé egg created for the anniversary

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 6.2



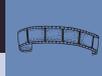
Nicholas's government to 1913

Governments manage a range of competing factors. Below are five characteristics of a good government:

- Trying to improve the lives of all its people
- Building up its agriculture and industry
- Listening to and responding to its people
- Running the country efficiently
- Defending the country from enemies.

- 1 On a scale of 1–5, with 5 being the best, rate how well you think Tsar Nicholas's government performed on each characteristic from 1896–1913. Explain your reasons. Use your knowledge from all the chapters you've read so far.
- 2 How stable do you think Russia was in 1913?
- 3 The revolution occurred in 1917, only four years after this point. How predictable or inevitable do you think a revolution was in 1913?

THE STORY SO FAR



- The system of tsarism was at a crossroads after dangerous and damaging public opposition throughout 1905.
- Nicholas's reinforcement of his full autocratic powers through his Fundamental Laws in 1906, and manipulation of the electoral laws in 1907, dashed the raised political expectations of the nation. The failure to create a constitutional monarchy or legitimately share the Tsar's absolute power with the people was criticised by the opponents of tsarism.
- The First and Second Dumas were dismissed for their determination to radically reform the power structure and land ownership. The Third and Fourth Dumas primarily comprised supporters of the Tsar, which resulted in greater conservatism and less influence.
- Stolypin initiated significant agrarian reforms aimed at solving the land crisis; any remaining opposition to tsarism was dealt with severely.
- While revolutionary leaders were struggling to exert any significant influence, popular opposition to tsarism re-emerged after Stolypin's assassination and the Lena Goldfields massacre in the form of political strikes from 1912.

Use the QR code or visit the digital version of the book and watch the video summarising the chapter.



Develop your historical thinking skills

Define key terms

Use information from this chapter to define these key terms.

- Duma
- Fundamental Laws
- Prime Minister Stolypin

Establishing historical significance

Use evidence from this chapter to write short paragraph answers.

- 1 Explain the Tsar's Fundamental State Laws of April 1906 and how they affected the power of the Dumas.
- 2 Explain the Lena Goldfields massacre and why it was a significant event.

Analysing cause and consequence

Use evidence from this chapter to explain why these events were significant and the consequences for people at the time.

- 1 Explain how Stolypin responded to opponents of the regime and the impact of this.
- 2 Outline Stolypin's reforms and their consequences.

Using quotes as evidence

Write a sentence using a short phrase from one of the quotes below or contrast the views from a few quotes. You can also use any of the quotes in this chapter. Quotes can be used directly or paraphrased in your own words.

I shall never, under any circumstances, agree to a representative form of government because I consider it harmful to the people whom God has entrusted to my care. **Tsar Nicholas II**

Curse the Duma. It's all Witte's fault. **Tsar Nicholas II**

As the revolution is so strong ... I must carry through effective measures of reform, and at the same time I must face revolution, resist it, and stop it. **Stolypin, Prime Minister**

An assembly representing the majority of the population will never work. **Stolypin about Dumas**

Autocracy is an outdated form of government that may suit the needs of a central African tribe but not those of the Russian people who are increasingly aware of the culture of the rest of the world. **Famous Russian writer Leo Tolstoy in an open letter to the Tsar in 1902**

The Lena shots broke the ice of silence, and the river of popular resentment is flowing again. The ice has broken. It has started! **Joseph Stalin**



Constructing historical arguments

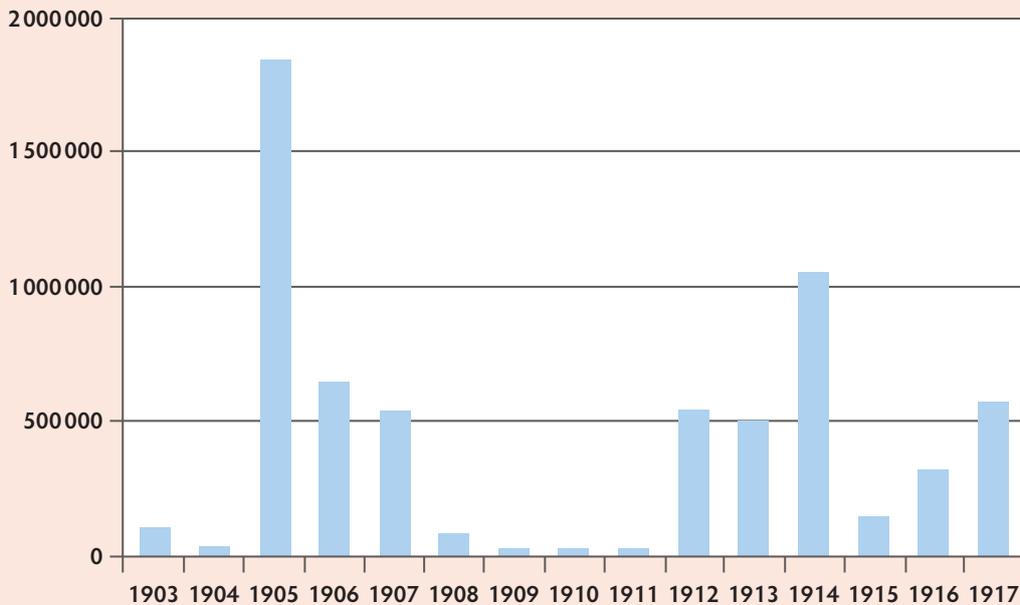
Write an essay using evidence from this chapter to develop your own argument.

- 1 'The political failure of the Dumas revealed that Nicholas was totally unwilling to reform.' To what extent do you agree with this statement? Use evidence to support your response.
- 2 'Witte and Stolypin's reforms were successful in improving conditions in Russia.' To what extent do you agree with this statement? Use evidence to support your response.

Analysing historical sources as evidence

Statistics are a valuable primary source. Trotsky was keen to prove the unhappiness of the Russian working class as proof that the people were demanding political change. He therefore published the numbers of people striking for political reasons between 1903 and 1917. These numbers came from official police records and were for political strikes only, not economic ones.

Political protests between 1903 and 1917



▲ Source 6.15 Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution* (1967), Sphere Books, London, p. 49

- 1 Which years had the greatest number of political protests? Why might this have been the case?
- 2 Why did 1908 to 1911 have very few political protests?
- 3 Why did the number of political strikes increase dramatically from 1912?

Analysing historian's interpretations

Debate: Was Stolypin a modern reformer or a conservative tsarist politician?

Abraham Ascher (1928–present)

Nationality: American

Helpful book: *Russia: A Short History* (2002)

Point of view

Ascher argues that Stolypin was the most competent leader who had the skills to modernise Russia politically and economically.

Reasons (evidence)

Stolypin had the skills to manage the opponents and protests and had a wide range of reforms to improve Russia. By not supporting reforming ministers Witte and Stolypin in their attempts to create a parliamentary democracy (Duma), the Tsar failed to embrace alternatives to autocracy.

Quote

Stolypin's program, a blend of reformism, authoritarianism, and nationalism, was more likely than any other to lead Russia toward social and political stability.

What's your point of view?

What's your point of view about how important the events of 1906 to 1912 were in contributing to the causes of the 1917 revolution?



▲ Source 6.16 Abraham Ascher



7 WORLD AT WAR

In the event of defeat ... social revolution in its most extreme form is inevitable.

– FORMER RUSSIAN MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR PYOTR DURNOVO IN 1914

Overview

World War One lasted five years, from 1914 to 1918, and divided Europe for the first half of the twentieth century. Two background questions must be addressed briefly: Why did World War One begin? And how did Russia become involved?

Germany, under the leadership of Nicholas's cousin Kaiser Wilhelm II, was seeking to expand its political role to match its industrial dominance. This threatened the ambitions of other nations, in particular Britain, Austria and Russia, and resulted in escalating tensions through a growing military arms race. Igniting the existing tension was the assassination of Austrian Archduke Ferdinand on 28 June 1914. Germany sent Russia an ultimatum demanding that it demobilise its troops within 12 hours. Upon Russia's refusal, Germany declared war on Russia on 1 August 1914. By mid-August, an international war for the control of Europe was being fought on western and eastern fronts on either side of an expanding German nation.

This chapter analyses the political, economic and social impact of the war on the Russian army at the front, but, more significantly, on the majority of the population remaining in the nation. A situation was created that was destructive enough to erupt into a revolution by February 1917.

Key issues

After completing this chapter, you should be able to answer these questions.

- What was the response in Russia to the outbreak of war?
- Why did the massive Russian army suffer so many defeats?
- Why was the war so damaging politically?
- What was the internal economic and social impact of war?
- Who was the Tsarina Alexandra?
- Who was Rasputin?

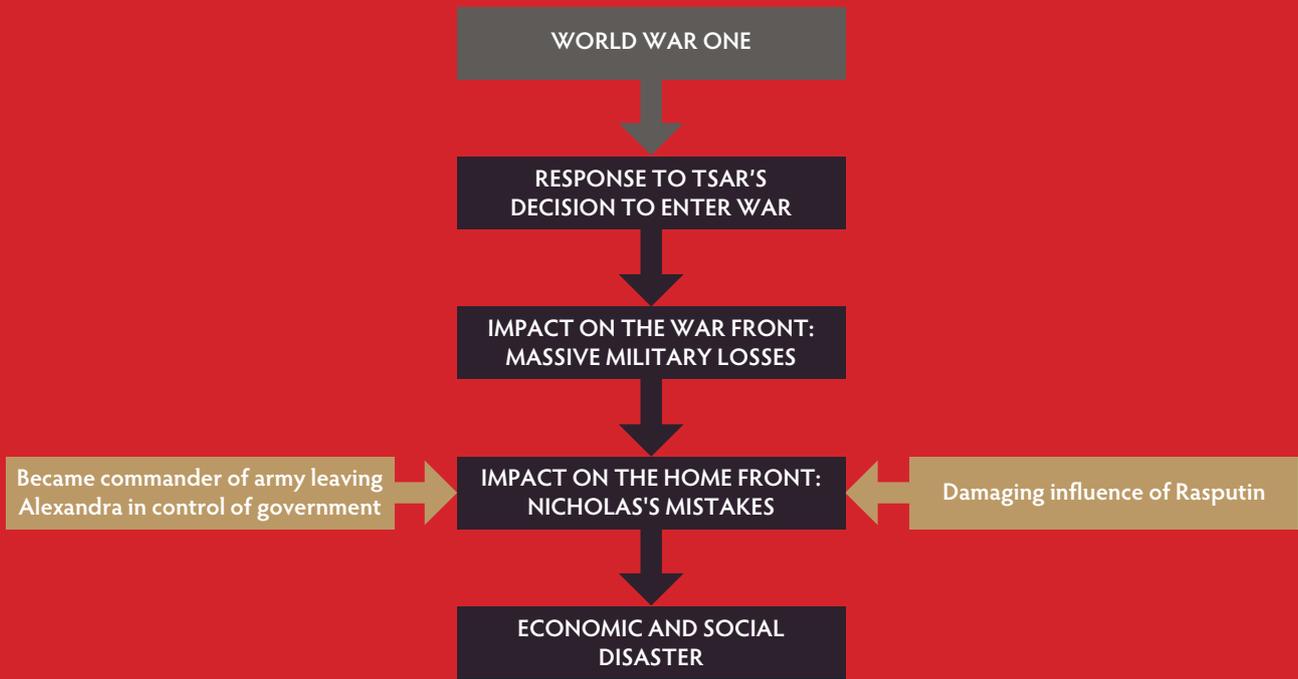
Digital resources for this chapter

In the *Interactive Textbook*:

-  Video and audio sources and questions
-  Digital activities

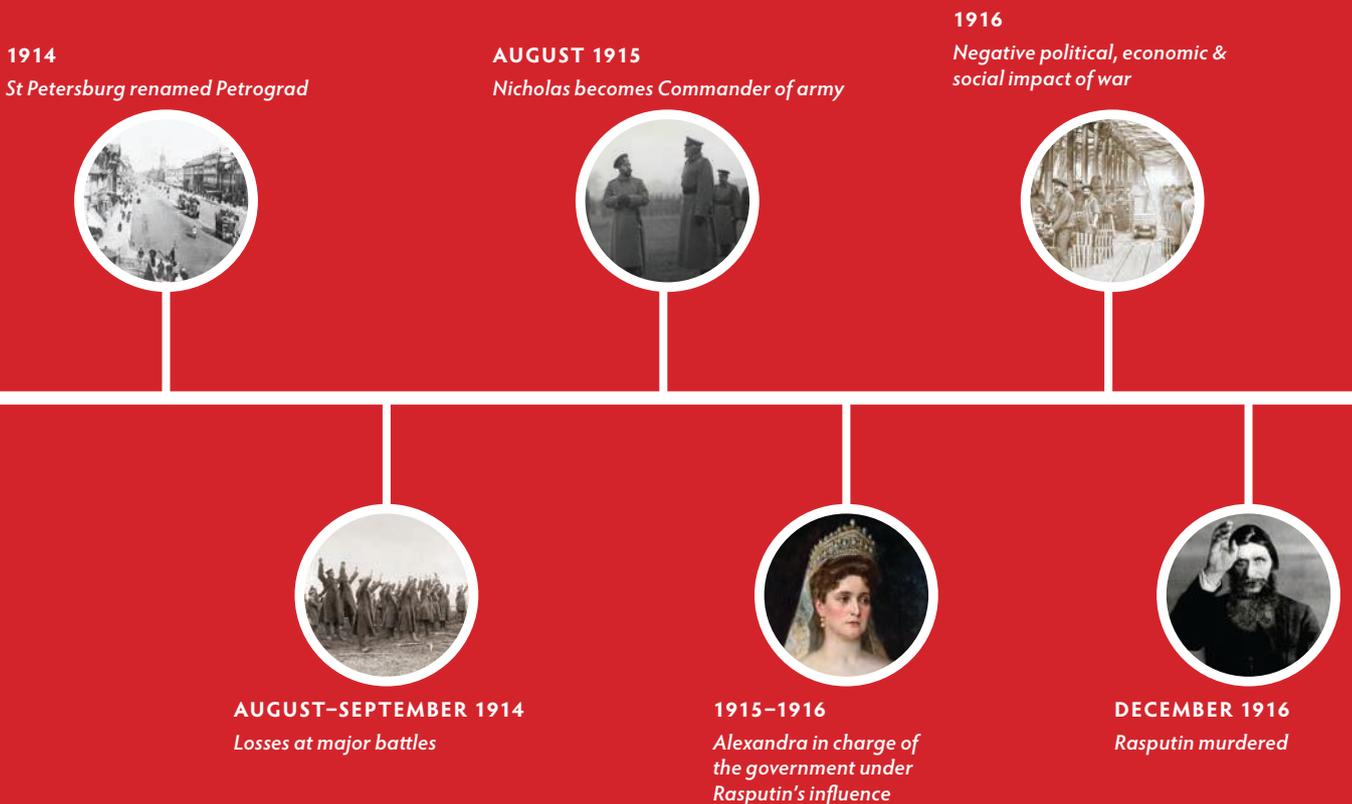
◀ **Source 7.0** *Russian army troops invading Prussia, 1914*, by Achille Beltrame

Flow of chapter



Chapter timeline

What are the key events of the Russian Revolution covered in this chapter?



7.1 What was the response in Russia to the outbreak of war?

Response 1 – Public support

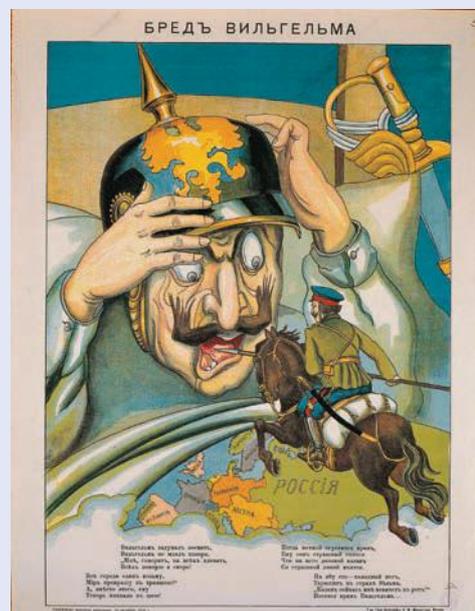
Popular discontent with the political and economic circumstances was forgotten amid the emotional fervour of embarking on such a serious campaign as a war. People prayed, shouted joyously, carried flags and placards with 'Long Live Russia', and even bowed in reverence when the Tsar made public appearances. After the turmoil of 1905 and suppression under Stolypin, the war initially repaired the growing division between the Tsar and his people. Bruce Lockhart, the British Vice-Consul in Moscow in 1914, wrote that the patriotic and religious support for tsardom meant that 'revolution was not even a distant possibility'.



▲ Source 7.1 Tsar Nicholas II blesses his troops who kneel to pay him homage, circa 1910.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 7.1: VISUAL ANALYSIS

- 1 Read the caption for this Russian war poster. Research what was it called and when was it produced.
- 2 Using specific details from the image, describe how Russia is portrayed.
- 3 Using specific details from the image, describe how Germany is portrayed.
- 4 What is the overall message and purpose of this poster?



► Source 7.2 A World War One poster depicting Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm II terrified of the oncoming Russian cavalry



AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

With the wave of anti-German hysteria at the beginning of the war in 1914, it was decided that St Petersburg sounded too Germanic, so the city was renamed Petrograd. It was renamed Leningrad in 1924, before returning to its original name of St Petersburg in 1991.



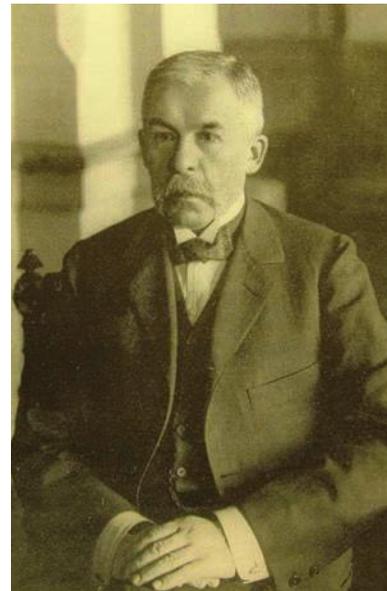
► Source 7.3 St Petersburg (renamed to Petrograd) in 1914

Response 2 – Durnovo's warnings

Pyotr Durnovo (1844–1915) was a member of the upper class through his role in the bureaucracy, then later as Minister of the Interior under Prime Minister Witte. Durnovo provided the clearest warning to Nicholas of the grave dangers involved in war. In February 1914, he argued that Russia would be irreparably damaged whether it won or lost. He declared that if Russia lost, 'The financial and economic consequences of defeat can be neither calculated nor foreseen and will undoubtedly spell the total disintegration of our entire national economy'. But if Russia won the war, the only benefit would be the easy defeat of the socialist movement.

Durnovo's primary concern was the implications of the war on the rise of discontent within the popular movement; he argued quite prophetically that joining the war would inevitably boil over into social revolution:

Russia will be flung into hopeless anarchy, the issue of which will be hard to foresee ... There will be agrarian troubles, as a result of agitation for compensating the soldiers with additional land allotments; there will be labour troubles during the transition from the probably increased wages of war time to normal schedules; and this, it is to be hoped, will be all, so long as the wave of the German social revolution has not reached us. But in the event of defeat, the possibility of which in a struggle with a foe like Germany cannot be overlooked, social revolution in its most extreme form is inevitable.



▲ Source 7.4 Pyotr Durnovo

Source 7.5 Cited in Dmytryshyn (Ed.), *Imperial Russia: A Source Book 1700–1917*, 1990, pp. 464–5

FOCUS QUESTIONS 7.1

- 1 List Durnovo's three predicted 'troubles' that Russia would face.
- 2 Write down two key phrases that provided the strongest warning to Nicholas.
- 3 Could Nicholas have *not* gone to war?

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Durnovo never had the chance to see that his prediction of revolution came true. He died only one year into the war.

Response 3 – Lenin's condemnation

Lenin declared the war to be merely another example of the wealthy bourgeois upper classes manipulating the toiling masses for their gain. He declared: 'We summon you to a social revolution. We appeal to you not to die for others but to destroy others, to destroy your enemies on the home front.' He called for the immediate formation of socialist groups that would go to the front not to fight but to win over their fellow German workers. His propaganda suggested the necessity of making both countries into republics, confiscating land and improving conditions for the industrial working classes. Yet Lenin's approach received little support. The wave of popular patriotism drowned Lenin's calls for a class war.



▲ Source 7.6 Russian soldiers in a trench on the Eastern Front, 1914



7.2 Why did the massive Russian army suffer so many defeats?

Russia's lack of success in World War One has puzzled many military historians. It had the largest army in the world, of around 13 million mobilised soldiers, which was more soldiers than Germany and Austria-Hungary combined. However, the overwhelming majority of Russia's soldiers were conscripted peasants, often with very little training. Further, their repeated defeats resulted from poor military leadership compounded by a critical lack of ammunition, supplies and organisation.



▲ Source 7.7 The Eastern Front, 1914

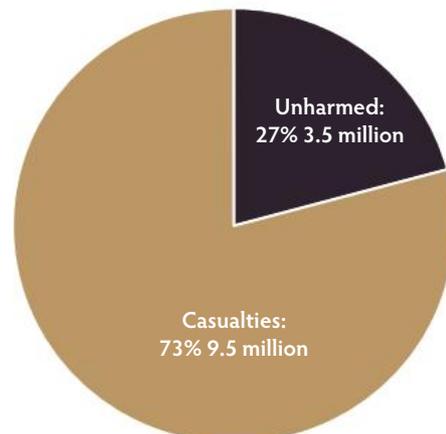
Key military defeats in 1914

The Russian generals began immediate offensives in eastern Prussia in the north and Galicia in the south. The four armies broke through the Austrians in Galicia and defeated one-third of the Austrian-Hungarian army by capturing 100 000 prisoners of war and 400 artillery guns, experiencing spectacular early success. But it was with the two armies in the north that the two most damaging defeats were inflicted on the Russians. The first was at the Battle of Tannenberg on 18 August where Russian casualties numbered 130 000 and prisoners of war more than 100 000.

KEY STATISTIC

The second was at the Battle of Masurian Lakes on 2 September where one entire army unit was surrounded and forced to surrender. In the first 12 months of war, the Russians lost more than four million men, with 16 million people in the region captured by enemy offensives.

Total Russian soldiers mobilised:
13 million



▲ Source 7.8 Total Russian army casualties in World War One

Lack of ammunition

Russia was in no position to fight a large-scale war, mainly due to the lack of rifles and ammunition. Added to this, the Minister of War, General Sukhomlinov, favoured using bayonets in traditional warfare. He encouraged the generals to storm the enemy trenches and engage in hand-to-hand combat, which became farcical against the modern machine guns and barbed wire of the Germans.

Again that cursed question of shortage of artillery and rifle ammunition stands in the way of an energetic advance. If we should have three days of serious fighting, we might run out of ammunition altogether. Without new rifles, it is impossible to fill up the gaps.

Source 7.9 Nicholas writing to Alexandra in July 1915

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Russian soldiers were sent into the trenches unarmed and instructed to wait for their comrades to die and then to use their rifles. Ammunition was also in such short supply that, on average, there were only three bullets per man per day.

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Poor internal organisation

Although Witte had developed a railway system by the 1890s, during the war the organisation of the trains was so poor that the troops often went hungry. There were adequate meat and grain supplies in Ukraine and Siberia, but they were not delivered on time. This was compounded by skilled men being sent to fight in the war, leaving locomotives without drivers or mechanics.

Demoralisation within the army

KEY HISTORIAN

Brian Moynahan (1941–2018)

Demoralisation within the army

The historian Brian Moynahan highlights the demoralisation evident in the Russian army by comparing the ratio of soldiers captured as prisoners of war (POWs) to those killed in action. By 1916, Russia had witnessed four and a half times more men captured than killed, 1.2 million to 270 000. In contrast, the British army had five times more men killed than taken as POW. By 1917, Russian POWs dramatically outnumbered the dead by a ratio of 16:1 – 900 000 POWs to 58 000 killed. Moynahan argues that the increasingly high POW ratio is significant because it reveals the Russian soldiers' desperate preference to be captured, rather than fight to the death for the sake of their fatherland.





▲ Source 7.10 Russian soldiers and officers surrendering

Impact of socialist propaganda

General Ruzski reported in December 1916 that ‘the influence of Bolshevik ideas is spreading very rapidly’. Desertion in war had previously been an ignoble act of selfish cowardice. Yet as Bolshevik propaganda became more widely accepted, surrendering to the enemy became more common. The more popular tactic was prompting whole companies to wound themselves in the finger or cheek and then race to board the hospital train to return home honourably as wounded in action.

7.3 Why was the war so damaging politically?

Mistake 1 – Nicholas becomes Commander of the Russian army

The significance of these military losses was reflected in the Tsar’s next decision. Nicholas replaced the popular and experienced Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich in August 1915, and became the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Russian army. His wife, Alexandra, wrote an extraordinary 400 letters to him at the front, which provide a fabulous insight into the priorities and mindset of the royal couple. Alexandra affirmed in writing that his decision demonstrated true ‘mastery, proving yourself the Autocrat without whom Russia cannot exist’.

► Source 7.11 The 1.9 m tall Nikolaevich with Tsar Nicholas (1.7 m)



The Chairman of the Fourth State Duma, Mikhail Rodzianko, became a regular source of advice to the Tsar as the problems of the war brought difficulties to Petrograd. His opinion of Nicholas's decision, expressed in a letter to the Tsar on 12 August 1915, was in direct contrast to the admiration of the Tsarina:

The nation longs for and impatiently awaits that authority which will be capable of instilling confidence and leading our native land onto the path of victory. Yet at such a time, Your Majesty, you decide to remove the supreme commander in chief, whom the Russian people still trusts absolutely. The people must interpret your move as one inspired by the Germans around you, who are identified in the minds of the people with our enemies and with treason to the Russian cause ... Sire, we make bold once more to tell you that, to the best of our understanding, your adoption of such a decision threatens Russia, yourself, and your dynasty with serious consequences.

Source 7.12 Cited in Vernadsky & Fisher, *A Source Book for Russian History from Early Times to 1917*, 1972, p. 844

While Nicholas believed he was doing the right thing, the magnitude of his decision cannot be understated. First, it meant that he literally abandoned the newly named capital Petrograd to command the troops at the army headquarters at Mogilev at the war front. Second, it meant that the Tsar symbolically abandoned the Russian people in their desperate time of need. The military defeats and high casualties resulted in a contagious lack of confidence in the Tsar, who now directly shouldered the blame for these losses in the eyes of the people.

FOCUS QUESTIONS 7.2

- 1 What are Rodzianko's three key criticisms of Nicholas's decision to control the army?
- 2 Do you agree with these criticisms?

Mistake 2 – Nicholas leaves Alexandra in charge of the government

Nicholas's decision to leave for the war front left the Tsarina responsible for political affairs. Encouraged by the advice of Rasputin, she grew in confidence and began relishing the opportunity to be involved in maintaining autocratic rule. The problem was threefold: she was politically inexperienced, she was from Germany and she implemented Rasputin's decisions through the government. Due to her German descent, rampant conspiracy theories implicated her as favouring pro-German policy. Lockhart told of a popular story during the war:

The Tsarevich [Alexis, heir to the throne] is seen crying in the corridor of the Winter Palace. A general ... stops and pats the boy's head.

'What is wrong, my little man?'

The Tsarevich replies, half smiling, half crying: 'When the Russians are beaten, Papa cries. When the Germans are beaten, Mama cries. When am I to cry?'

Source 7.13 Lockhart, *Memoirs of a British Agent* (1932)



▲ **Source 7.14** Tsarina Alexandra



7.4 What was the internal economic and social impact of war?

The political disillusionment about tsarism was exacerbated by the military defeats. By 1916, the war was costing nearly five times more than had been budgeted for in 1913. The same problems of a lack of supplies and internal organisation confronted by the troops were also experienced by working families in the cities and peasant families in the Russian provinces. Given that the 1917 Revolution began in Petrograd, it was these economic and social conflicts, rather than military defeats, that created a revolutionary situation. Both of these important issues are illuminated in more detail in Chapter 8 in relation to the February Revolution.

Economic impact

In Petrograd and Moscow, the war had become of secondary importance to the people's suffering. According to Katkov in his book *Russia 1917* (1967), funding the war between 1914 and August 1917 cost 38 648 million roubles.

KEY STATISTIC

War costs alone were 4.7 times the *total* government expenditure in the last peacetime year of 1913. To raise such enormous amounts, the government settled on borrowing from Allied countries and printing more money. Both tactics were unsuccessful and resulted in the escalation of four main interrelated economic problems.

Food shortages	Fuel shortages
Tragically, Russia experienced strong harvests in 1914–16, but poor organisation meant that these rich supplies were not efficiently transported by rail or road to the towns and major cities. This increased the occurrence of riots to obtain food.	Russia relied on fuel such as coal to operate both homes and businesses. The same transport crisis meant that bakeries and factories had to operate for limited periods or close down altogether. This fuel crisis was heightened by the freezing winter of 1916–17.
Inflation and price increases	Unemployment
Wage increases were surpassed by rising prices. The <i>Okhrana</i> reported to the Tsar in October 1916 that wages had risen 50%, but goods between 100% and 500%. For example, rent rose from 3 to 12 roubles per month and boots from 6 to 30 roubles.	The practical reality of the fuel shortages was growing unemployment. This, along with the low supply but high price of food, meant that the daily lives of industrial workers became increasingly desperate.

KEY STATISTIC

Social impact

Military defeats, distant leadership and economic disaster resulted in significant social depression and tension. Women in Azerbaijan lay on train tracks to stop new recruits from being transported to the front and there was violent resistance to conscription. The government became increasingly concerned about socialist agitation among the industrial workers. Their message was not just anti-German, but anti-war. Sir George Buchanan advised the Tsar on 30 December 1916 about the importance of regaining the confidence of the people, 'for without such mutual confidence Russia will never win the war'. Writing about the Tsar, Lockhart later reflected that 'although his loyalty to his **Allies** remained unshaken to the last, it was his failure to harness the loyalty of his own people which eventually cost him his throne'.

Allies the group of countries who united to fight the Central Powers group of countries in World War One

KEY QUOTE



▲ Source 7.15 Workers in a munitions factory

KEY HISTORIAN



▲ Source 7.16 Orlando Figes

Orlando Figes (1959–present)

Orlando Figes is an award-winning British historian who was a lecturer at Cambridge University but is now Professor of History at the University of London. His mother and sister were both authors, so he grew up in an environment of robust political discussion. His most recent book on the Russian Revolution is *Revolutionary Russia, 1891–1991* (Pelican, 2014), which uses information from several of his previous books. Interestingly, Figes argues that the Russian Revolution should be understood as a single cycle of 100 years, from the famine crisis of 1891 until the collapse of the Soviet regime in 1991. His interest is how the revolution affected the lives of ordinary people, such as peasants, workers and soldiers.



7.5

SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUALS



▲ Source 7.18 Rasputin

Tsarina Alexandra (1875–1918) and Rasputin (1869–1916)

It was not the bullets of revolutionary terrorists, nor the shells of Germans at the front, but the existence of a single person that was threatening to destroy one of the greatest empires in the world.

Source 7.17 Edvard Radzinsky, *The Rasputin File* (2000)

Early life: Grigorii Yefimovich Rasputin represented everything that the ruling elite were not, which contributed both to his fame and his unpopularity. He was semi-literate rather than educated, a peasant rather than upper class, from Siberia not Petrograd or Moscow, and a mystic not grounded in scientific logic. As a teenager, he was a monk in an Orthodox monastery and at the age of 21 he married a peasant girl. Together they had four children, the youngest of whom died as a child. Witnesses frequently commented on Rasputin’s blazing, hypnotically staring eyes.

Rise to prominence and Alexei’s ‘healer’: After four girls, Nicholas was openly delighted when Tsarevich Alexei was born in 1904, providing him with an heir to his throne. Yet, the royal doctors predicted a short lifespan due to Alexei’s haemophilia, a genetic condition that prevented his blood from forming the clotting cells needed to thicken blood if and when bleeding occurred. Throughout his boyhood, Alexei was therefore permanently accompanied by a minder who ensured that he was safe at all times.

Rasputin entered into the confidence of the royal family in St Petersburg in 1905 through his mysterious ability to ‘heal’ Alexei’s haemophilia. This began an incredible decade of influence over every member of the royal family. Alexandra especially appreciated Rasputin, as haemophilia is passed through the female line, so Rasputin’s healing powers not only saved her son but also eased her guilt.

High society competed for his attendance at salons, restaurants and tea parties. Rasputin’s popularity grew due to the clash between his image as a holy healer assisting the Tsarina and his late-night binge drinking and womanising. Despite most of the Tsarina’s letters being full of respect for his healing powers and godly advice, rumours of a sexual relationship between the two consumed the popular imagination.

The following controversial letter from the Tsarina to Rasputin, published in St Petersburg in 1912, fuelled such speculation:

I kiss your hands and lay my head upon your blessed shoulders. I feel so joyful then. Then all I want is to sleep, sleep forever on your shoulder, in your embrace.



▲ Source 7.19 Young Alexei, Rasputin, Tsarina Alexandra and one of her four daughters at the Alexander Palace, 1916

Scandal and controversy: Rumours of sexual scandals between Alexandra and Rasputin, and between Alexandra and her best friend, Anna Vyrubova (her lady in waiting), had no basis. However, Alexandra’s ‘sexual corruption’ was symbolic of the diseased condition of the monarchy. Historian Figes argued that ‘the point of the rumours was not their truth or untruth: it was their power to mobilise an angry public against the monarchy. In a revolutionary crisis, it is perceptions and beliefs that really count’. All revolutions are based in part on such myth.

continued ...

... continued

Political influence

We are faced with the strangest of human triangles ... Rasputin, the empress and the emperor; set in ascending order of authority and a descending order of influence.

Source 7.20 Sir B Pares, *The Fall of the Russian Monarchy* (1939). Pares lived in Russia during World War One.

Rasputin's social impact was a mere diversion compared with his political impact. By 1916, the influence of Alexandra and Rasputin had become the major source of political tension between the public and the government. In 1915 and 1916, Rasputin exerted considerable influence through Alexandra, who was in control of the government in Nicholas's absence. Her desire to maintain the system of autocratic tsarism meant that she despised the Duma. This profoundly affected the social credibility of the royals as well as creating intense political disillusionment. The fundamental problem was that men were promoted to high positions if they respected Rasputin and his advice rather than because they displayed expertise in their new ministerial field. Political favouritism between 1915 and 1916 due to being a 'friend of Rasputin' influenced the selection of four Prime Ministers, three Foreign Secretaries, three Ministers of War and six Interior Ministers.

Many eyewitnesses and historians have criticised Rasputin as being the symbol of the decay evident in the tsarist regime. For example, Pares wrote critically against Rasputin's political influence:

'The Russian ministers were selected by an ignorant, blind and hysterical woman on the test of their subservience to an ignorant, fanatical and debauched adventurer.' Florinsky wrote:

'The fairly honourable and efficient group who formed the top of the bureaucratic pyramid degenerated into a rapidly changing succession of the appointees of Rasputin. It was an amazing, extravagant, and pitiful spectacle, and one without parallel in the history of civilised nations.'



Ariadna Tyrkova, a St Petersburg revolutionary and school friend of Lenin's wife, Krupskaya, commented:

'Throughout Russia, both at the front and at home, rumour grew ever louder concerning the pernicious influence exercised by the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna, at whose side rose the sinister figure of Gregory Rasputin. This charlatan and hypnotist had wormed himself into the Tsar's palace and gradually acquired a limitless power over the hysterical Empress, and through her over the Sovereign. Rasputin's proximity to the Tsar's family proved fatal to the dynasty, for no political criticism can harm the prestige of Tsars so effectually as the personal weakness, vice, or debasement of the members of a royal house.'



Revolutions occur when there is a lack of trust in the ruling elite. This was Rasputin's most significant impact: he contributed directly to the perception that the royal family and the government were in a political shambles.



Rasputin's murder

Rasputin's death was even more mysterious and scandalous than his life.

Murder fact file	
Date	16 December 1916
Central figure	Prince Felix Yusupov, a 29-year-old Oxford graduate who was the son of the richest woman in Russia. Although he was publicly homosexual, he had recently been married to Grand Duchess Irina Alexandrovna, daughter of the Tsar's favourite sister.
Co-conspirators	Grand Duke Dmitry Pavlovich, a favourite nephew of the Tsar, and Grand Duke Nikolai Mikailovich. Also involved was Vladimir Purishkevich, a right-wing Duma leader and outspoken critic of Rasputin, and Dr Lazavert who prepared the poison.
Motives	Figes argues that it was a 'homosexual vendetta' after Rasputin had tried to seduce Yusupov after his wedding. It was also argued that Yusupov was outraged by Rasputin's influence over the Tsar.
Location	Cellar of Yusupov Palace by the River Neva.
Context	Rasputin was lured to the palace with the promise of sleeping with Yusupov's beautiful wife Irina. Although explicitly warned not to go, Rasputin could not resist the potential of this new conquest.
The murder	Rasputin was fed two glasses of poisoned wine and two cakes, each of which was laced with sufficient cyanide to kill several men instantly. He survived. Two-and-a-half hours later, in desperation, Yusupov shot him. He survived. After finding Rasputin running towards the palace gate, they shot him in the head and back, then beat him repeatedly with a club. The conspirators then tied him in a rug and threw him in a hole in the ice. When his body was discovered three days later, incredibly one arm had wriggled free. Official cause of death – drowning.
Reaction	For several days after the murder, crowds of women gathered at the spot to collect 'holy water' from the river that had been purified by Rasputin's flesh.
Funeral	He was buried in the grounds of the royal palace at Tsarskoye Selo on a freezing day in January 1917. After the revolution in February 1917, a group of soldiers dug up Rasputin's embalmed corpse, hid it in a piano case, doused it in kerosene and burnt it in a nearby forest before scattering his ashes in the wind.

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

The actual basement where Rasputin was murdered was blocked off and closed to the public until 1992 when it was painted and opened as a tourist site, complete with wax figures of Rasputin and Yusupov.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 7.2: VISUAL ANALYSIS



This postcard plays on the double meaning of the Russian word *derzhit*, which is both the verb 'to hold' and the root of the word 'autocracy' (*samoderzhavie*). Many postcards like this dominated popular culture after February 1917.

- 1 What are the two meanings of Rasputin's 'hold' on Alexandra?
- 2 Why might the postcard have been titled 'Autocracy'?
- 3 What was the impact of Alexandra's supposed relationship with Rasputin?



► Source 7.21 A widely circulated lewd postcard titled 'Autocracy'

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 7.3: CREATIVE WRITING



Produce an article for the opinion section of the *St Petersburg Times* on the murder of Rasputin. Slant your opinion towards either favouring or condemning the murder of this notable socialite. Comment in your article whether Rasputin's death would significantly increase or decrease the chances of tsarism surviving.



► Source 7.22 The UK newspaper *The Daily Mirror* reports Rasputin's death



7.6 What impact did World War One have on the revolutionary situation?

The policies of Nicholas’s government were pressured and exposed during the war, given the gravity of the domestic situation and Nicholas’s absence from Petrograd. The most significant result of the war was that the Tsar lost the loyalty of most sections of the population. While events in the Tsar’s regime, such as Bloody Sunday in 1905, did indeed change the working class’s perception of the Tsar, it was the war that lost him most support. Military failures resulted in many members of the army and the families of the conscripted losing faith in the Tsar. Allowing the Tsarina and Rasputin to control internal political affairs from 1915 disillusioned the ruling elite and middle-class intelligentsia. Economic hardships made life unbearable for industrial workers, peasants and their families.

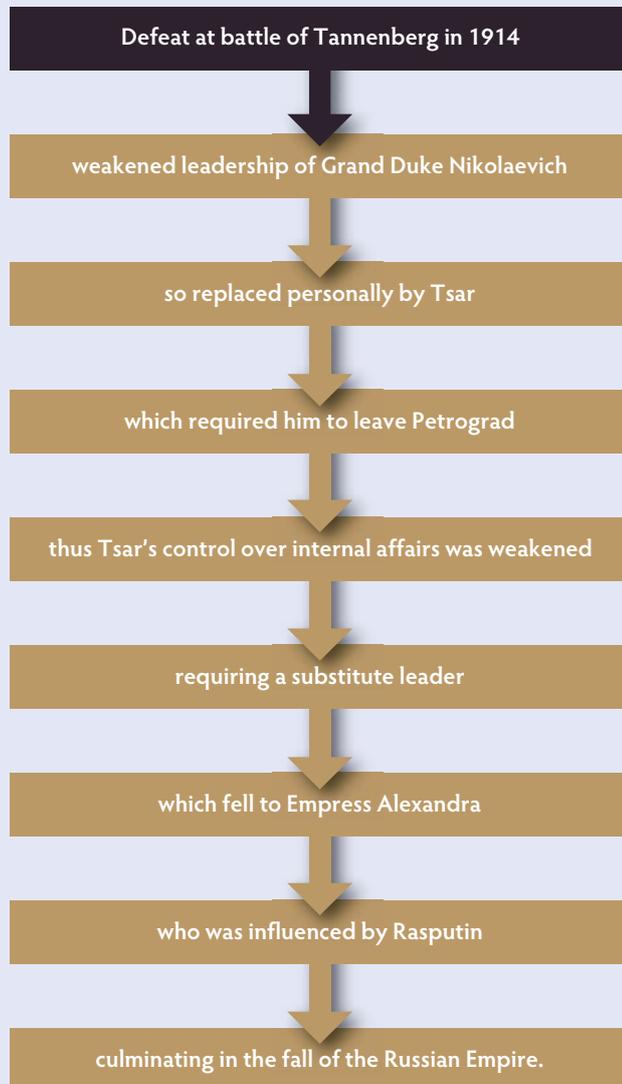
ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 7.4: HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS



Author analysis: Massie’s arguments about the impact of war

Robert Massie argues that the military weakness of the Russian army led to a series of events that culminated in the fall of the empire. A close reading of Massie’s *Nicholas and Alexandra* (1967) reveals his logic explaining why revolution occurred.

- 1 How does Massie link the lost military battle in 1914 with the political revolution of 1917?
- 2 Which links in his reasoning are the weakest?



All of these factors created a Russian society whose allegiances were more self-interested, with each sector looking after its own political or economic ends rather than those of tsarism. The current system did not offer any hope of improvement. This does not imply that all of Russia wanted a revolution to overthrow the Tsar and create a republic. However, it did mean that far-reaching change became a desperate need rather than a political luxury. How those changes eventuated and what they finally looked like are discussed in Area of Study 2. The crucial impact of the war in the creation of a revolutionary situation was that the discontent evident in the old order was now targeted at Autocratic Tsarism itself.

The Emperor Nicholas II is one of the most pathetic figures in history. He loved his country. He had its welfare and greatness at heart. Yet it was he who was to cause the catastrophe which has brought it to utter ruin and misery.



Source 7.23 Buchanan, *My Mission to Russia and Other Diplomatic Memories* (1923)

THE STORY SO FAR



- The initial response to the outbreak of war was so widespread that warnings from ministers like Durnovo and opponents like Lenin received little attention.
- Despite being the largest army in the world, Russia suffered a prolonged series of defeats because the lack of ammunition and supplies, poor internal organisation and socialist propaganda all resulted in disastrous demoralisation among the troops.
- Military losses resulted in greater government spending on financing the war. This created severe economic and social hardships on the home front.
- Added to these conflicts was the political and social influence of the scandalous Rasputin through Tsarina Alexandra.
- The most significant result of the war was that the Russian Government rapidly lost all support.

Use the QR code or visit the digital version of the book and watch the video summarising the chapter.





Develop your historical thinking skills

Define key terms

Use information from this chapter to define these key terms.

- Battle of Tannenberg
- demoralisation
- Durnovo
- Nikolaevich

Analysing cause and consequence

Use evidence from this chapter to write short paragraph answers.

- 1 Explain the varied responses to the outbreak of the war.
- 2 Why did the massive Russian army suffer so many defeats? What was the impact on the soldiers?
- 3 Why did Rasputin's involvement with the royal family create such a negative perception of Nicholas's government?

Using quotes as evidence

Write a sentence using a short phrase from one of the quotes below or contrast the views from a few quotes. You can also use any of the quotes in this chapter. Quotes can be used directly or paraphrased in your own words.

The fundamental cause of the Russian Revolution, then, was the incompatibility of the tsarist state with the demands of modern civilisation. War accelerated the development of revolutionary crisis, but their deep-lying causes could not be wished away in times of peace. **Christopher Hill, historian**

While the collapse of tsarism was not inevitable, it was made more likely by deepening cultural and political flaws that prevented the tsarist regime from adjusting to the economic and cultural growth of the country, flaws that proved fatal under the pressure generated by World War I. **Richard Pipes, historian**

The autocracy's situation was precarious on the eve of the First World War. The society was deeply divided, and the political and bureaucratic structure was fragile and overstrained. The regime was so vulnerable to any kind of jolt or setback that it is hard to imagine that it could have survived long, even without the War. **Sheila Fitzpatrick, historian**

The illness of the Tsarevich cast its shadow over the whole of the concluding period of Tsar Nicholas II's reign and alone can explain it. Without appearing to be, it was one of the main causes of his fall, for it made possible the phenomenon of Rasputin and resulted in the fatal isolation of the sovereigns. **Pierre Gilliard, Tutor of Tsarevich Alexei**

The Rasputin scandal had been a bizarre symptom of the disease affecting Russian politics rather than a cause. **Michael Lynch, historian**

Constructing historical arguments

Write an essay using evidence from this chapter to develop your own argument.

- 1 How did the crisis of World War One help create a revolutionary situation in Russia? Use evidence to support your response.
- 2 'Rasputin's real significance was that he symbolised many of the regime's failings.' To what extent do you agree with this statement? Use evidence to support your response.

Analysing historical sources as evidence

What is the key message about the influence of Rasputin on the Tsar and Tsarina in Source 7.24?

- 1 What is the meaning of the size of each of the three characters?
- 2 What truth was there in such a public impression that the royals were merely Rasputin's puppets?



▲ Source 7.24 The inscription reads 'The Russian tsars at home', c. 1915

Analysing historian's interpretations

Debate: How significant was the impact of World War One?

George Katkov (1903–1985)

Nationality: Russian historian

Helpful book: Katkov, G 1967, *Russia 1917: The February Revolution*, Longman. Particularly Chapter 3, 'Army and revolution'.

Katkov was born and lived in Russia until 1921 and wrote this book to attempt to uncover the real causes of the 1917 February Revolution. Chapter 3 examines the varied interpretations of the role of the war in determining the origins and course of the revolution.

Point of view

Just because of the lack of success at the war front and failures of government on the home front, it did not mean that revolution was inevitable. The core problem was the soldiers and generals abandoning their support for Tsar Nicholas.

Reasons (evidence)

The loss of the Russo-Japanese war in 1904–05 did not result in a successful revolution because the army and Cossacks remained loyal to Nicholas. However, many of the new conscripts to the army from 1914 were sympathetic to the revolutionary parties. Hence, they were loyal to the needs of the country rather than to the Tsar himself.

Quotes

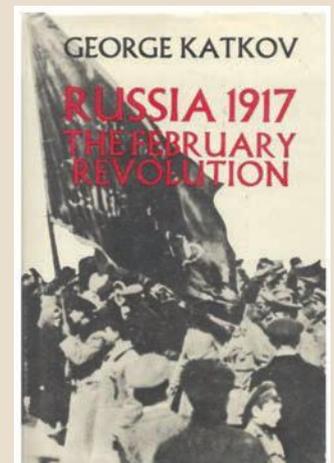
Defeat in war is not necessarily a prelude to revolution.

The overwhelming majority of observers of the Russian revolution agree on one point: it was brought about and shaped by the war.

The red ball of revolution started spinning through the blizzard-swept streets of Petrograd.

What's your point of view?

What's your point of view on how the war helped create a revolutionary situation by the end of 1916?



▲ Source 7.25 *Russia 1917: The February Revolution*



8

YEAR OF REVOLUTIONS, 1917: THE FEBRUARY REVOLUTION

The collapse of the Romanov autocracy on March 1917 was one of the most leaderless, spontaneous, anonymous revolutions of all time.

– WILLIAM CHAMBERLIN, AMERICAN HISTORIAN



Overview

Russia's internal state was in a critical condition, but in February it became fatal for Tsar Nicholas. Interestingly, all the key players were missing from Petrograd: Lenin and his fellow revolutionaries were in exile and the Tsar was 650 kilometres away at military headquarters in Mogilev. Two crises ravaged the Russian home front: food and fuel shortages. Food supplies were at a critical low. Moscow was receiving only 50 per cent of its necessary daily flour supply, and Petrograd a dire 20 per cent. Cities were also suffering from an acute shortage of fuel. Wood yards were empty and peat supplies were exhausted. Out of the 73 factories that had stopped operating by December 1916, 50 had stopped due to a lack of fuel to power the machinery. The real tragedy was that Russia, the largest country in the world, had incredible amounts of raw materials for food and fuel, but lacked the organisation to transport it to the cities. Skilled workers were also sent to the war front; consequently, Russia's labour force was severely depleted. This exacerbated the organisational problems. With the absence of the Tsar and the presence of Rasputin, the economic crisis rapidly become political suicide. The February Revolution is a sorry tale of mutual misunderstandings, breaches of trust and loss of confidence in the government, all exposed by a stampede of protest from the long-suffering workers in Petrograd.

PRICE CRISIS IN 1917

In 1917 the average working wage was five roubles per day.

In 1914, this was worth:

In 1917, this was worth:



2 bags of flour

$\frac{1}{3}$ bag of flour



5 bags of potatoes

$\frac{3}{4}$ of a bag of potatoes



5 kilograms of meat

$\frac{4}{5}$ kilograms of meat

Key issues

After completing this chapter, you should be able to answer these questions.

- What impact did the key features of Petrograd have on the revolution?
- What advice did the Tsar receive about the revolutionary situation?
- How did economic unrest result in social revolution?
- What was the significance of the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II?
- Why did the February Revolution occur?

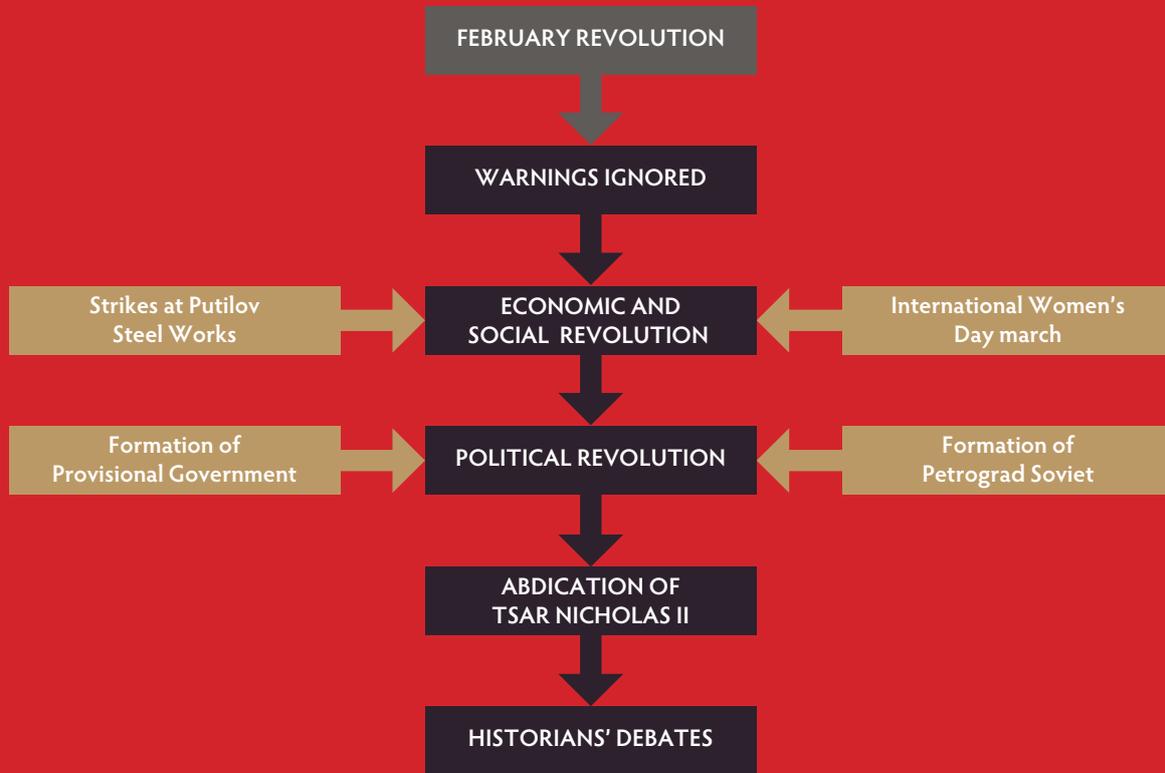
Digital resources for this chapter

In the *Interactive Textbook*:

-  Video and audio sources and questions
-  Digital activities

◀ Source 8.0 *February 27, 1917* by Boris Kustodiey, 1917

Flow of chapter



Chapter timeline

What are the key events of the Russian Revolution covered in this chapter?

18 FEBRUARY

Strike at Putilov Steel Works



2 MARCH

Tsar Nicholas II abdicates



26 FEBRUARY

Soldiers joined the protestors



23 FEBRUARY

International Women's Day march



28 FEBRUARY

*Provisional Government formed
Petrograd Soviet formed*



3 MARCH

End of Romanov Dynasty

8.1 What bearing did the key features of Petrograd have on the revolution?

Petrograd is considered one of the most beautiful cities in the world. To understand the city in which the twin revolutions of 1917 occurred, it is crucial to acknowledge two key features that have dictated its historical development. First, Petrograd is built along a 30-kilometre stretch of the wide Neva River, which runs for 74 kilometres from Lake Ladoga to the Gulf of Finland. Numerous canals branch off the Neva, creating a city of islands and inlets. Not only do the waterways provide the main form of water transport, but they also enable the city to be protected by raising its bridges. Second, Petrograd's geographical location, on the same line of latitude as Alaska and Greenland, means that the city experiences sub-zero winters when the canals and rivers freeze. This limited any outdoor marches or protests for months of the year.



▲ Source 8.1 *First Snow, 1917* by Anna Petrovna Ostroumova-Lebedeva depicts the Neva River at the start of winter.



▲ Source 8.2 Petrograd – a city of revolution. Use this map and the information on the following page to understand the key locations covered by this book. An interactive version of the map is also available on *Cambridge GO*. ISBN 9781108886895 © Richard Malone 2021

Key locations in Petrograd in 1917

- ① **Finland Station, October 1917.** Lenin returned on a sealed train from Germany and gave his 'Peace, Bread, Land' speech on 3 April, 1917.
- ② **Winter Palace and Palace Square, October 1917.** Red Guards stormed the Winter Palace at 2.10 a.m. on 25 October 1917.
- ③ **City Duma, February 1917.** In the chaos of the abdication of the Tsar, the Provisional Government was formed in the Petrograd Duma and composed predominantly of former nobles and aristocrats.
- ④ **Putilov Steel Factory, February 1917.** 20 000 striking workers started to protest against their managers in a pay dispute. Over the following 13 days, some 240 000 people joined the protest in the streets of Petrograd; the short-term trigger that kick-started the February revolution, ending in the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II and the formation of the coalition Provisional Government.
- ⑤ **Smolny Institute, October 1917.** Lenin helped direct the October Revolution from here. Later this building became the headquarters for the new Bolshevik government as well as the Petrograd Soviet.
- ⑥ **Tauride Palace, February 1917.** On 28 February, 600 workers and soldiers met there to form the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. The following day they issued Soviet Order No. 1 – to directly weaken the power of the Provisional Government.
- ⑦ **Nevsky Prospekt, February 1917.** Tsarist Cossacks patrolled the city but refused to fire on the thousands of striking workers in Nevsky Prospekt as long as bread was their only demand.
- ⑧ **Peter and Paul Fortress, October 1917.** Trotsky armed the Red Guard with stored weapons and then implemented his takeover of the city on 24 October 1917. At 11 p.m. the fortress's cannons opened fire on the Winter Palace. After the Bolshevik takeover the following day, the Provisional Government members were arrested and imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress.
- ⑨ **Bolshevik Vyborg Headquarters, February 1917.** The Vyborg District had some of the strongest support during the February Revolution from the factory workers in the area. The offices of the Bolshevik Central Committee in Vyborg District throughout the revolutionary events, destroyed during the July Days.
- ⑩ **Battleship *Aurora*, October 1917.** In the Neva River for repairs, it was commandeered to fire upon the Winter Palace in a symbolic act of rejection of the government on 25 October.
- ⑪ **Kronstadt Island, October 1917.** Sailors from this naval garrison to Petrograd seized the battleship *Aurora* to use against the Provisional Government in the Winter Palace and help take power for the Bolsheviks on 25 October. It was also the scene of the bitter Kronstadt Revolt in 1921.

8.2 What advice did the Tsar receive about the revolutionary situation?

Warning 1 – Okhrana

The Tsar's secret police regularly sent detailed reports to the Tsar informing him of the political atmosphere in Petrograd. In January 1917, the following report was made:

The mass of the population is at present in a very troubled mood ... an exceptional heightening of opposition and bitterness of feeling became very obvious amongst wide sections of the population of Petrograd. There were more and more frequent complaints about the administration and fierce and relentless criticism of government policies ... Complaints were openly voiced about the venality of the government, the unbelievable burdens of the war, the unbearable conditions of everyday life ... the conviction has been expressed, without exception, that 'we are on the eve of great events' in comparison with which '1905 was but a toy'.

Source 8.3 Cited in Laver, *Russia 1914–1941* (1991), pp. 7–8

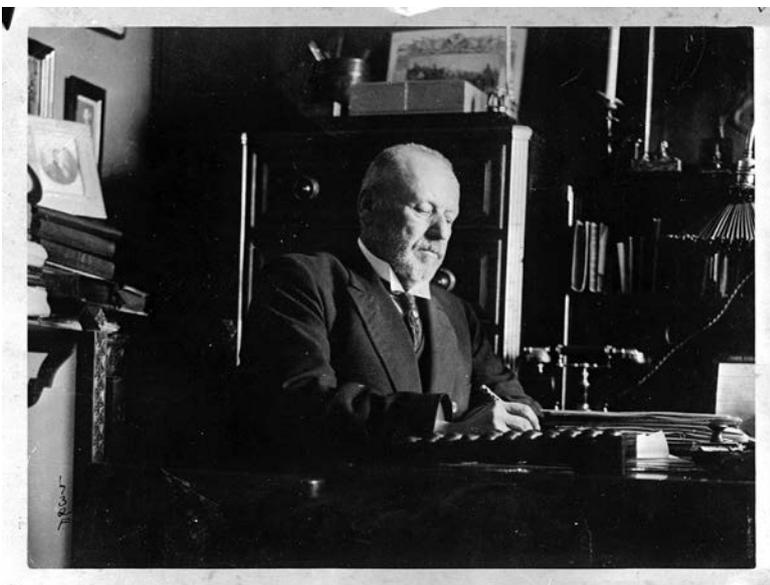
Warning 2 – Chairman of Duma

Rodzianko was the Chairman of the Duma and visited the Tsar at army headquarters on 20 January 1917 to share his grave concerns:

Your Majesty, I consider the state of the country to have become more critical and menacing than ever. The spirit of all the people is such that the gravest upheavals may be expected ... All Russia is unanimous in claiming a change of government and the appointment of a responsible premier invested with the confidence of the nation ... Sire, there is not a single honest or reliable man left in your entourage; all the best have either been eliminated or have resigned

... Indignation against and hatred of the Empress are growing throughout the country. She is looked on as Germany's champion ... Your Majesty, do not compel the people to choose between you and the good of the country.

Source 8.4 Mikhail Rodzianko, cited in Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra* (1967), p. 374



◀ Source 8.5 Mikhail Rodzianko, chairman of the Duma

Warning 3 – British Ambassador

Sir George Buchanan was the British Ambassador in Russia from 1910 to 1917. He sent a respectful but prophetic warning to the Tsar in February 1917:

Your Majesty, I concluded, we must remember that the people and the army are but one, and that in the event of revolution only a small portion of the army can be counted on to defend the dynasty ...

If I see a friend walking through a wood on a dark night along a path which I knew ended in a precipice, would it not be my duty, sir, to warn him of the danger? And is it not equally my duty to warn Your Majesty of the abyss that lies ahead of you? You have, sir, come to the parting of the ways, and you have now to choose between the two paths. The one will lead you to victory and a glorious peace – the other to revolution and disaster. Let me implore you to choose the former.

Source 8.6 Buchanan, *My Mission to Russia and Other Diplomatic Memories* (1923)

FOCUS QUESTIONS 8.1

- 1 What was Buchanan's prediction about the army?
- 2 Was the Tsar's regime in serious enough danger to be described as heading towards an 'abyss'?
- 3 What are the 'two paths'?
- 4 Overall, how could the Tsar have responded to this serious warning?



◀ Source 8.7 Sir George Buchanan, British diplomat to Russia, 1910–17



8.3 How did economic unrest result in social revolution?

Julian date	Crisis in Petrograd	Responses
Saturday, 18 February 1917	<p>Twenty thousand workers at the Putilov Steel Works, the largest factory in Petrograd, were locked out by their managers after a disagreement over pay. Political activism resulted in the remaining workers at the factory also striking to support their workmates.</p>  <p>▲ Source 8.8 Workers from the Putilov factory in Petrograd protesting</p>	No significant response recorded by Tsar, Duma or the soldiers.
Thursday, 23 February 1917	<p>International Women's Day saw thousands of women marching through the streets of Petrograd in protest against the lack of food and the futility of war. The crowd swelled to 90 000.</p>  <p>▲ Source 8.9 International Women's Day march</p>	No significant response recorded by Tsar, Duma or the soldiers.

Julian date	Crisis in Petrograd	Responses
<p>Friday, 24 February 1917</p>	<p>According to General Khabalov, Chief of the Petrograd Military District, around 200 000 workers were on strike. Only minor violence occurred.</p>  <p>▲Source 8.10 Revolutionary newspapers are handed out to eager crowds.</p>	<p>Soldiers – Cossacks patrolled the city but refused to fire on the striking workers in the main road called Nevsky Prospekt as long as bread was their only demand.</p> <div data-bbox="1203 555 1471 741" style="background-color: #e0e0e0; padding: 5px;"> <p>Khabalov General Khabalov was the Chief of the Petrograd Military District during the February Revolution</p> </div>
<p>Saturday, 25 February 1917</p>	<p>Khabalov estimated that the number of striking workers had grown to around 240 000. The city came to a standstill. Public transport ceased. All newspapers closed down.</p>	<p>Tsar – Nicholas sent a telegram to Khabalov: 'I command you to suppress from tomorrow all disorders on the streets of the capital, which are impermissible at a time when the fatherland is carrying on a difficult war with Germany.'</p> <p>Tsarina – Alexandra sent a message to Nicholas: 'This is a hooligan movement. Young people run about and shout that there is no bread, simply to create excitement, along with workers who prevent others from working ... But all this will pass and become calm, if only the Duma will behave itself.'</p>
<p>Sunday, 26 February 1917</p>	<p>This was the day Trotsky later defined as most decisive because the soldiers began to join the protesters, turning the strikes into dangerous revolts. While many soldiers still patrolled the streets clearing protesters at bayonet point, several were seen among the crowds firing on police.</p>	<p>Duma – Rodzianko sent a telegram to the Tsar urging immediate action: 'The situation is serious. The capital is in a state of anarchy ... It is necessary that some person enjoying the confidence of the whole country be entrusted immediately with the formation of a new government. There can be no delay. Any procrastination is fatal.'</p> <p>Tsar – Nicholas dismissed Rodzianko's telegram exclaiming, 'More rubbish from that fat pig!' Nicholas directed his agitation towards the Duma rather than the popular disturbances. He ordered the Duma to cease meeting immediately.</p>

continued ...



... continued

Julian date	Crisis in Petrograd	Responses
Monday, 27 February 1917	The workers controlled the entire city with the exception of the Winter Palace, Admiralty and telegraph installations. Protesters released an estimated 15 000 political prisoners and ordinary criminals. Prisons, police stations, government records and furniture were then burnt in huge bonfires.	<p>Tsar – Nicholas sent a telegram to Alexandra suggesting that mutiny among the troops was minor and that the Duma ministers must simply work harder to solve the food and fuel problems.</p> <p>Duma – Rodzianko sent an urgent telegram: 'Measures must be taken, immediately, for tomorrow will already be too late. The final hour has struck, when the fate of the country and the dynasty is being decided.'</p> <p>Significantly, the first political initiative was taken by 12 members of the Duma who refused the Tsar's demand to dissolve, and formed a Provisional Committee.</p> <p>Soldiers – No soldiers could now be relied upon by the government. John Pollock, an English journalist, estimated that up to 40 000 soldiers had mutinied; other estimates were as high as 75 000.</p>
Tuesday, 28 February 1917	The fighting escalated to extreme violence. Police with machine guns and rifles positioned themselves at the top of high buildings. Armoured trucks full of rebelling soldiers were taken where the fighting was heaviest. Shulgin, a conservative Duma leader, commented: 'These days passed as a nightmare – no beginning, no ending, no middle, all jumbled together.'	<p>Tsar – The Tsar received an urgent telegram from Alexandra: 'Concessions inevitable. Street fighting continues. Many units gone over to the enemy.'</p> <p>Yet Nicholas did not act. His mistake was one of omission. This failure to act decisively or to promise reform allowed the protests to gather deadly momentum.</p> <p>Duma – The one-day old Provisional Committee publicly declared itself the Provisional Government (see Chapter 9).</p> <p>Soldiers – Apart from 1500 loyal troops led by Khabalov in the Winter Palace, the city now overwhelmingly belonged to the protesters. In a crucial act, soldiers and workers formed the Petrograd Soviet (see Chapter 9).</p>



KEY
STATISTIC

Julian date	Crisis in Petrograd	Responses
Wednesday, 1 March 1917	Soldiers, including the Imperial Guard and Cossacks on horseback, openly marched in official formation wearing red ribbons and carrying red flags, demonstrating their allegiance to the revolution.	<p>Tsar – The Tsar finally responded proactively by approving the formation of the Provisional Government. He began the return journey to Petrograd to personally solve the problems.</p> <p>Soldiers – The military revolution was complete. The Petrograd Soviet asserted control by issuing Soviet Order No. 1 (see Chapter 9).</p>
Thursday, 2 March 1917	Due to the capture of the train tracks by armed revolutionary soldiers, the Tsar’s train journey was halted 250 kilometres short of Petrograd and detoured to Pskov.	<p>Tsar – Nicholas abdicated! He wrote in his diary: ‘All around me there is treachery, cowardice and deceit.’</p> <p>He requested that his brother Mikhail become the new Tsar.</p> <p>Duma – The Provisional Government took official control of Russia.</p>
Friday, 3 March 1917	Key political action took place behind the scenes because peace on the streets had been restored. An estimated 1330 people were killed in the fighting.	Tsar – Grand Duke Mikhail abdicated! The Romanov Dynasty ended in a dismal blaze of helplessness and resignation.

 **KEY QUOTE**

KEY STATISTIC 

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

One wealthy upper-class lady cunningly saved the destruction of her elegant Petrograd mansion by putting a sign on her door: ‘No trespassing. This house is the property of the Petrograd Soviet. Countess Kleinmichel has been taken to the Fortress of St Peter and Paul.’ She then leisurely packed her bags and escaped.



ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 8.1: COMPREHENSION TABLE



Dates provide an interesting problem. There were two calendars operating in the world in 1917: Russia used the old Julian calendar established by Roman ruler Julius Caesar in 45 BCE. All of the chapters in Area of Study 1 use the Julian calendar dates: that is, when the events actually occurred for people in Russia. In comparison, Western countries used an updated calendar by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582 called the Gregorian calendar.

	Russian Julian calendar	Western Gregorian calendar
First Revolution began	23 February	8 March
Second Revolution began	24 October	6 November

In your workbook, write a short heading summarising the key crisis for each day in order to create an overview of the February Revolution. Also work out the Gregorian dates to eliminate confusion when you read Western sources.

Russian Julian calendar	Western Gregorian calendar	Your summary of key crisis or event
18 February	3 March	Strike at Putilov Steel Works, Petrograd
23 February		
24 February		
25 February		
26 February		
27 February		
28 February		
1 March		
2 March		
3 March		

- 1 Which day do you consider most significant? Provide evidence.
- 2 Explain why the Tsar and Tsarina's responses were so out of touch with the reality of the crisis. Provide evidence.
- 3 Was it the role of ideas, leaders or popular movements that was most important in causing the February Revolution in Petrograd? Provide evidence.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 8.2: CREATIVE RESPONSE



Imagine you were one of the following key players in the February Revolution. Write your account of the revolution.

- Rodzianko – Chairman of the Duma
- Khabalov – Chief of Police in Petrograd
- Nicholas – last Tsar of Russia
- Alexandra – last Tsarina of Russia
- Mikhail – Nicholas's brother
- Serge – a fictional industrial worker from the Putilov Steel Works
- Olga – a fictional woman who marched in protest on International Women's Day

8.4 The abdication of Tsar Nicholas II

The Tsar had lost all political and popular authority even before his **abdication**. Due to the immediacy of the crisis, the Petrograd Soviet and the Provisional Government had been asserting power since 28 February. Nicholas's generals and advisers recommended that his voluntary abdication would be the only way to ensure a peaceful transition to a new order.

abdication the resignation of a monarch from their throne

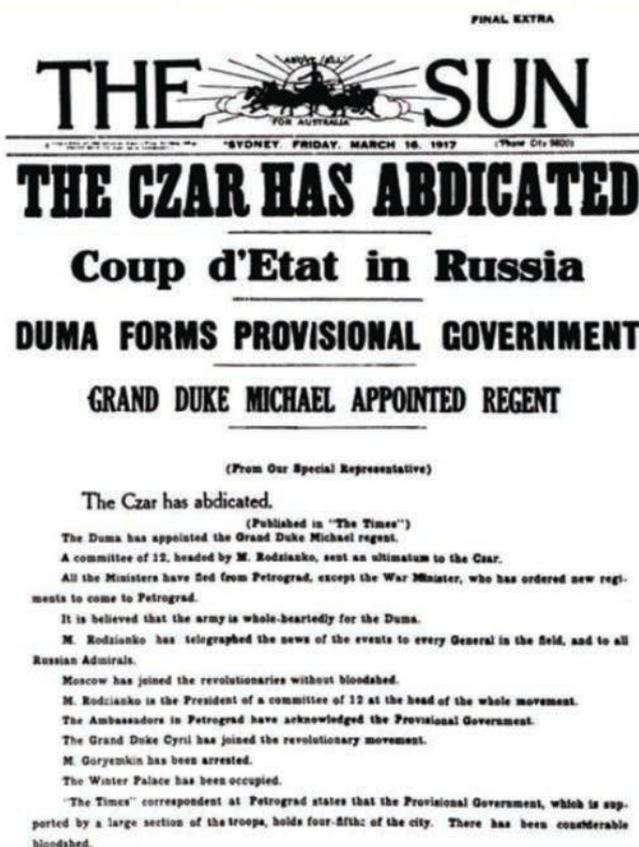
General Brussilov stated: 'If it is necessary to choose between the Tsar and Russia, I side with Russia.' At 3 p.m. on 2 March 1917, Tsar Nicholas II signed his abdication in favour of his son, Alexei. While waiting for the Duma delegates to arrive at Pskov, Nicholas had a conversation with the family doctor about the grave nature of Alexei's haemophilia. The fact that he and Alexandra were likely to be exiled from Russia and hence separated from their son prompted the Tsar to write a second abdication document that also abdicated on behalf of Alexei.

The day after Nicholas abdicated, his brother refused to become the new Tsar. This second abdication ended the 304-year Romanov Dynasty. Despite not being Nicholas's intention, the system of government in Russia headed by an autocratic tsar was formally over. Official power was transferred to the Provisional Committee, which became the Provisional Government. The great influence of popular movements was realised – what had begun as protests to alert the government of the terrible food and fuel crisis in Petrograd resulted in the political defeat of one of the most powerful leaders in Europe. Ironically, the Tsar's abdication resulted in what he had never been willing or able to give his country: a broad-based coalition government. As historian Orlando Figes powerfully argued:

For 22 years he ignored the lessons of history, as well as the pleadings of countless advisors, which all pointed to the fact that the only way to save his throne was to grant a government accountable to the people ... he probably found it easier to abdicate than to turn himself into a constitutional king. That was Nicholas' tragedy.



Source 8.11 Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891–1924*, p. 343



◀ Source 8.12 The front page of Sydney newspaper *The Sun* the morning after the Tsar abdicated



ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 8.3: HISTORICAL DEBATES

**Key debate 1: Was the February Revolution spontaneous or organised?**

Argument 1: The February Revolution was spontaneous and leaderless. William Chamberlin, an American historian, wrote:

The collapse of the Romanov autocracy in March 1917 was one of the most leaderless, spontaneous, anonymous revolutions of all time. While almost every thoughtful observer in Russia in the winter of 1916–1917 foresaw the likelihood of the crash of the existing regime, no one, even among the revolutionary leaders, realised that the strikes and bread riots which broke out in Petrograd on March 8 [Gregorian calendar] would culminate in the mutiny of the garrison and the overthrow of the government four days later ...

There are two features of the March revolution that strike the observer again and again. There is the lack of planned leadership, and there is the action of the soldiers independently of their officers. The latter, with very few exceptions, simply disappeared during the decisive hours of the uprising.

The anonymous host of workers in collarless blouses and soldiers in grey uniforms overthrew the Romanov Dynasty, with its three centuries of absolute rule behind it. But the rebellious masses had nothing concrete to put in the place of the old order.

Source 8.13 Chamberlin, *The Russian Revolution 1917–1921*, pp. 73–80

- 1 Write down the sentence that best summarises Chamberlin's key argument.
- 2 What are the two features of the revolution that 'strike the observer'?
- 3 What key role did the troops play?
- 4 What was his criticism of the 'rebellious masses'?

Argument 2: The February Revolution was planned and organised by the Bolsheviks.

Despite not being in Petrograd in February or March 1917, or being a member of the Bolshevik Party, Leon Trotsky argued that revolution was achieved by the workers and peasants who were educated and organised by the Bolsheviks. Trotsky wrote:

The February Revolution was accomplished by the workers and peasants – the latter in the person of soldiers. But there still remains the great question. Who raised the workers to their feet? Who brought the soldiers into the streets? ... The mystic doctrine of spontaneousness explains nothing. In every factory, in each guild, in each company, in each tavern, in the military hospital, at the transfer stations, even in the depopulated villages, the molecular work of revolutionary thought was in progress ... To the question 'Who led the February Revolution?' we can answer definitely enough: Conscious and tempered workers educated for the most part by the party of Lenin.

Source 8.14 Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1977), pp. 136–48

- 1 The revolution occurred in the city of Petrograd. How does Trotsky argue that the peasants contributed to the success of the revolution?
- 2 What evidence is there to support Trotsky's argument that the revolution was led by the Bolsheviks?
- 3 Why would it be hypocritical for Trotsky to argue any differently than he does?

Join the debate

Was the February Revolution spontaneous or organised?

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 8.4: HISTORICAL DEBATES



Key debate 2: Was the Tsar pushed off the throne against his will or did he choose to give up his throne?

The answer to this question is important in our understanding of the Tsar as the leader of Russia. If he was forced off the throne, we can reserve some sympathy for him. If he simply gave up, it provides a perfect example of weak leadership.

Argument 1: The Tsar abdicated against his will.

- 1 In Source 8.15, what does the dark cloud symbolise about revolution?
- 2 Whose hand is pushing the Tsar off the cliff? What is the symbolism of the hand coming through the back of the throne?
- 3 What is interesting about what the Tsar is wearing?
- 4 Why is it historically correct to argue, as the cartoon does, that the throne was very close to the edge of the cliff?



▲ Source 8.15 A cartoon produced in March 1917, titled 'At Last' (*Brisbane Worker*, 22 March 1917)

Argument 2: The Tsar chose to give up his throne.

Pipes argued that the Tsar both replaced Nikolaevich in 1915 and then abdicated in 1917 because of his selfless love for Russia. He had the power to crush the February disturbance, which would have made it merely a futile revolt rather than the revolution it became. Pipes wrote:

When the generals and Duma politicians persuaded him that he had to go and save the army and avert a humiliating capitulation, he acquiesced. Had staying in power been his supreme objective, he could easily have concluded peace with Germany and turned the army loose against the mutineers. The record leaves no doubt that the myth of the Tsar being forced from the throne by the rebellious workers and peasants is just that. The Tsar yielded not to a rebellious populace, but to generals and politicians, and he did so from a sense of patriotic duty. The social revolution followed rather than preceded the act of abdication.

Source 8.16 Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime 1919–1924* (1994), p. 497

- 1 Why does Pipes believe that the Tsar's abdication reflected strong leadership?
- 2 From this extract, why does Pipes argue that there was a social revolution in Russia?

Join the debate

Why did the Tsar abdicate?

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

In the last letter to his wife before he abdicated, Nicholas wrote, 'I shall take up dominoes again in my spare time.' In contrast, his mother said that it was 'the greatest humiliation of her life' and blamed Alexandra for 'everything'.



8.5 Why did the February Revolution occur?

George Kennan, an American who worked with the American Foreign Service from 1926 to 1953, wrote three books on the revolution and Russian foreign policy. Kennan's arguments about why the February Revolution occurred were presented to a conference of experts in Russian history commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the revolution in 1967. The following extracts are taken from his full paper in Bucklow and Russell's *Russia: Why Revolution?* (1992).

Argument 1: It is an oversimplification to argue that the old regime collapsed because it failed to modernise industry.

Evidence 1: 'The rates of industrial growth achieved in Russia in the final decades of tsardom would appear to compare not at all unfavourably with those achieved in Western countries at comparable stages of development. The 8 per cent figure for the period from 1906 to 1914 [is] respectable ... to say the least. One must doubt that the pace of industrialisation could have been pushed much further without producing adverse social consequence.'

Argument 2: It is an oversimplification to argue that the old regime collapsed because it failed to overcome the backward agrarian system.

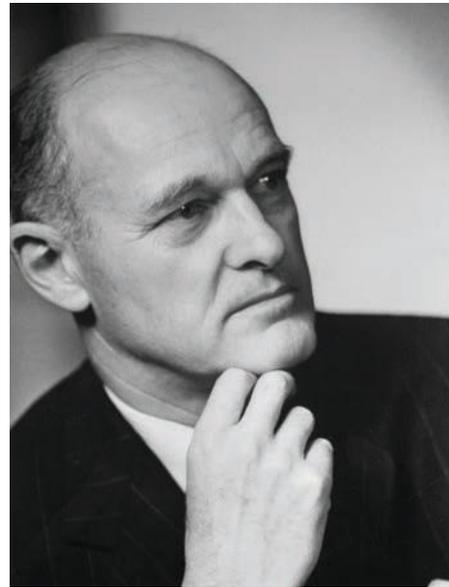
Evidence 2: 'One can truthfully say that the Tsar's government deserved [criticism] ... for its failures in relation to the peasant throughout most of the nineteenth century ... [but] the fact is that the revolution came precisely at the moment when the prospects for the development of Russian agriculture, the war aside, had never looked more hopeful.'

Argument 3: The most decisive and fundamental reason for which the old regime collapsed was the failure of the autocracy to introduce a representative 'parliament'.

Evidence 3: 'There was of course, eventually, the Duma ... [but] it was obvious that the granting of it by Nicholas II came far too late and precisely in the wrong way – under pressure, that is, and with obvious reluctance and suspicion on his part.'

Argument 4: The second fundamental reason why the old regime collapsed was the personality and weak leadership of the Tsar.

Evidence 4: 'Poorly educated, narrow in intellectual horizon, a wretchedly bad judge of people, isolated from Russian society at large, in contact with only the most narrow military and bureaucratic circles, intimidated by the ghost of his imposing father and the glowering proximity of his numerous gigantic uncles, helpless under the destructive influence of his endlessly unfortunate wife: Nicholas was obviously inadequate to the demands of his exalted position.'



▲ Source 8.17 George Kennan

THE STORY SO FAR



- Russia was experiencing severe economic crisis due to a shortage of food and fuel as a result of World War One.
- Despite receiving honest and desperate warnings from three key sources – the *Okhrana*, the Chairman of the Duma and the British Ambassador – the Tsar remained inactive. No reforms were initiated.
- The economic unrest erupted into social action on the streets of Petrograd from 23 February, when striking workers from the Putilov factory joined the march for International Women's Day.
- The key factor in the success of the revolution was the mutiny of the troops, who openly sided with the protesters. This gave military power to the protesters' numerical might.
- While the spontaneous popular disturbances were predicted by many sources, the political consequences were unimaginable. The result of the February Revolution was the abdication of the Tsar and the end of the 300-year-old Romanov Dynasty.



Use the QR code or visit the digital version of the book and watch the video summarising the chapter.

Develop your historical thinking skills

Define key terms

Use information from this chapter to define these key terms:

- abdication
- popular movements
- role of Duma Chairman Rodzianko

Analysing cause and consequence

Use evidence from this chapter to write short paragraph answers.

- 1 What caused the February Revolution?
- 2 Why did the February Revolution succeed?
- 3 What were the main outcomes of the February Revolution?

Using quotes as evidence

Write a sentence using a short phrase from one of the quotes below or contrast the views from a few quotes. You can also use any of the quotes in this chapter. Quotes can be used directly or paraphrased in your own words.

Who led the February Revolution? We can ... answer definitely enough: conscious and tempered workers educated for the most part by the party of Lenin. **Leon Trotsky**

The collapse of the Romanov autocracy in March 1917 was one of the most leaderless, spontaneous, anonymous revolutions of all time. **William Chamberlin, eyewitness**

When the February Revolution came, it was not as the result of military defeat, or even war weariness, but as the result of the collapse of public support in the government. **S.A. Smith, historian**



He probably found it easier to abdicate than to turn himself into a constitutional king. That was Nicholas' tragedy. **Orlando Figes, historian**

The fundamental cause of the Russian Revolution, then, was the incompatibility of the tsarist state with the demands of modern civilisation. **Christopher Hill, historian**

Time and time again, the obstinate refusal of the tsarist regime to concede reforms turned what should have been a political problem, into a revolutionary crisis ... The tsarist regime's downfall was not inevitable, but its own stupidity made it so. **Figes**

No one made the Russian Revolution, unless it was the autocracy itself ... It was the direct result of the utter bankruptcy of the autocracy. **Bernard Pares, diplomat and eyewitness**

The autocracy collapsed in the face of popular demonstrations and the withdrawal of elite support for the regime. **Sheila Fitzpatrick, historian**

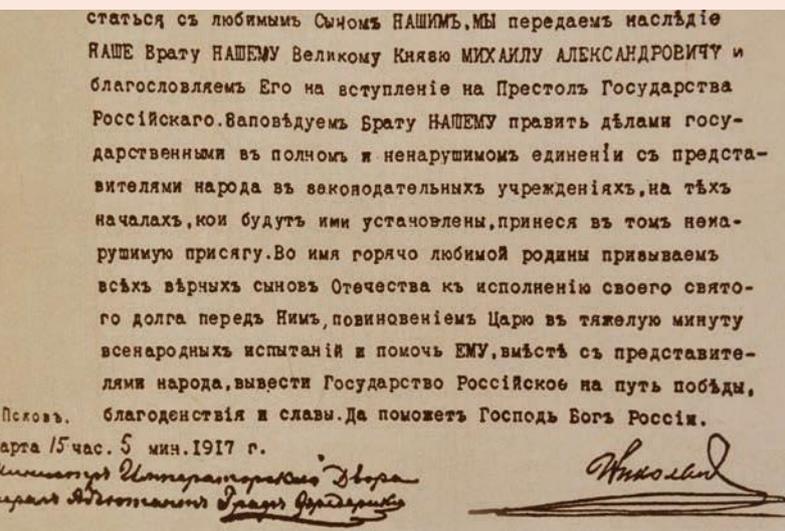
Constructing historical arguments

Use evidence from this chapter to develop your own argument in these essay questions.

- 1 Trotsky said that 'A revolution breaks out when all the antagonisms of a society have reached their highest tension'. To what extent do you agree with this view for the February Revolution?
- 2 'Popular movements were far more significant than individuals and their ideas in causing the February Revolution.' To what extent do you agree with this view?

Analysing historical sources as evidence

Key document: The Tsar's abdication



▲ Source 8.18 The bottom of the Tsar's abdication Act

In these days of great struggle with a foreign enemy, who for nearly three years has striven to enslave our homeland, the Lord God has been pleased to send down on Russia a new, terrible ordeal. The internal popular disturbances that have begun, threaten to have a disastrous effect on the further conduct of this persistent war. The destiny of Russia, the honour of our heroic army, the welfare of the people, the entire future of our dear fatherland demand that, whatever it may cost, the war be brought to a victorious end.

The cruel enemy is gathering his last forces, and already the hour is near when our gallant army, together with our glorious allies, will be able to finally crush the enemy. In these decisive days in the life of Russia, we have deemed it a duty of conscience to facilitate for our people a close

union and consolidation of all national forces for the speediest attainment of victory; and, in agreement with the State Duma, we have thought it best to abdicate the throne of the Russian state and to lay down the supreme power.

Not wishing to part with our beloved son, we hand down our inheritance to our brother, Grand Duke Mikhail Aleksandrovich, and give him our blessing on his accession to the throne of the Russian state. We enjoin our brother to direct state affairs in full and inviolable union with the representatives of the people in the legislative institutions, on those principles which they will establish.

In the name of our dearly beloved homeland we call on all faithful sons of the fatherland to fulfil their sacred duty to the Tsar by obeying him at this grave moment of national tribulation, to help him, together with the representatives of the people, to bring the Russian state onto the road of victory, prosperity and glory.

May the Lord God help Russia! Nikolai

Source 8.19 Vernadsky & Fisher, *A Source Book for Russian History*, p. 883

- 1 What was Tsar Nicholas's attitude to the war?
- 2 What was his attitude towards the 'internal popular disturbances' in Petrograd?
- 3 What reason does he provide for laying down his supreme power and abdicating?
- 4 What reason does he provide for also abdicating on behalf of his son Alexei?
- 5 What is unexpected or ironic about the leadership advice ('enjoin') he gave to his brother Grand Duke Mikhail?
- 6 What is your overall impression of the Tsar's character in this process?

Analysing historian's interpretations

Debate: What were the main causes of the February Revolution?

Robert Massie (1929–2019)

Nationality: American historian

Helpful book: *Nicholas and Alexandra: The Last Tsar and His Family*, Indigo Press, 1967.

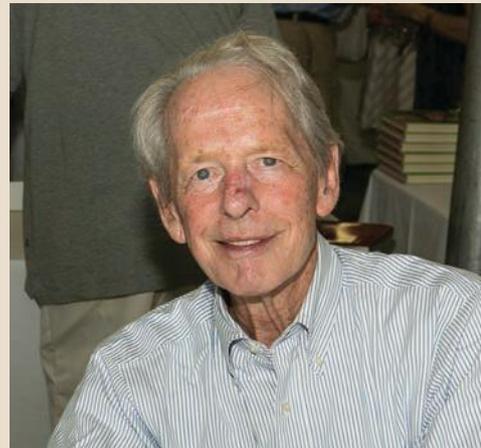
Widely regarded as the expert on the Russian royal family.

Point of view (perspective or argument)

Nicholas abdicated because he had no political future if he rejected the advice of his war generals and government leaders in Petrograd.

Reasons (evidence)

In prioritising advice as the main cause of his sorry abdication, Massie overlooks many other significant problems caused by Nicholas – his mistakes, poor economic conditions, broken trust with the people, lack of reform and his willingness to use violence. If the Tsar believed that the main problem was the recommendation of his advisers, then he was seriously out of touch with reality.



▲ Source 8.20 Robert Massie

Quote

Years of rule, years of war, years of personal strain and anguish had left him with few inner resources with which to face the prospect of plunging his country into civil war. Ultimately, the factor which swung the Tsar's decision was the advice of his generals ... If it was the advice of his generals that the highest act of patriotism he could perform would be to abdicate, then it became impossible for Nicholas to refuse.

What's your point of view?

What's your point of view about the main causes of the February Revolution?



9

CRISIS OF DUAL AUTHORITY

The Provisional Government had authority without power whilst the Soviet had power without authority.

– KERENSKY

Overview

The abdication of Tsar Nicholas II was the most significant event of the February Revolution. The political consequences, however, went far deeper. Two new political bodies were formed on 28 February: the Provisional Government that, as Kerensky admitted, were the official authority with formal power; and the Petrograd Soviet that had the genuine power in the eyes of the people. This was a period best described as **Dual Authority**.

Dual Authority the term given to the eight-month period between February and October 1917

Dual Authority can further be considered as having operated in two different phases. The first phase, February to April, was when the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet generally worked together and were supported by the main revolutionary parties, including the Bolsheviks. The second phase was from Lenin's return on 3 April, when he launched a rivalry campaign that separated the Soviet and the Bolshevik Party from the Provisional Government and their supporters. This chapter analyses the formation, key documents and impact of each of these two new powers, with a focus on the key turning points that allowed the Bolsheviks to rise to power by October.

Key issues

After completing this chapter, you should be able to answer these questions.

- Why did the Provisional Government have authority without power?
- Why did the Petrograd Soviet have power without authority?
- Who was Alexander Kerensky?
- Why did the Provisional Government fail to win support?
- What were the main concerns of the soldiers, workers and peasants?
- What were the turning points in the rise of the Bolsheviks?
- Why did Kerensky's initial popularity and leadership fail?

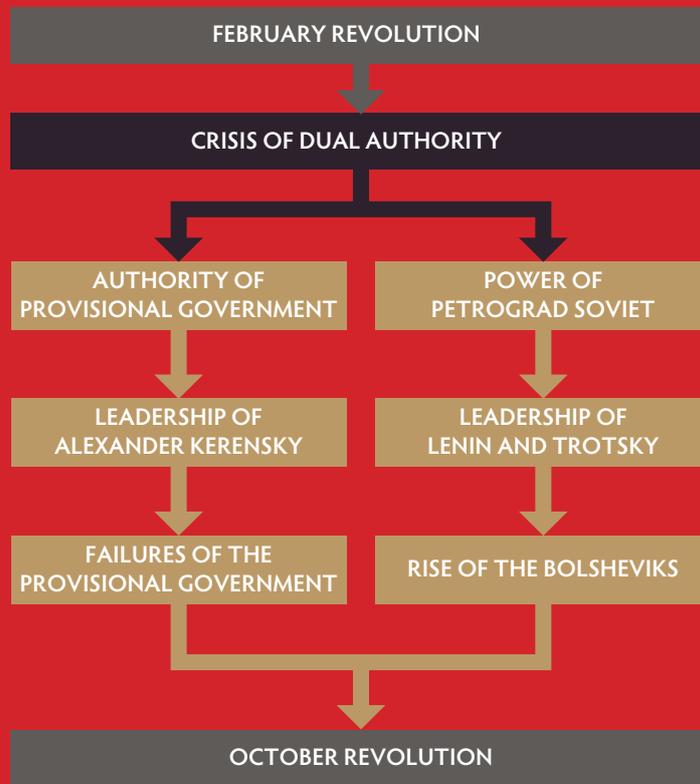
Digital resources for this chapter

In the *Interactive Textbook*:

-  Video and audio sources and questions
-  Digital activities

◀ **Source 9.0** Lenin proclaims the *April Theses* from the balcony of the Kschessinska Mansion

Flow of chapter



Chapter timeline

What are the key events of the Russian Revolution covered in this chapter?

MARCH

Provisional Government and Petrograd Soviet



MAY

Trotsky's return



JULY

July Days



SEPTEMBER

Growth in support for Bolsheviks



APRIL

Lenin's return and April Theses



JUNE

June Offensive



AUGUST

Kornilov Affair

9.1 March 1917: Formation of Dual Authority

Why did the Provisional Government have authority without power?

As Chairman of the State Duma, Mikhail Rodzianko formed the Provisional Government and Prince Lvov was appointed Prime Minister. The members of the new government had all been elected in 1912 to the Fourth Duma. All were wealthy members of noble or landowning families and most were members of the Freemasons religious society. Some were openly liberal and opposed to the Tsar, like Milyukov, the Foreign Minister, and Kerensky, a former leader of the Socialist Revolutionaries and a current member of the Petrograd Soviet.

Provisional Government's liberal reforms

The Provisional Government's key policies were published on the same day and immediately implemented over the next few days. Historian Robert Service described Russia as becoming 'freer than any other country', despite still being involved in World War One. Policies included:

- full amnesty of all political and religious prisoners
- freedom of speech
- freedom of the press
- freedom to strike and assemble in unions
- abolition of all class, religious and national restrictions
- immediate preparations for a vote to elect a Constituent Assembly consisting of representatives from the whole nation; when formed, the Provisional Government would cease to exist
- replacement of the tsarist police with an elected people's militia
- election of local councils
- military troops who fought on the side of the revolution to be given roles as permanent defenders of Petrograd.

► **Source 9.1** Prince Lvov, was appointed as Prime Minister of Russia on 15 March 1917.



FOCUS QUESTIONS 9.1

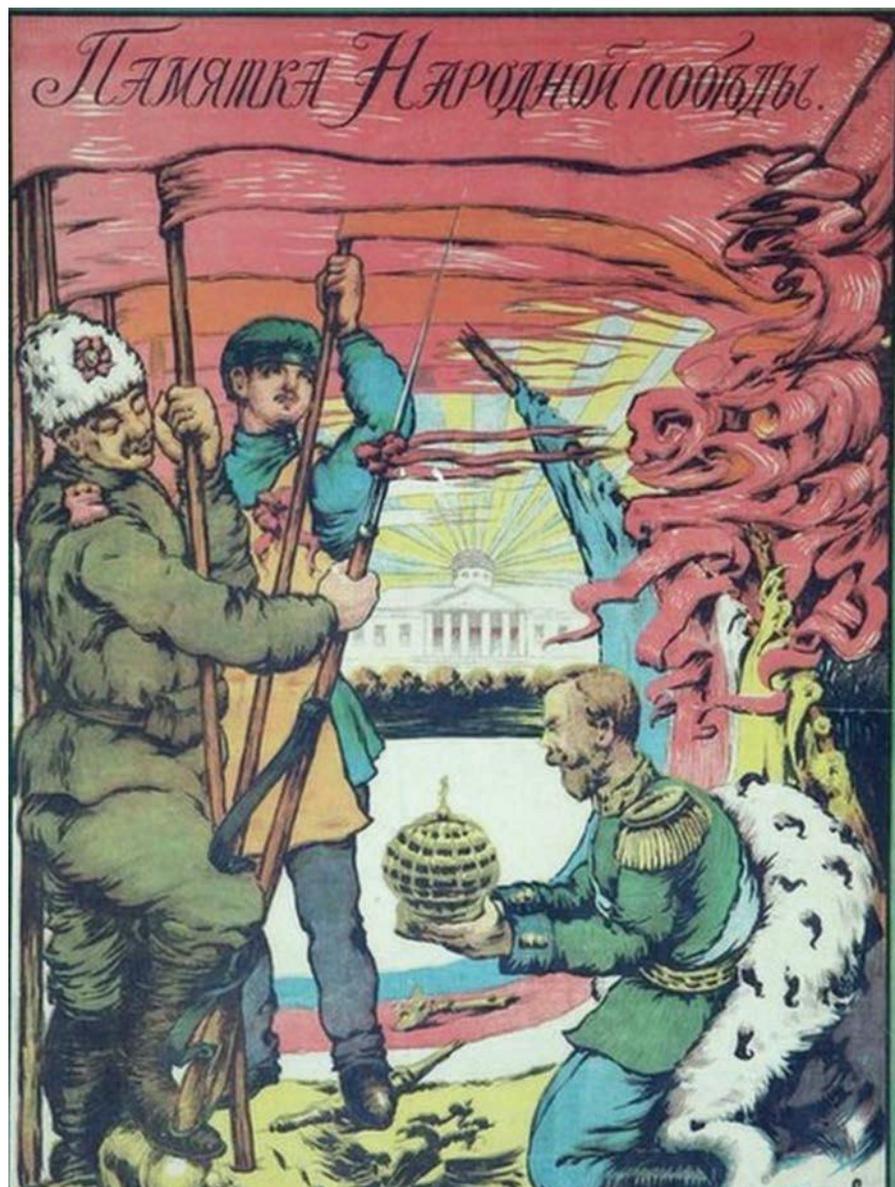
- 1 Which policy do you consider the most beneficial? Explain why.
- 2 How might these policies have been received by the workers?
- 3 How might these policies have impacted the war effort?
- 4 Why did the Provisional Government describe itself as 'provisional' or 'temporary'?
- 5 Lenin later attacked the Provisional Government as being made up of conservative politicians who did not represent the 'revolutionary' aspirations of the people. To what extent do you agree with Lenin's criticism?

Weak political and popular foundation

The fundamental weakness undermining the Provisional Government's power was its dubious political beginnings. The new government had formed from a rebellious committee of 12 men who had refused to stop meeting as the Tsar had ordered. They had then gained power by default after the triple abdication (Nicholas, Alexei and Michael). This had vast political implications. They were not chosen representatives elected by mass vote and therefore did not have widespread support. The core issue was that they were privileged members of society from the Fourth Duma who were given political control in the confusion of a desperate internal crisis. They did not have a popular mandate for their new-found authority and struggled to overcome this legacy.

FOCUS QUESTIONS 9.2

- 1 Explain the main figures in Source 9.2. Who do they represent and how are they portrayed?
- 2 Explain the symbolism of the background.
- 3 What is the key message of this image?



► **Source 9.2** 'Memo of the people's victory'. The poster shows Nicholas II handing authority to revolutionary forces, here represented by a soldier and a worker. The Tauride Palace, where the Provisional Government sat, sits in the background. Behind it, a rising sun symbolises freedom.

Why did the Petrograd Soviet have power without authority?

The Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies ... enjoys all the elements of real power, since the troops, the railways, the post and telegraph are in its hands. One can say flatly that the Provisional Government exists only so long as it is permitted by the Soviet.

– Alexander Guchkov

On 27 February 1917, 600 soldiers and workers turned up to the Tauride Palace and officially formed the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, as Trotsky had during the 1905 Revolution. Chkeidze, a Menshevik, was elected as its first chairman. The soviet's considerable influence derived from its control of the army, railways, communications, employers and employees. Over 3000 deputies regularly packed into the meeting room to hotly debate the progress of the revolution. Lenin argued that because the soviet represented ordinary Russians, it must assume total control.

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Surprisingly, the rival Provisional Government and Petrograd Soviet met in adjacent rooms of the royal Tauride Palace.

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Soviet Order No. 1

A day after the formation of the Petrograd Soviet, it published the following demands that severely limited the power of the Provisional Government. The Order, called **Soviet Order No. 1**, was to be read to all companies, battalions, regiments and sailors. The Order included the following key demands.

- Every military unit, from army battalions to navy vessels, must elect representatives immediately to attend the Soviet.
- All political activity of the military units 'is subordinated to the Soviet'.
- Any military orders given by the Provisional Government 'shall be executed only in such cases as they do not conflict with the orders and resolutions of the Soviet'.
- 'All kinds of arms, such as rifles, machine guns, armoured automobiles and others, must be kept at the disposal and under the control of the company and battalion commanders and must in no case be turned over to officers, even at their demand.'
- When performing their duties, soldiers 'must observe strict military discipline.
- Titles of officers must be changed from 'Your Excellency' and 'Your Honour' to 'Mister General' and 'Mister Colonel'.

Soviet Order No. 1

the Order given by the Petrograd Soviet one day after its formation that no military orders from the Provisional Government were to be obeyed unless also approved by the Soviet

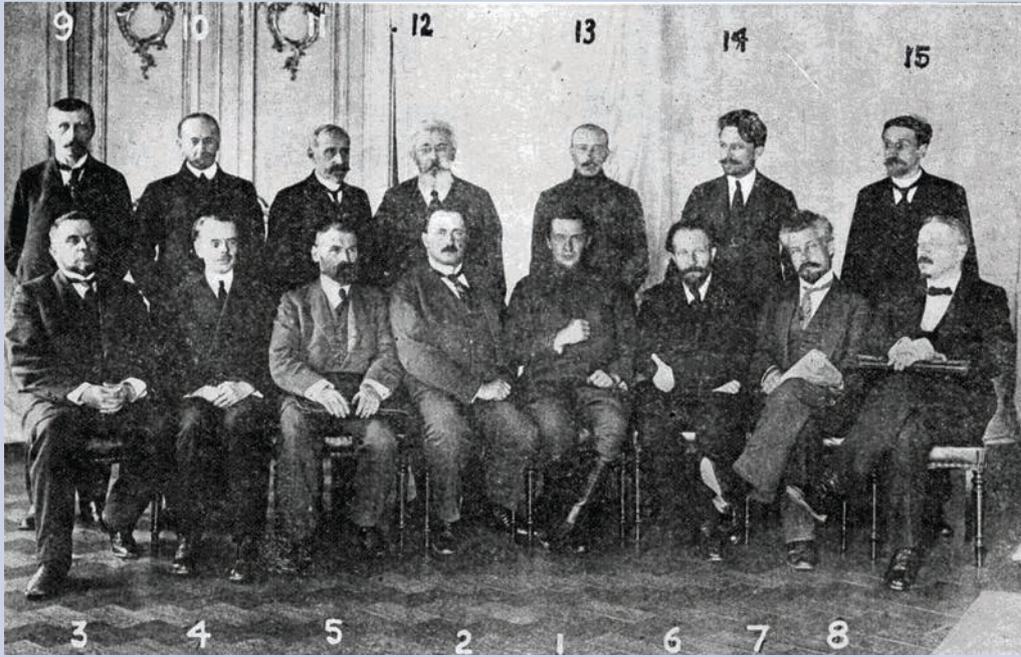
FOCUS QUESTIONS 9.3

- 1 Which of these items were reactions against the old tsarist system?
- 2 Which of these would have been most threatening to the Provisional Government?
- 3 Rank the demands in order of significance, with 1 being most important and 6 being least important.
- 4 How likely was it that these orders would be obeyed?

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 9.1: VISUAL ANALYSIS



As Napoleon famously stated, 'A picture tells a thousand words'. Your task is to compare the following photographs of the representative political bodies formed in 1917.



▲ Source 9.3 The new Provisional Government



▲ Source 9.4 First session of the Petrograd Soviet in the Tauride Palace

- 1 Write three words that best describe each of the photographs.
- 2 In what ways do these two photographs support Lenin's argument that the Provisional Government merely represented the wealthy, while the Soviet represented the proletariat?

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 9.2: GRIEVANCES



In the first few weeks after the abdication, over 4000 letters and telegrams were sent to the Provisional Government and Petrograd Soviet, providing an invaluable analysis of the aspirations of the Russian people. The overwhelming demand was to form a democratic republic by establishing a Constituent Assembly.

Kerensky admitted in his memoirs that he had attempted an impossible middle road. This meant that some of the Provisional Government's policies were aimed at pleasing its upper-class supporters while others sought to appeal to working-class supporters of the Soviet. Consequently, both sections of society were alienated.

Workers' main grievances	Peasants' main grievances
Introduce an eight-hour working day	Seize state land and that of large landowners
Raise salaries	Give land to those who work it
Improve sanitary conditions	Decrease land rents
Abolish overtime hours	

Source 9.5 Bucklow & Russell, *Russia: Why Revolution?*, pp. 132–3

- 1 Which of these grievances did the Provisional Government try to address and how?
- 2 How does this list of grievances help explain the failure of the Provisional Government?

9.2 SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL



▲ Source 9.6 Alexander Kerensky

Alexander Kerensky (1881–1970)

The pattern of events in 1917 revolved around the charismatic Kerensky. Kerensky was a fascinating and unique character in that he was the only member of both the Provisional Government and the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet. As an eloquent and passionate leader of the dominant Socialist Revolutionary Party and Vice Chairman of the Petrograd Soviet, he was seemingly an ideal figurehead to unify the new Russia.

Kerensky's background was of being a successful political lawyer, Lena Goldfields champion, radical intelligentsia, and outspoken member of the Fourth Duma. However, his passion and popularity grew during the turmoil of the February revolution. He was one of the 12 members of the Fourth Duma who disobeyed the Tsar's order to disband, made bold speeches to the soldiers who joined the protestors and arrested Tsarist ministers. It was his decisive actions that connected him with the spontaneous popular movements, described by historian Stankevich as earning himself 'complete trust', by eyewitness Sukhanov as 'indispensable', and by colleague F.A. Stepun as 'the only trueborn son of the revolution'.



KEY QUOTE

continued ...



... continued

Kerensky identified with February completely, and his position fitted well the euphoric, excited, carnival, mood of the 'masses' in the initial phase of the revolution. Both the character and the political position of the 'Minister of People's Justice' were close to their political culture. Kerensky was not closely involved with party politics ... In the initial phase of the revolution, not to be strongly identified with any party was a kind of political trump-card. 'Strength lies in unity' was one of the most popular slogans. To be 'partisan' was seen as a threat to that unity. The politicised masses were irritated by inter-party arguments. Kerensky's political style also corresponded to the initial, carnival period of the revolution ... He was a remarkable speaker and improvisator, a fine actor, an 'impressionist politician' as Sukhanov and Chernov put it, who could catch instinctively the mood of an audience, reflect it subtly and brilliantly and thereby significantly amplify that mood. People went 'to see Kerensky' and the label of 'popular minister' ... confirm the remarkable success of his performance.

Source 9.7 Boris I. Kolonitskii, 'Kerensky' in Acton (Ed.), *Critical Companion to the Russian Revolution 1914–1921*, London: Arnold (1997), pp. 141–2

FOCUS QUESTIONS 9.4

- 1 How did Kerensky gain the support of the masses during the February Revolution?
- 2 Why was it considered an advantage to not be closely involved with any political party?
- 3 Why was Kerensky's style so effective?

Leadership roles in 1917

February – active member of Fourth Duma demanding Tsar's abdication

March – Minister of Justice

June – Minister of War

July – Prime Minister

Newspaper headlines in 1917

'Knight of the Revolution'

'First love of the Revolution'

'The hero-minister'

'The Leader of Freedom'

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Kerensky's father was the principal of Lenin's high school when Lenin was a student there.

9.3 April 1917: Lenin's speech and *April Theses*

Bolshevik involvement in the February Revolution was limited, with most Bolshevik leaders at the time exiled to Europe or Siberia. However, the Provisional Government's policy of releasing all political prisoners meant leaders could publicly return to Russia. Revolutionaries in Europe faced the difficult prospect of returning through enemy war zones, but accepting Germany's assistance raised the ideological danger of political compromise. The Germans naturally hoped that returning the revolutionaries would defeat the Russian Government and result in the withdrawal of Russian troops from the war. Lenin, Stalin, Zinoviev and other Bolshevik exiles in Switzerland accepted the option of being transported in a sealed express German train and were returned to Finland Station in Petrograd on 3 April.



► **Source 9.8** 'Lenin on the road to Petrograd in April, 1917'. Drawing by Pyotr Vasilievich Vasiliev



Lenin was sent into Russia by the Germans in the same way that you might send a phial containing a culture of typhoid or cholera to be poured into the water supply of a great city, and it worked with amazing accuracy.

Source 9.9 Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom 1940–45, 1951–55



Lenin's return in April infused a radical Marxist mindset into the Bolshevik Party. Hence, it was the most significant turning point in this period of dual government. Lenin radically altered the course of the Bolshevik Party from supporting the Provisional Government to seeking exclusive power. He presented a clear political program for change. The Provisional Government's policy of freedom of speech and the press now operated against it. Lenin was able to openly speak against the new government in the same hostile and abrupt manner that had resulted in his frequent exile under the Tsar.

Lenin's attack on the Provisional Government began in an impromptu speech to crowds gathered by the Soviet at the Finland Station to celebrate his return. Sukhanov described the powerful speech in his memoirs as being unforgettably 'thunder-like'.

Two phrases from his speech became common slogans that represented the philosophies of the Bolsheviks:

KEY QUOTE 

'Peace, Land, Bread!' and 'All Power to the Soviets'.

These slogans became the political platform upon which Lenin attempted to gain popularity – a promise to end the hated war, to redistribute land in the countryside and to solve the chronic food shortage. What was so revolutionary about his speech and subsequent *April Theses* was the immediacy with which he demanded the transition from the Provisional Government's upper-class democracy to a revolutionary dictatorship of workers and peasants.



▲ Source 9.10 A painting by Aksenov depicting both Lenin's speech of 3 April 1917 and the popularity of his return

KEY EVENT 

Lenin released his *April Theses* the next day, 4 April. A 'thesis' is an idea or argument and Lenin's 'theses' were a collection of his arguments that became the Bolshevik blueprint for revolution. Lenin's approach was uncompromising: the February Revolution had not been a genuine class revolution, thus a second revolution was needed to overthrow the Provisional Government, and this would be achieved by the Bolsheviks through the soviets without any other revolutionary party. Menshevik Bogdanov immediately declared the *April Theses* as 'the raving of a madman!', arguing that Lenin was 'planting the banner of civil war in the midst of revolutionary democracy'. Even Kamenev, a prominent Bolshevik leader, published an article in *Pravda* the next day called 'Our Differences'. In it he declared that Lenin's arguments were 'unacceptable' and 'greatly in variance' with those of other revolutionary leaders. Most historians conclude that Lenin's call for 'All power to the Soviets' was really a call for 'All power to the Bolsheviks'. They argue that Lenin perceived the soviets, with the most important being the Petrograd Soviet, as a strong power base from which the Bolshevik Party could assume sole political power. Taking control of the soviets could then allow a takeover of the country in the name of the proletariat.

Lenin's return and the *April Theses* are crucial to understanding the subsequent events of 1917. The relative cooperation between the Provisional Government, Petrograd Soviet and revolutionary parties ended abruptly. The fires of hostile ideological and political rivalry were forever inflamed.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 9.3: DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Extracts from Lenin's *April Thesis*, 4 April 1917

- 1 *Our attitude toward the war, which under the new government of Lvov and Co. unquestionably remains on Russia's part a predatory imperialist war owing to the capitalist nature of that government ...*
- 2 *The present situation in Russia ... represents a transition from the first stage of the revolution – which, owing to the insufficient class consciousness and organisation of the proletariat, placed the power in the hands of the bourgeoisie – to the second stage, which must place the power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest strata of the peasantry ...*
- 3 *No support for the Provisional Government; the utter falsity of all its promises should be made clear ...*
- 4 *It must be explained to the masses that the Soviet of Workers' Deputies are the only possible form of the revolutionary government ...*
- 5 *Not a parliamentary republic – a return to it ... would be a step backward – but a republic of Soviets of Workers', Agricultural Labourers' and Peasants' Deputies throughout the land, from top to bottom.*
- 6 *Confiscation of all landed estates ... the disposal of the land to be put in charge of the local soviets ...*

Source 9.11 Adapted from Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 24

- 1 Which of the six extracts would have been most favoured by each of these groups? Explain why:
 - a Petrograd Soviet
 - b industrial workers
 - c peasants
- 2 Which was most damaging to the Provisional Government?
- 3 Describe the tone of Lenin's words.

9.4 May 1917: Trotsky returns and joins the Bolshevik Party

Trotsky returned from exile from the United States in May 1917, and similarly to Lenin, his arrival significantly changed the shape of the revolution. Trotsky openly supported Lenin's direction over the previous month, such as his attack on the Provisional Government, *April Theses*, support of peace and promoting the Soviets. The Bolsheviks were greatly strengthened when Trotsky and Lenin buried their historic disagreements and Trotsky, with his supporters, joined the party in July. Historian Orlando Figes argues that 'Whereas Lenin became its principal strategist of the party, working mainly behind the scenes, Trotsky became its principal source of public inspiration'. His ability to use real-life examples gave him links with the crowds that, unlike the Provisional Government, the Bolsheviks understood their needs.

► Source 9.12 Trotsky (pictured here with bodyguards) had returned from the United States to Petrograd by May 1917



9.5 June 1917: Continuing the war and the June Offensive

The dominant problem inherited by the Provisional Government was Russia's continued involvement in World War One. Militarily, Russian forces had been disorganised since their early losses, economically the war had virtually bankrupted the nation, and socially the Russian population desired peace from constant turmoil. Yet the new government remained committed to the war because pulling out would have forfeited the considerable loans from Russia's Western allies. Politicians and generals also stubbornly refused to give up the struggle. Continuing to fight the war was ultimately the source of their downfall; however, a member of the Provisional Government explained their reasons for staying in the war:

The Provisional Government should do nothing now which would break our ties with the allies. The worst thing that could happen to us would be separate peace. It would be ruinous for the Russian revolution, ruinous for international democracy.

By June, Russia's problems were crushing the country. Kerensky had been promoted to Minister of War in early May. He decided that remaining in the war was like waiting to die. Despite having little military rationale, a proactive attack was planned to boost the morale of the soldiers. Kerensky visited the front, powerfully urging them to view the battle as a revolutionary crusade leading to freedom and a bright future. The Petrograd Soviet supported the move, declaring that it might, 'stop the disintegration in our army'. Similarly, Maxim Gorky, a socialist leader, claimed that, 'although I am a pacifist, I welcome the coming offensive in the hope that it may at least bring some organisation to the country'.



◀ Source 9.13 Kerensky at his writing desk

AMAZING BUT TRUE . . .

Before the June Offensive, a medal was produced in Kerensky's honour. One side of the medal showed him surrounded by flowers and the other was inscribed: 'The glorious, wise, true and beloved leader of the people – 1917'.

After two days of artillery bombing, the Russians attacked the Austrian line on 18 June. The Russian army achieved immediate success, capturing 18 000 prisoners in only two days. German reinforcements nullified this euphoria, however, inflicting massive casualties, estimated by Sheila Fitzpatrick to be 200 000. Instead of dropping shells, the German planes flew low over the fleeing troops and 'bombed' them with propaganda leaflets. The failure of the June Offensive is the best example of the problem of continuing to fight the war.



Source analysis: problems caused by continued support for the war

There was a consistency between attitudes at the front and in Petrograd. The Provisional Government was openly discredited because of their continued support for the war. Radical change was attractive. Revolutionary workers, peasants and soldiers were increasingly taking matters into their own hands. Soldiers were open supporters of peace and Soviet power. Lenin's personal reputation soared at the front because of his consistent promise of immediate peace.

American historian Alan Wildman describes the breakdown of the Imperial Army at the war front from mid-1917:

Rejuvenated Bolsheviks gained considerable credibility at the front because they alone called for an immediate end to the war and the radical solution of what was uppermost on most soldier-peasants' minds, the land question; likewise, they alone called for a new government based on the soviets which conformed to the soldiers' mythic conception of their own power ... From late September through October whole regiments and divisions initiated 'peace actions' with the enemy. Most were defused by promises to terminate work on entrenchments and by authorizing 'meetings' and deputations to the rear, but harried commanders were now at the mercy of their men. Higher soldier-officer committees were very slow to face up to the magnitude of this groundswell of soldier resistance, remaining loyal to the Petrograd Soviet and the Provisional Government, while preparing for elections to the Constituent Assembly. Many still blamed the mood on a handful of Bolshevik and German agents.

Source 9.14 Alan Wildman, 'Breakdown of the Imperial Army in 1917' in Acton (Ed.), *Critical Companion to the Russian Revolution 1914–1921*, London: Arnold (1997), pp. 76–7

FOCUS QUESTIONS 9.5

- 1 List the two reasons why the Bolsheviks gained 'considerable credibility' at the front.
- 2 How did regiments start resisting from late September?

Lack of focus on the issue of land

The direct consequence of focusing on the war was that the internal problems of food and fuel shortages, inflation, peasant seizures of land and ministerial instability were not adequately addressed. Hence, the Provisional Government were too slow to solve the problem of land. The result was that peasant uprisings took control of the countryside. This problem was exacerbated by soldiers deserting the army in the thousands. Most of the soldiers had been peasants, so they were keen to return home to seize land before it was too late. This became a significant point of division for the government because of the Bolsheviks' attractive promises of peace and land.



Source analysis: Dissatisfaction of the soldiers and peasants

What were the main concerns of the soldiers and peasants? There were thousands of letters written during 1917. These provide a rich resource for understanding the deep dissatisfaction of soldiers, workers and peasants that had erupted by mid-1917. Both peasants and workers were conscripted to the army to be soldiers, so their perspectives are closely linked.

Dissatisfaction of soldiers

Source 1: A letter from the soldier Yurchenko, written in the trenches at the war front, on 8 July 1917, to the Petrograd Soviet

I most humbly ask you to inform us in the trenches how long this pointless war is going to continue, and also whether the bourgeoisie is going to keep trying to pull the wool over our eyes for very long, because hundreds and thousands of men are dying practically every day, and for what? They say it's for freedom. But is the German really trying to infringe on our freedom? No 'Comrades, enough blood!' the Provisional Government was bellowing not so long ago, but now they are doing just the opposite. In short, I am finishing up my letter, but I repeat that we have had enough blood, enough killing of innocent people. Enough! It's time to put an end to the war.

Cited in Mark D. Steinberg, *Voices of Revolution 1917*, Yale University Press, 2001, p. 199

Source 2: A letter from the soldiers Solovyov and Baronin, written in the trenches at the war front, on 8 July 1917, to the Bolsheviks

We consider the program of your Bolsheviks party the most just. Everyone keeps denying it and saying that the Bolsheviks are counterrevolutionaries, but we, your comrades, see from your speeches in the newspaper that everyone respects known as Pravda that there is nothing here but benefit for us peasants and workers, and nothing harmful. . . . And we, your comrades, are against the shedding of excess blood, which is now being spilled in streams here on the southwestern front, and against an offensive, which we also do not see bringing any benefit other than sacrifices, losses, and injury, but unfortunately there are very few of us, but my comrades and I hope that many of our men, who still understand too little, will join us; and in view of this we need the program of your Bolshevik party like a fish needs water or a man air, and time is passing and we, your politically conscious comrades, need to sow and sow and sow.

Cited in Mark D. Steinberg, *Voices of Revolution 1917*, Yale University Press, 2001, p. 200

Source 3: A letter from the soldier Sirebrov, written from his position in the defensive line, on 9 August 1917, to the Petrograd Soviet

Comrade Soldiers and Workers,

All of us troops ask you as our comrades to explain to us who these Bolsheviks are and what party they belong to because we don't know them or their opinion. Our provisional Government has come out very much against the Bolsheviks. But we soldiers, don't find any fault with them at all. Before, we were against the Bolsheviks. But now after waiting so long for what was promised, because the Provisional Government promised during the very first days to give the poor people their freedom but then didn't. We are little by little going over entirely to the side of the Bolsheviks.

Cited in Mark D. Steinberg, *Voices of Revolution 1917*, Yale University Press, 2001, pp. 213–4

Source 4: A letter from the soldiers at the war front, in early October 1917, to the Provisional Government

We soldiers at the front have been in the trenches for more than three years now. There is severe hunger here at the front. We get one pound of bread and one ounce of meat. We walk around in tatters, like beggars. At night we sit by the barbed wire for six hours at a stretch. We have lost the last shreds of our health, while at home our families are going hungry on their limited land. We soldiers at the front ask you comrades of the Provisional Government to put a speedy end to the war. It would be good for you comrades of the Provisional Government to do the fighting. When you drink and eat you get whatever your heart desires, and bullets and rockets aren't whining over your head, while we soldiers at the front sit by the wire fence at night and in the day we have to stand in the trench – even if you get a few hours of rest every day, the lice never give you any peace. Once more we demand a speedy peace from you the Provisional Government, and if you don't try to do this, Comrade Kerensky, in the near future we are going to throw down our rifles and leave the front for the rear and destroy you, the bourgeoisie. You need war and money, but we need life. Once more we demand a speedy peace. For now, that is your primary task. We ask you to carry out our decision. If not, it will be our sword and your head from your shoulders.

Cited in Mark D. Steinberg, *Voices of Revolution 1917*, Yale University Press, 2001, p. 231

FOCUS QUESTIONS 9.6

- 1 All these letters were written from soldiers. For each source, list when each source was written and to whom it was written.
- 2 Compare the attitude toward the Bolsheviks in Sources 2 and 3. Use exact phrases from the sources to explain your response.
- 3 Compare the demands in Sources 1 and 4. Use exact phrases from the sources to explain your response.
- 4 Which letter do you consider was the most demanding? Use exact phrases from the source to explain why.

Dissatisfaction of peasants**Source 5: Letter to Kerensky from peasant Ivan Shabrov in the Ryazan Province, 13 July 1917**

In the provinces there is total collapse. If the capitals and the major cities remain at the pinnacle of the revolution's tasks, the countryside is sliding back down. Popular peasant ignorance does a bad job of figuring out ideological constructions and slogans. All it knows is the shirt on its own back, and lives only for today, which gives peasants a chance to scrape together another ruble, but they never even take a peek into the distant tomorrow ... In short, the situation in the countryside is not favourable. It's not favourable on the railroads or at the post office or the telegraph office either. Here people talk a lot about their rights but are silent when it comes to their responsibilities, and things are done any which way and every day it's getting worse. Still, these are the things you can see. The revolutionary centres have only vague notions of the countryside, but meanwhile the countryside will have the decisive word in the revolution: to be or not to be?

Cited in Mark D. Steinberg, *Voices of Revolution 1917*, Yale University Press, 2001, pp. 236–7

FOCUS QUESTIONS 9.7

- 1 How does Source 5 describe the situation in the countryside, the provinces?
- 2 How does this source describe the mindset of the peasants?
- 3 In the final sentence, Shabrov states that peasants will have 'the decisive word in the revolution'. Why might he say that?



Source 6: Letter to the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets from peasant Ivan Pastukhov in the Vologda Province, 7 July 1917

Comrades, we beg of you, end this bloody drama as soon as possible, it isn't a war – it's the extermination of the people. The people's cause, the way people used to say before, has been abandoned, tsarism is again starting to poke through our young freedom. We beg of you again, comrades, workers and soldiers deputies, make peace right away. Otherwise, we will die of hunger, without bread or sugar, and they're sending nothing at all to our remote north. High prices have overtaken everything. This war benefits only the bourgeoisie, and over these three years the land, our poor soldiers' land, had gone desolate and unplowed.

Cited in Mark D. Steinberg, *Voices of Revolution 1917*, Yale University Press, 2001, pp. 234–5

Source 7: Resolution taken by an assembly of peasants from the Kostroma Province, 9 July 1917. Signed by 303 peasants

We the working peasantry can tell that the Bolsheviks of Social Democracy are pursuing only selfish goals and do not want to be a friend and comrade to the working peasantry, and since this is so, then we in turn, declare that we can get along without them, but they will die of hunger without us – we are not going to give them grain or meat or fuel until they recognize a single firm authority in the person of the Provisional Government and abandon their aspirations to take power.

Cited in Mark D. Steinberg, *Voices of Revolution 1917*, Yale University Press, 2001, p. 236

KEY HISTORIAN



Sheila Fitzpatrick (1941–present)

Born and raised in Australia, Sheila Fitzpatrick is the daughter of an author and an avid musician. Having taught Russian history at the University of Chicago, she is now an Honorary Professor at the University of Sydney. Her interpretation is similar to Orlando Figes's in that they are both interested in analysing the revolution 'from below'. This means battling to remove the traditional viewpoint of reading history through a political lens in order to see the revolution as a social history of people.

◀ Source 9.15 Sheila Fitzpatrick in Russia in the 1960s

9.6 July 1917: the July Days

KEY STATISTIC



By late June, the country was collapsing both socially and economically. Between March and July, 568 factories closed down, resulting in the dismissal of a further 104 000 workers. Internal crises were multiplying and the inadequacy of the Provisional Government was magnified. Street demonstrations had been a daily occurrence since February, but from 3 to 6 July the protests became an open rebellion on the streets, initiated by the Bolshevik Kronstadt sailors furious about the war. The July Days directly challenged the authority and future of the new government. Historian Sheila Fitzpatrick estimates the number of these protesters at half a million. However, their joint actions were disorganised and undisciplined, many of them roaming the streets, drinking and looting. As a result, Kerensky used his loyal troops to easily disperse the Bolshevik protestors, which both saved the Provisional Government and elevated him to the position of Prime Minister.



▲ Source 9.16 Soldiers demonstrate on top of a tank

The July Days were disastrous for the progress of the Bolshevik Party, as they were blamed for the disturbances. To avoid accepting blame for a failed uprising, Trotsky argued that the protests were initiated by the Socialist Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks. Lenin's credibility as a revolutionary leader was significantly damaged after he created a false passport and escaped to Finland, while other leaders like Trotsky and Kamenev stayed to face arrest and imprisonment. Pipes is brutal in his assessment of Lenin's escape:

The flight of the shepherd could not but deliver a heavy blow to the sheep. After all, the masses, mobilised by Lenin, bore the whole burden of responsibility for the July Days ... and the real culprit abandons his army, his comrades and seeks personal safety in flight.



KEY
QUOTE

Source 9.17 Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, p. 436



▲ Source 9.18 Troops loyal to the Provisional Government returned from the front and defeat the protestors with force.



The July Days seemed to signal the destruction of the Bolsheviks and a significant victory for the government. While it should have been titled a 'death point', it became a 'turning point' for three reasons. First, the Bolsheviks survived. Second, Lenin resolved his long differences with Trotsky and recruited him as a new member of the Bolshevik Party. Third, Trotsky was able to use the failure of these July protests to develop more effective strategies, which were successfully implemented in the October Revolution.

Kronstadt a major naval base situated on an island near Petrograd

Lesson 1: The Bolsheviks had been caught unaware by an uprising of Bolshevik sailors from within the **Kronstadt** Garrison. Successful uprisings must be coordinated and directed from above with strong leadership.

Lesson 2: Revolutionary parties within the Soviet were disunited. The Bolsheviks must assume power alone as a coalition of revolutionary parties was unworkable.

Lesson 3: The Bolsheviks still lacked mass popular support and first had to achieve a majority in the Petrograd Soviet.

Lesson 4: Large-scale public protests during daylight bred failure; it was necessary to use surprise tactics in multiple locations at night.

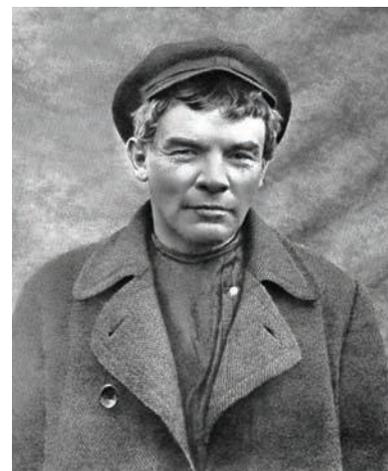
Lesson 5: The Provisional Government maintained enough military support to defeat single large uprisings, so small, disciplined groups of trained workers and sailors must be used.

FOCUS QUESTIONS 9.8

- 1 Which of these lessons do you consider to be most important and why?
- 2 How can we know whether the Bolsheviks really did 'learn' these lessons?



▲ Source 9.19 Kerensky (centre) at the funeral of those who died in the July Days



▲ Source 9.20 A clean-shaven and disguised Lenin escaped quite easily to Finland after the July Days.

Source analysis: Dissatisfaction of workers after July Days 1917

Putilov was the largest steelworks employer in the country, employing 30 000 workers in 1917. Their workers had the reputation of being radical activists in class and political struggles, hence many were involved in the July Days protests. This is a letter to citizens from workers at the Putilov factory in Petrograd, 11 July 1917, explaining their role in the 3–5 July protest marches.

Where is justice?

Where are the results of the blood and of the lives of our brothers who fell in the revolution?

Where is the new life, that heavenly, joyous, fiery-red bird that flew so temptingly over our country and then hid – as if to trick us? (Note: a Firebird is a mythological symbol of a better world.)

Citizens, this is not the first time Putilov workers have shed blood for the common interests of the working class. Remember 9 January 1905. On these days, 3 and 4 July, we were marching with the pure heart of loyal sons of the revolution and marching not against the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies but in support of it. That is why "All Power of the Soviet" was written on our banners ... And the Provisional Government is already frozen, with everything in bureaucratically dead forms. It is in this light that the economic and political situation on the eve of the events of 3–4 July appeared before us, workers.

Citizens: Take an honest look at the black, smoking chimneys rising up from the earth. There, at their foot, creating new assets for you that you need, are people just like you, suffering and tormented in bondage by the most complete and fierce exploitation. Class consciousness is maturing slowly there. Hatred is building up in their hearts, and the sweet conditions of another life for all mankind are being written lovingly on the bloody banner ... All citizens to the active support of the committee for the salvation of the revolution, this final push for freedom.

Source 9.21 Cited in Mark D. Steinberg, *Voices of Revolution 1917*, Yale University Press, 2001, pp. 187–8

FOCUS QUESTIONS 9.9

- 1 Why was the Putilov factory significant?
- 2 The document asks three questions at the start of the extract. What were these about?
- 3 How does the document justify the Putilov workers' involvement in the July Days protests?
- 4 How does the document describe what was happening to workers in the Putilov factory?
- 5 How does the document help you understand the angry attitude of workers by mid-1917?

9.7 August 1917: the Kornilov Affair

KEY EVENT

While the question of who initiated the July Days is still hotly debated by historians, the results are not. Kerensky, appointed Prime Minister of the Provisional Government two days after the July Days, went on the offensive by arresting Bolshevik leaders, ransacking their offices, confiscating printing equipment and banning the Bolshevik newspaper *Pravda*. Yet, ironically, the Provisional Government's weak handling of the subsequent Kornilov Affair enabled the broken Bolshevik Party to recover and grow in popular support. Turning points are events in history that have a significant positive or negative impact – and the Kornilov Affair was the major turning point in 1917 that allowed the Bolsheviks to rise to power by October.

In August, General **Kornilov** was appointed Commander in Chief of the Russian army. He was described as having the 'heart of a lion but the brain of a sheep'. Threatened by the advancing German army, Kornilov warned Kerensky of the urgent need to defend Petrograd. His method of restoring order, however, was to march his troops towards the capital. Fearing that Kornilov was going to replace the Provisional Government with a military dictatorship, Kerensky declared Kornilov a traitor and ordered the release of the Bolsheviks from prison. Ironically, the Bolsheviks were given weapons by the very government Lenin had threatened to overthrow. Trotsky immediately formed, armed and trained the **Red Guard** from 40 000 radical workers, who were then credited with saving Petrograd from certain military defeat by a tsarist general. Trotsky later criticised Kerensky for having 'neither sufficient logical consistency nor determination' to keep the Bolsheviks suppressed.

Kornilov a tsarist military general who marched his troops on Petrograd in August 1917

Red Guard a group of workers that was hastily formed into a fighting group to defend Petrograd against the advancing Kornilov



◀ Source 9.22 General Kornilov

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

The battle between Kornilov and Kerensky never eventuated. Workers on the railroads refused to transport Kornilov's troops the final two hours into Petrograd. Kornilov allowed himself to be arrested.

9.8 September 1917: Growth in support for Bolsheviks and Kerensky's failed leadership

Growth in Bolshevik support

From the defeat of Kornilov, Bolshevik support grew rapidly. Two crucial indicators of this were the influential Petrograd and Moscow Soviets and the mass meeting of the All Russian Congress of Soviets.

Moscow Soviet July = 11% September = 51%		 KEY STATISTIC
June 1917: First All Russian Congress of Soviets 822 representatives from soviets throughout Russia. Bolsheviks 12% Socialist Revolutionaries 34% Mensheviks 30%	25 October 1917: Second All Russian Congress of Soviets 670 representatives from soviets throughout Russia. Bolsheviks 59%	
Lenin was outvoted 543 to 126 in his motion to declare World War One a class war. His ideology was not shared or supported by the revolutionaries in the soviet.	Socialist Revolutionaries and Menshevik delegates walked out of the Congress to Trotsky's jeers.	

A key debate facing historians involves the rapid growth in support within a mere four-month period, particularly considering the low experienced by the party after the July Days. Possible reasons to explain why the Bolsheviks became more popular include:

Reason 1 – Demoralisation of the army after the June Offensive multiplied the number of Bolshevik groups within the army: 44 groups in July increased to 108 by September.

Reason 2 – Bolshevik popularity increased by reputation as defenders of Petrograd after the Kornilov Affair.

Reason 3 – Bolsheviks promoted themselves as true revolutionaries because they were the only party who had not cooperated with the Provisional Government.

Reason 4 – Bolsheviks gained a majority in the Petrograd and Moscow Soviets by September.

Reason 5 – Trotsky was elected Chairman of the Petrograd Soviet.

Analysis of Kerensky's failed leadership

The Kerensky phenomenon as the 'people's minister' was initially based on three key points of connection: with the radical intelligentsia, military and the working class.

Kerensky did regard himself as unique and irreplaceable political leader, as the personification of 'Russian democracy'. He frequently claimed that the only alternative to him was anarchy, chaos and dictatorship, and demanded not only trust, but faith. In his speeches there were invariably just two subjects of the political process – Kerensky himself as the revolutionary leader and the revolutionary people. Those closest to him regarded him in the same way, 'all Russia immediately recognized its leader in him. They knew, loved and believed in him' recalled his wife.



Source 9.23 Boris I. Kolonitskii, 'Kerensky' in Acton (Ed.), *Critical Companion to the Russian Revolution 1914–1921*, London: Arnold (1997), p. 143



FOCUS QUESTIONS 9.10

- 1 Who were the three groups with whom Kerensky was initially popular?
- 2 Why did Kerensky regard himself as 'irreplaceable'?

So how did Kerensky fall from this dizzying height of popularity? Bessie Beatty, an American journalist who travelled to Russia in 1917 along with famous writer John Reed, wrote that 'Kerensky, trying like the true democrat he was to please everyone, succeeded in pleasing no one. Attacked from above and below, from within and without, there seemed little hope for him'.

The fundamental problem was the continuation of fighting the war, at a time when the soldiers and peasants were wanting immediate peace. The two core turning points that quickly undermined Kerensky's popularity were the failed June Offensive as Minister for War which turned fatal with the Kornilov Affair as Prime Minister. Ironically, Kerensky's victory over Kornilov signalled his political defeat. It was in this toxic political environment that a Bolshevik-led socialist coalition become the preferred political alternative. Utilising this atmosphere of mass political consciousness against Kerensky, the Bolsheviks and their supporters waged a successful propaganda campaign painting him as a traitor, actor, weak, spineless and a windbag.

AMAZING BUT TRUE...

Rumours and gossip spread rapidly after Kerensky moved into the Winter Palace and broke up with his wife: that he slept in the Tsar's bed using the Tsarina's sheets, took his daughter as his lover, was a regular drug user, dressed in women's clothes, and was a political puppet doing a secret deal with the German enemy.

The rise and fall of Kerensky provides an excellent snapshot of how quickly things were moving politically in Russia after the abdication of the Tsar in February. The spectacular Kerensky personality cult with widespread support in the first half of 1917 had ended by mid-1917 as the crisis deepened. The democratic ideology of the early revolution was replaced by a growing desire for strong central government that provided solutions to Russia's problems. What remained as a feature of Russian politics, however, was the love of personality cult, the strong all-powerful leader and saviour – cult of Tsar Nicholas, cult of Kerensky, cult of Lenin and later the cult of Stalin – all fascinating political subcultures.

AMAZING BUT TRUE...

Russian joke from 1917

Q: What is the difference between Russia today and at the end of last year?

A: Then we had Alexandra Fedorovna (the Tsarina), but now we have Alexander Fedorovich (Kerensky)!

9.9 How were the Bolsheviks able to rise to power?

Why did the Provisional Government fail to win support?	What were the turning points in the rise of the Bolsheviks?
Failure 1: Weak political and popular foundation	Turning point 1: Revolutionaries return and Lenin's <i>April Theses</i>
Failure 2: Continued fighting World War One	Turning point 2: Trotsky joins the Bolshevik Party
Failure 3: June Offensive	Turning point 3: The July Days
Failure 4: Lack of focus on the issue of land	Turning point 4: Kornilov Affair
Failure 5: Failed popularity of Kerensky	Turning point 5: Growth in political support

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 9.4: CREATIVE THINKING



What if ...

How might the following events have altered the course of 1917 if they had actually occurred?

- 1 What if the Provisional Government had signed a peace treaty with the Germans and ended Russia's involvement in World War One?
- 2 What if the Germans had actively stopped the return of Lenin to Russia?
- 3 What if the Petrograd Soviet had ignored Lenin's *April Theses* and continued cooperating with the Provisional Government?
- 4 What if democratic elections to the new Constituent Assembly (planned for October) had taken place in June or July?
- 5 What if Lenin had been caught after the July Days and was locked in prison with Trotsky?
- 6 What if Trotsky had officially joined the Mensheviks not the Bolsheviks?
- 7 What if General Kornilov had not marched on Petrograd?

THE STORY SO FAR



- The Tsar's abdication left two political bodies in control of all Russia: the Provisional Government that had political authority; and the Petrograd Soviet that had genuine influence with the workers and soldiers.
- Lenin's return in April aggressively challenged the Provisional Government and called for 'Peace, bread, land' and a second revolution that truly represented the proletariat.
- The Provisional Government experienced two dramatic summer months with the demoralising failure of the June Offensive followed by the overwhelming internal success of defeating the Bolsheviks in the July Days. Trotsky became a member of the Bolshevik Party in July after being associated with the Mensheviks from 1903.
- The Kornilov Affair in August was full of fortune for the scattered Bolsheviks as Trotsky was released from prison and was given the credit for protecting Petrograd with his newly formed Red Guard.
- The political support for the Bolshevik Party grew rapidly in the key political bodies – the Petrograd and Moscow Soviets and the All Russian Congress of Soviets.

Use the QR code or visit the digital version of the book and watch the video summarising the chapter.





Develop your historical thinking skills

Define key terms

Use information from this chapter to define these terms.

- Kornilov Affair
- Lenin's *April Theses*
- Petrograd Soviet
- Provisional Government

Analysing cause and consequence

Use evidence from this chapter to write short paragraph answers.

- 1 How did Lenin's return from exile in April impact the politics of 1917?
- 2 Why did the Provisional Government fail to win support?
- 3 How did the Kornilov Affair allow the Bolsheviks to regain popularity?
- 4 Explain Kerensky's rise and fall from power.

Using quotes as evidence

Write a sentence using a short phrase from one of the quotes below or contrast the views from a few quotes. You can also use any of the quotes in this chapter. Quotes can be used directly or paraphrased in your own words.

It was a paradoxical situation: in order to survive the Provisional Government had to keep Russia in the war, but in doing so it destroyed its own chances of survival. **Michael Lynch, historian**

There was nothing preordained about the collapse of tsarist autocracy nor even of the Provisional Government. **S.A. Smith, historian**

The events of 1917 were filled with might-have-beens and missed chances. **Sean McMeekin, historian**

Russia is sinking in a bloody ditch, and he (Kerensky) is to blame. **Zinaida Gippius was a poet and editor in Russia in 1917, this was from her 'Diary of Gippius'**

The Provisional Government was so politically isolated and the insurgents enjoyed such overwhelming support that they were able to elbow the Government out of existence with a slight push. **Isaac Deutscher, historian**

Among the socialist parties, only the Bolsheviks had overcome Marxist scruples, caught the mood of the crowd, and declared their willingness to seize power in the name of the proletarian revolution. **Sheila Fitzpatrick, historian**

The Provisional Government had expired even before the Bolsheviks finished it off. **S.A. Smith**

Analysing historian's interpretations

Debate: Did the Provisional Government need to be overthrown? Should the Bolsheviks' rise to power be considered favourably or not?

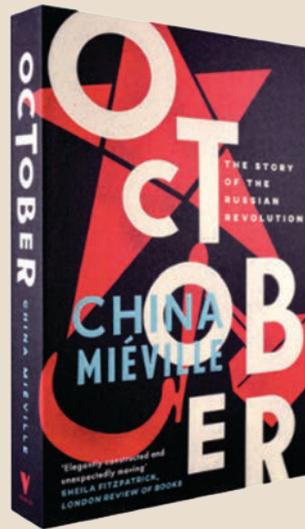
China Miéville

Nationality: British

Helpful book: *October: The Story of the Russian Revolution* (Verso, 2017)



▲ Source 9.24 China Miéville



▲ Source 9.25 *October: The Story of the Russian Revolution* (2017)

Point of view

Miéville is a British urban fantasy author and comic book writer who identifies himself as part of the New Weird movement.

Miéville's leftist sympathies mean that he argues empathetically that the world's first socialist revolution should be celebrated. His enthusiasm for revolution means that he believes that revolution is a good thing in general, and that the Bolsheviks' road to revolution in 1917 was a particularly positive story.

Reasons (evidence)

Miéville focuses on the dramatic narrative of 1917: strikes, protests, riots, looting, mass desertions from the army, land occupations by hungry peasants and pitched battles between workers and Cossacks, not just in Petrograd but along the length and breadth of the vast country.

Quotes

The early days of revolution were remarkable for how submerged and scattered that hard right was ... In those days everyone was, or claimed to be, a socialist. No one wanted to be bourgeois.

Democracy was a sociological term in Russia in 1917, denoting the masses, the lower class, at least as strongly as it did a political method. For many in those heady moments, Kerensky exemplified "the democracy".

The revolution is the possibility of possibilities.

What's your point of view?

What's your point of view about whether the Provisional Government needed to be overthrown? Should the Bolsheviks' rise to power be considered favourably?



10 **YEAR OF REVOLUTIONS, 1917: THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION**

In times of revolution it is not enough to ascertain the 'will' of the majority – no, one must be stronger at the decisive moment in the decisive place and win.

– LENIN

Overview

History remembers the October Revolution as being the most dramatic event of 1917. The takeover becomes a fascinating topic given the amount of historical debate that has been rekindled since the fall of the **Soviet Union** in 1991. The perception of the Bolsheviks and their communist regime undoubtedly influences the perception of its beginnings in October 1917.

This chapter analyses the seizure of political power in Petrograd by the Bolsheviks in October 1917. Lenin initiated the revolution while Trotsky coordinated it so efficiently that it can best be described as a takeover: a simple transfer of power from the Provisional Government to the Bolshevik Party. The 10 days of protest that followed, and the counter-revolutionary battles until 1921, reveal that the takeover in October was indeed the easy launch of a difficult journey for the Bolsheviks.

Soviet Union Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)

Key issues

After completing this chapter, you should be able to answer these questions.

- How did the Bolsheviks strategically take over Petrograd?
- Why were the Bolsheviks successful?
- How did the Bolsheviks gain control of Petrograd?

Digital resources for this chapter

In the *Interactive Textbook*:

-  Video and audio sources and questions
-  Digital activities

◀ **Source 10.0** Soviet artist Pavel Petrovich's dramatic interpretation of the storming of the Winter Palace

Flow of chapter



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Chapter timeline

What are the key events of the Russian Revolution covered in this chapter?

7 OCTOBER

Lenin secretly returns from Finland



23 OCTOBER

Kerensky attacks the Bolsheviks and defends the Winter Palace



25 OCTOBER

Second All Russian Congress of Soviets begins



7–10 OCTOBER

Lenin convinces his Central Committee to revolt



24–25 OCTOBER

Takeover of Petrograd and Provisional Government

26 OCTOBER

New Soviet government announced

10.1 The strategic takeover of Petrograd

Rebellions happen; revolutions are made.

– Pipes

Lenin's self-imposed exile in Finland was not wasted. While living in a tent on a remote island, using a tree stump as a table, he wrote letters attempting to continue directing the revolution. His suggestions of immediate preparations for the overthrow of the government were ignored.

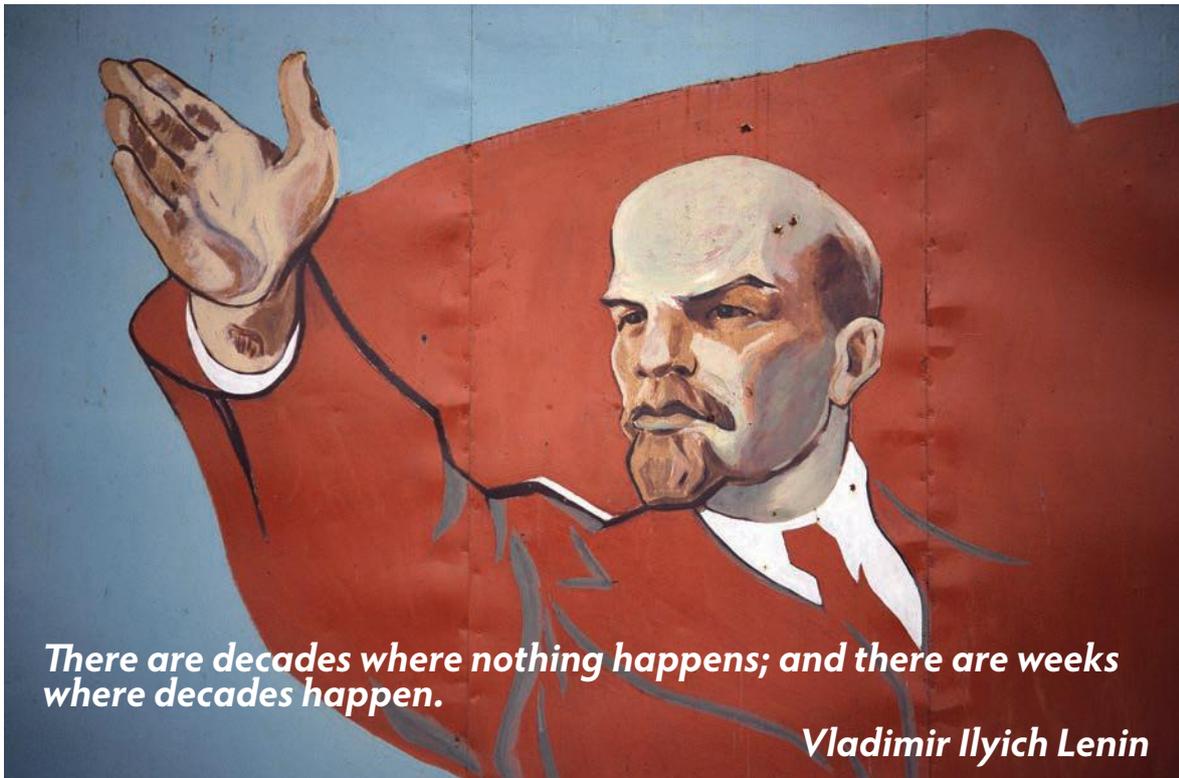
A desperate two weeks of negotiation began with the Bolshevik **Central Committee** after Lenin's secret return to Petrograd on 7 October. Lenin urged that the takeover must occur before the November elections for the Constituent Assembly. The Assembly had been the democratic dream of the reformers and progressives since the turn of the century and would have seriously limited Bolshevik ambition once established. Lenin was also determined to have secured leadership by the Second All Russian Congress of Soviets, scheduled to begin meeting on 25 October, so that they could legitimise the action that had already occurred.

Central Committee
the main decision-making group of the Bolshevik Party

By 10 October, Lenin had persuaded the Congress that an armed insurrection was necessary. Many members of the Central Committee, however, were not convinced that the time was right, so no date was agreed upon.



▲ Source 10.1 Lenin's hiding place in Finland



Rumours of Bolshevik action were confirmed when two prominent members of the Central Committee, Grigory Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev, published an article in a revolutionary journal arguing it was the wrong circumstances upon which to base a Bolshevik overthrow of the government. On 23 October, Kerensky took the offensive and initiated action against the Bolsheviks. He declared to a hastily called pre-parliament meeting: 'Those who dare lift their hand against the state are liable to immediate, decisive and permanent liquidation.' Bolshevik newspapers were closed down and telephone wires to their headquarters cut. Members of the Kadets, Women's Battalion and Cossacks were sent to guard the Winter Palace, but without heavy artillery or machine guns.

▼ Source 10.2 Kerensky established the Women's Death Battalion called the 'Amazons'.



Kerensky's aggression demanded a swift response and Lenin acted immediately. The Bolshevik takeover was ordered to begin the following night, 24 October. Despite Trotsky's claim that the revolution would not have occurred without Lenin, it was he who strategically organised the takeover. Trotsky had several advantages. He was administratively minded, had influence over the workers as Chairman of the Petrograd Soviet, dominated the **Military Revolutionary Committee** established by the Soviet, and led the Red Guard that he formed in August to defend Petrograd from General Kornilov. He armed the Red Guard with guns stored in the Peter and Paul Fortress, and then implemented his takeover. It may be helpful to refer to the map of Petrograd in Chapter 8. The stages of the takeover were broadly organised as follows:

AMAZING BUT TRUE . . .

Maria. L Bochkareva fought in World War One, was the first woman to command a military unit, and won three medals for bravery. She persuaded Kerensky to allow her to establish the Women's Death Battalion in May 1917 with 2000 female recruits, which she later commanded to defend the Winter Palace in October.



► Source 10.3 Maria Bochkareva in 1917

AMAZING BUT TRUE . . .

Trotsky signalled that the revolution had begun by dripping some official red sealing wax on the door of the Bolshevik editorial office.

Stage 1: Capture key communication centres like the telegraph station and post office.

Stage 2: Capture key installations like the electric companies.

Stage 3: Capture key vantage points like the bridges and railway stations.

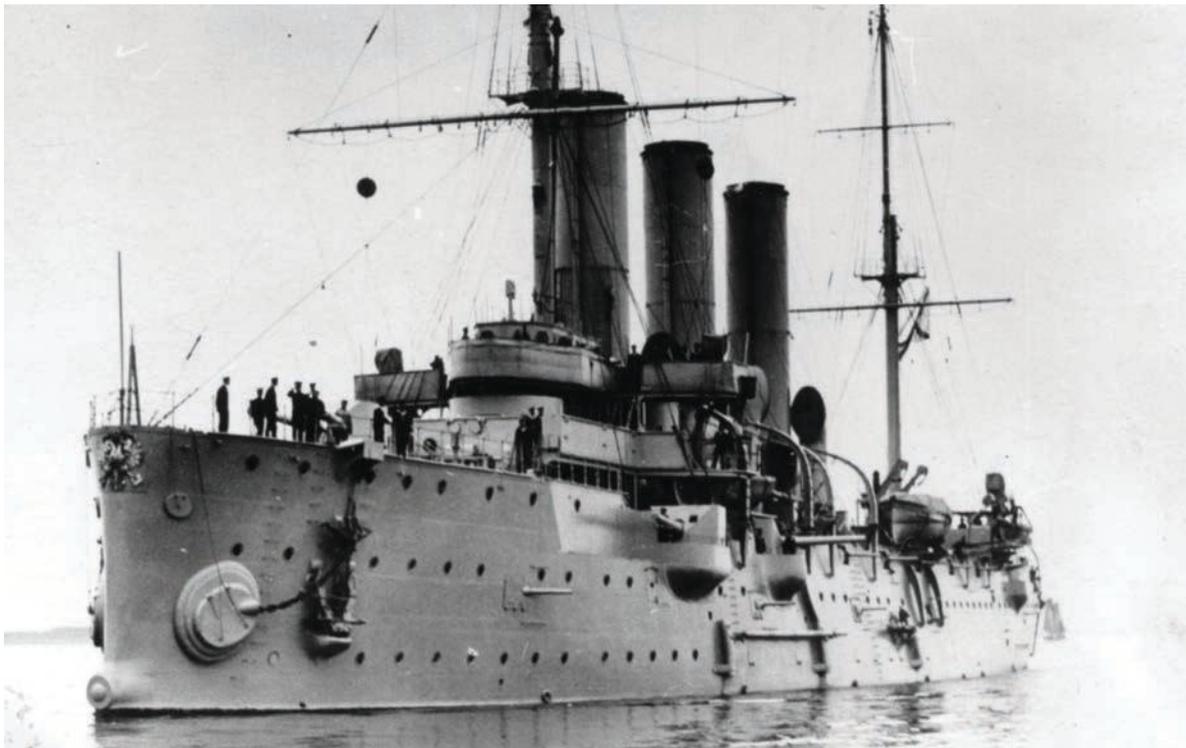
Stage 4: Capture the Provisional Government in the Winter Palace.

Military Revolutionary Committee an influential body established by the Bolsheviks in 1917 and coordinated by Trotsky to effect the October Revolution



The first three stages were completed so efficiently that the takeover resembled the changing of the guard. Capturing the Winter Palace proved more dramatic, although the opposition was still of a very limited nature. The Cossacks deserted when the Red Guard approached, and the Cadets and the 140 volunteers of the Women's Battalion surrendered rather than resist the 40 000 strong army. The battleship *Aurora*, in the Neva River for repairs, was also commandeered to fire blank shells upon the Winter Palace in a symbolic act of rejection of the government. It is curious that the Winter Palace did not fall because of acts of courage or a military barrage, but because the back door was left open, allowing the Red Guard to enter. A Red Guard named Adamovich remembered gasping as he burst into the Winter Palace, as he had never before seen such splendour and luxury.

KEY STATISTIC 



▲ Source 10.4 The battleship *Aurora*, which fired blanks at the Winter Palace

▼ Source 10.5 A truck crammed with eager soldiers during the October Revolution in Petrograd, 1917



AMAZING BUT TRUE . . .

More damage was done to the Winter Palace during the filming of Sergei Eisenstein's epic called *October* in 1927 than in its actual overthrow in 1917.

AMAZING BUT TRUE . . .

Many of the men guarding the Provisional Government in the Winter Palace got tired of waiting for the Bolshevik attack and left their posts to have dinner in local restaurants. One of the groups that remained behind consisted of 40 disabled soldiers led by an officer with artificial legs.

▼ Source 10.6 Advertising poster for Eisenstein's film *October* (1927)



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▼ Source 10.7 A re-enactment of the storming of the Winter Palace





10.2 How did the Bolsheviks gain control of Petrograd?

1917 Julian date (Gregorian date)	Events	Summary of significance
<p>Day 1</p> <p>Tuesday, 24 October (6 November)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trotsky distributes arms to Red Guard. Petrograd Garrison rebels against the Provisional Government, claiming that it is a 'tool of the enemies of the people'. Systematic capture of key communication, installations and vantage points. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kerensky powerless to stop armed uprising by the Bolsheviks.
<p>Day 2</p> <p>Wednesday, 25 October (7 November)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Red Guard storms Winter Palace at 2:10 a.m. Government ministers resigned to fate and surrender without a fight. Battleship <i>Aurora</i> fires blanks at Winter Palace. Kerensky escapes and is protected by the American Embassy. Provisional Government arrested and imprisoned in Peter and Paul Fortress. Opening session of the Second All Russian Congress of Soviets. Trotsky dismisses Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionary Party opposition from Congress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provisional Government officially overthrown. Sailors had fired against its own government. Petrograd Soviet now in control of government, garrison and proletariat.
<p>Day 3</p> <p>Thursday, 26 October (8 November)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bolsheviks announce their official government title as 'Government of People's Commissars' with Lenin as leader. Posters pinned on walls and fences by the Socialist Revolutionaries describing takeover as a 'crime against the motherland and revolution'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong anti-Bolshevik opposition <i>within</i> Petrograd.

26 October 1917: new Soviet government announced

Our rising has been victorious.

Now they tell us: Renounce your victory, yield, make a compromise. With whom? ... You are bankrupt. You have played out your role. Go where you belong: to the dustbin of history!

Source 10.8 Trotsky to the Mensheviks, 25 October 1917



The opening session of the Second Congress of Soviets began on 25 October 1917 in the **Smolny Institute**, which later became the headquarters of the Bolshevik Party. Because members were elected, this was a crucial decision-making body that received widespread support and carried genuine authority. The Provisional Government had been seriously weakened by its failure to convince the population of its right to rule. Consequently, Lenin could not let the October events be seen as a mere Bolshevik coup, and therefore marketed the revolution as a rising by the Petrograd Soviet in which many parties were represented.

His tactic worked. Despite growing pockets of anti-Bolshevik sentiment, the Second Congress of Soviets officially approved the new regime, providing legitimacy to Lenin's takeover. The new Soviet government was now official, the Government of People's Commissars!

Smolny Institute the headquarters of the new Bolshevik government as well as the Petrograd Soviet in 1917



▲ Source 10.9 Painting of the Second All Russian Congress of Soviets



KEY HISTORIAN



▲ Source 10.10 John Reed

John Reed (1887–1920)

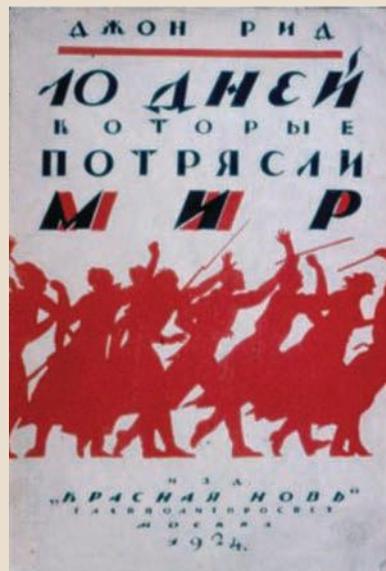
Ten Days that Shook the World (1919)

This is one of the classic eyewitness accounts of the October Revolution. John Reed was a left-wing American journalist, described by Lenin's wife Krupskaya in the introduction to the Russian edition as a 'passionate revolutionary, a communist who understood the meaning of the great struggle'. Lenin lavished praise on the book, stating 'unreservedly do I recommend it to the workers of the world'. In the introduction. Reed states that his book is 'a slice of intensified history – history as I saw it'. The book describes the 10 days during which the Bolsheviks

Reed John Reed was an American journalist who was in Petrograd during the October Revolution

established control over Petrograd and Moscow which, in the words of Australian historian Hoysted, 'shook both the foundations of Russia and the complacency of the capitalist western systems'. Reed described Lenin's opening address to the Second All Russian Congress of Soviets on 26 October 1917:

Now Lenin, gripping the edges of the reading stand, letting his little winking eyes travel over the crowd as he stood there waiting, apparently oblivious to the long-rolling ovation, which lasting several minutes. When it finished, he said simply, 'We shall now proceed to construct the Socialist order!' Again that overwhelming human roar.



▲ Source 10.11 Cover of Reed's book Ten Days that Shook the World (1919)

AMAZING BUT TRUE...

Reed returned to Russia to work for the communist government but died of typhus in 1920. Reed was considered such a hero of the revolution that he was buried under the Kremlin, an honour normally reserved for leaders.

AMAZING BUT TRUE . . .

A modern source that covers the October Revolution well is the 1981 Hollywood film *Reds*, starring Warren Beatty and Diane Keaton. Another is Orson Welles's pro-communist narration of a documentary also called *Ten Days that Shook the World*.

10.3 Analysing the October Revolution

The Bolsheviks did not have the support of the majority of Russian population. Historian Robert Service (1990) argued that the causes of the October Revolution were far more complex than just the influence of Lenin, because 'Great historical changes are brought about not only by individuals. There were other mighty factors at work as well in Russia'. So why were the Bolsheviks able to take over power?

- 1 The unpopularity of the Provisional Government was a crucial factor. Note that there were no mass demonstrations demanding the return of Kerensky and his government.
- 2 Absolute opposition at both the warfront and home front to the Provisional Government's decision to continue fighting World War One. The Bolsheviks were the only revolutionary political party demanding that Russia pull out of the war.
- 3 Bolsheviks were a disciplined party dedicated to revolution. By October, membership had rocketed to 800 000 members. Significantly, these members were in the right places – soldiers in the army, sailors at the Kronstadt naval base and workers in major industrial centres.
- 4 Bolsheviks had the majorities in the powerful Petrograd and Moscow soviets.
- 5 Bolsheviks had outstanding personalities who were brilliant speakers and writers, notably Lenin and Trotsky.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 10.1: COMPARING SOURCES ON THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION



Source A: Historian Richard Pipes argues that the revolution was not inevitable.

The ease with which the Bolsheviks toppled the Provisional Government – in Lenin's words, it was like 'lifting a feather' – has persuaded many historians that the October coup was 'inevitable'. But it can appear as such only in retrospect. Lenin himself thought it an extremely chancy undertaking. In urgent letters to the Central Committee in September and October 1917 from his hideaway, he insisted that success depended entirely on the speed and resoluteness with which the armed insurrection was carried out: 'To delay the uprising is death,' he wrote on October 24, 'everything hangs on a hair.' These were not the sentiments of a person prepared to trust the forces of history. Trotsky later asserted – and who was in a better position to know? – that if 'neither Lenin nor myself had been in Petersburg, there would have been no October Revolution.' Can one conceive of an 'inevitable' historical event dependent on two individuals?

Source 10.13 Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime 1919–1924* (1994), p. 498

continued ...



continued ...

Source B: Lenin declares that victory was achieved by the people.

On 25 October 1917, Lenin issued a declaration of victory that was sent by telegram throughout Russia:

To the citizens of Russia.

The Provisional Government has been overthrown. State power has passed into the hands of the organ of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, the Military Revolutionary Committee, which stands at the head of the Petrograd Soviet and garrison.

The cause for which the people have struggled – the immediate proposal of a democratic peace, the elimination of landlord estates, workers' control over production, the creation of a soviet government – the triumph of this cause has been assured.

Long live the workers', soldiers', and peasants' revolution!

Signed: The Military Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies

- 1 Using **Source A**, how does Pipes suggest that the revolution was not inevitable?
- 2 How convincing do you find Pipes's logic?
- 3 Using **Source B**, list the four causes 'for which the people have suffered'.
- 4 Which three groups does Lenin state that the revolution was achieved by?
- 5 Compare and contrast the main message of **both sources**.
- 6 Analyse the role played by individuals versus 'the people' in achieving the October Revolution. Use the sources and your own knowledge in your response.

▼ **Source 10.14** Trotsky (front row, 2nd from left) and Stalin (far right) saluting in the street, October 1917



ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 10.2: USING LANGUAGE



There are many possible terms to describe major political events: uprising, revolt, **coup d'état**, mutiny, takeover, insurrection or revolution. Language and terminology are powerful weapons. Pipes and MacDonald use the term 'coup d'état' and Figs 'insurrection' when referring to the October Revolution, while Malone uses 'takeover'.

coup d'état the forced replacement of a government from one privileged group to another

- 1 Why might these authors be reluctant to use the word 'revolution'?
- 2 Which term do you think most accurately reflects the events of October 1917?

THE STORY SO FAR



- Lenin returned secretly from his hiding place in Finland on 7 October and argued each night with the Bolshevik Central Committee for a systematic and strategic overthrow of the Provisional Government.
- Seizing power was made urgent by two scheduled events: the opening session of the Second All Russian Congress of Soviets in late October and the November elections for the Constituent Assembly. Lenin and Trotsky hastily organised the takeover for 24 October after Kerensky attacked the Bolsheviks.
- Trotsky's strategic takeover was efficiently completed by capturing the key communications, installations, vantage points and, most importantly, the government in the Winter Palace.
- The Bolsheviks's new government was formally approved by the Second All Russian Congress of Soviets on 26 October 1917.

Use the QR code or visit the digital version of the book and watch the video summarising the chapter.





Develop your historical thinking skills

Define key terms

Use information from this chapter to define these key terms.

- Battleship *Aurora*
- Bolshevik Central Committee
- Military Revolutionary Committee
- Red Guard
- Second All Russian Congress of Soviets

Use quotes as evidence

Write a sentence using a short phrase from one of the quotes below, or contrast the views from a few quotes. You can also use any of the quotes in this chapter. Quotes can be used directly or paraphrased into your own words.

The Bolsheviks did not seize power, they picked it up. **Adam Ulam, Polish-American historian**

In his guidance of the uprising, Lenin's genius as a leader of the masses, a wise and fearless strategist, who clearly saw what direction the revolution would take, was strikingly revealed. **Obichkin, Russian historian**

October was a classic coup d'état, the capture of governmental authority by a small band ... with a show of mass participation, but with hardly any mass involvement. **Richard Pipes, American historian**

The October Revolution emerges as very much more than a conspiratorial coup d'état. By then the central political issue was that of soviet power. **Edward Acton, British historian**

The Provisional Government had lost effective military control of the capital a full two days before the armed uprising began. This was the essential fact of the whole insurrection: without it one cannot explain the ease of the Bolshevik victory. **Orlando Figes, British historian**

Now that the great revolution has come, one feels that however intelligent Lenin may be he begins to fade beside the genius of Trotsky. **Bolshevik Mikhail Uritsky, October 1917**

Constructing historical arguments

Use evidence from this chapter to develop your own argument in these essay questions.

- 1 'The October Revolution occurred more because of Provisional Government weakness than of Bolshevik strength.' To what extent do you agree with this statement? Use evidence to support your response.
- 2 'To what extent was the October Revolution achieved from above (leadership) or from below (popular movements)?' Use evidence to support your response.

Analysing primary sources

Two of the most popular works applauded by the communist regime as worthy representations of the glory of the October Revolution were Reed's book *Ten Days that Shook the World* (1919) and Sergei Eisenstein's film *October* (1927).

- 1 What message is conveyed in **Source 10.11** about the role of the proletariat?
- 2 What is **Source 10.6** suggesting by having Lenin as the main subject in the centre of the poster?
- 3 What are the images underneath Lenin's feet in **Source 10.6**?
- 4 In your opinion, which image more accurately represents the October Revolution?

Analysing historian's interpretations

Debate: Was the October Revolution a genuine class revolution?

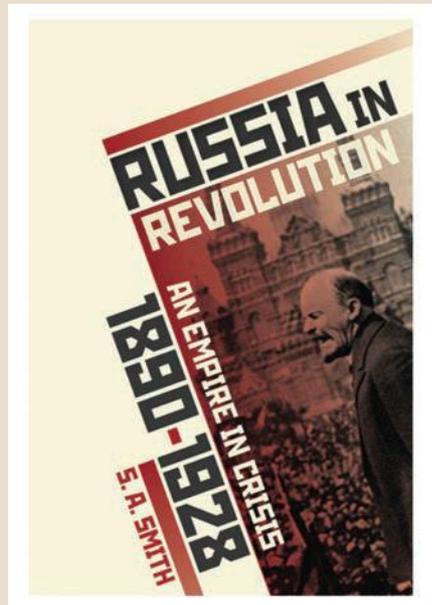
Stephen A. Smith

Nationality: British historian and academic

Helpful book: *Russia in Revolution: an empire in crisis, 1890 to 1928*, Oxford University Press, 2017



▲ **Source 10.15** Stephen A. Smith



▲ **Source 10.16** *Russia in Revolution: an empire in crisis, 1890–1928*

Point of view

Steve Smith is more sympathetic to Lenin's victory in October and the central role of the workers movement. He argues that it was not a coup but a genuine revolution.

Reasons (evidence)

The Provisional Government was not a democratically elected government. From June to October the Bolsheviks had increasing popular support, mainly from working class and soldiers.

Quote

The seizure of power is often presented as a conspiratorial coup against a democratic government. It certainly had elements of a coup, but it was a coup much advertised, and the government it overthrew had not been democratically elected.

What's your point of view?

What's your point of view on whether the October Revolution was a genuine class revolution?



11

THEMATIC ANALYSIS, 1896–1917

It is impossible to predict the time and progress of revolution. It is governed by its own more or less mysterious laws.

– LENIN

Overview

The big question is ‘What were the significant causes of the Russian Revolution?’ But the answer is complex. Why? Because there are long-term causes and short-term triggers, plus there were the two 1917 revolutions of February and October, each with their different causes.

The entire political, social and economic system in Russia was designed around Tsarist Autocracy, to support the privileged powers of the ruling classes, underpinned by a backward agrarian system. But none of these long-term factors can be considered the direct cause of the 1917 revolutions because the Romanov Dynasty had survived and even thrived under these conditions for over 300 years. So what were the main turning points in the collapse of the existing political order in February 1917, the consequence of which was the creation of a power vacuum that was exploited by Bolsheviks in October?

Key issues

After completing this chapter, you should be able to answer these questions.

- What were the conditions in tsarist Russia that contributed to the outbreak of revolution?
- Why was Nicholas’s government unwilling to adjust to changing circumstances?
- What role did individuals play between 1896 and 1917?
- What role did movements play between 1896 and 1917?
- What role did ideas play between 1896 and 1917?
- Who’s who in the Russian Revolution, 1896–1917?

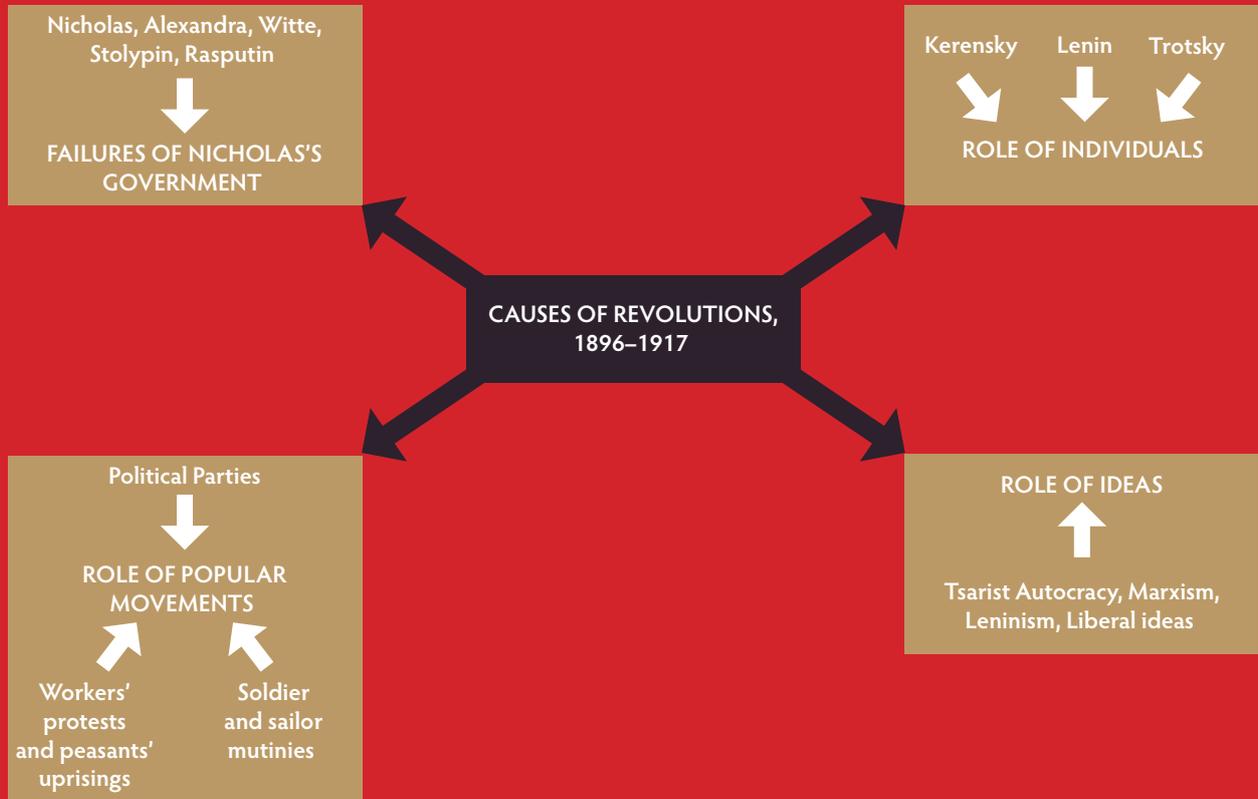
Digital resources for this chapter

In the *Interactive Textbook*:

-  Video and audio sources and questions
-  Digital activities

◀ Source 11.0 Soviet propaganda poster commemorating the October Revolution

Flow of chapter



Chapter timeline

What are the key events of the Russian Revolution covered in this chapter?

1896-1905
Tensions erupt under Tsar Nicholas II



1914 - FEBRUARY 1917
Crises exacerbated by World War One



OCTOBER 1917
Bolshevik victory over Provisional Government



1906-13
Tsarist Autocracy stabilised



MARCH 1917-OCTOBER 1917
Failure of Dual Government

11.1 What were the events and conditions in tsarist Russia that contributed to the outbreak of revolution?

Long-term cause 1: Institutional weaknesses in tsarist Russia

It is crucial to consider how the system and concept of Tsarist Autocracy created the preconditions of revolution. The institutions that enabled tsarism were inefficient and corrupt. Orthodox Christianity validated the Tsar as God's earthly representative and promoted obedience to him. Opposing the Tsar was to oppose God himself. All levels of government were directly answerable to the Tsar and had no power other than implementing his will. The bureaucracy was made up of privileged families which resulted in an inefficient administrative system. Enforcing law was the Tsar's secret police, the *Okbrana*, and the Cossacks, whose use of force intimidated and eliminated opposition. All these institutional weaknesses became less defensible in an era of progress and modern thinking.

Long-term cause 2: Economic and social inequalities

Daily life in Russia was full of economic and social inequalities. The system of class hierarchy was based on privilege by birth rather than by merit or opportunity. Class boundaries divided society into the privileged upper classes and working lower classes. A small middle class of 1.5 per cent meant that small businesses and entrepreneurial growth was also significantly underdeveloped. Society was based on 82 per cent peasants and only 4 per cent industrial workers. Hence, the labour of the peasantry fuelled a traditional agrarian system which was limited by a lack of fertile land. Despite the reform efforts of Government ministers Witte and Stolypin, Russia's backward agrarian system became outdated by the advances of the rapidly industrialising Western world.

11.2 Why was Tsar Nicholas unwilling to adjust to changing circumstances?

Reason 1: Unwilling to change system of Tsarist Autocracy

Like his powerful father Alexander III, Nicholas II was never convinced that he should abandon the concept of Tsarist Autocracy. The reforms in his *October Manifesto* were reluctantly introduced to regain control after the turmoil of 1905. The rising political expectations of a liberal power sharing model of a Duma were dashed through the Fundamental Laws and the dismissal of the first two Dumas in 1906 and 1907. The Tsar's inflexibility demonstrates that he perceived the world as one of extremes, void of compromise. The British diplomat in Russia at the time, Bernard Pares, argues that the Tsar's downfall was primarily due to this inability to seek the middle ground between 'reform' and 'reaction'. This mindset led Nicholas to consider that any reforms by definition meant an attack on autocratic rule, which he was desperate to maintain.

Reason 2: Unwilling to support reforms to modernise

Nicholas's rule was characterised by isolation from economic reality. Reforms are introduced as an attempt to change an existing problem. If these reforms fail, the problem still exists, but with added discontent and tension. Two main periods of change in economic fortunes were evident: periods of reform under Sergei Witte (1892–1903) and Pyotr Stolypin (1906–11). Witte's far reaching reforms invested heavily in expanding Russian industry and investment.



Stolypin's agricultural reforms increased the size of peasants' landholdings. Stolypin's reforms not only saved but also strengthened tsarism, but they still were not welcomed by the Tsar, primarily because of suspicion from the royal court and a traditional government, which were both resistant to major change. This was most evident in that Witte was replaced in 1906 when he pushed for constitutional reform and Stolypin's reforms were abandoned after his assassination in 1911.

World War One reversed these relatively favourable circumstances of 1913. Food and fuel shortages meant higher inflation and price increases, which resulted in increased unemployment.

Reason 3: Willingness to use violence

Nicholas's unwillingness to reform, due to his utmost belief in autocracy, was backed up by his use of violence to maintain a traditional society. The three best examples are the Bloody Sunday (1905), Lena Goldfields (1912) and his order to Petrograd Chief of Police to 'suppress' the February Revolution protests (1917). Each of these massacres demonstrated the singular mindset that challenges to the existing order were not to be tolerated. It was no coincidence that the primary growth in support of revolutionary political movements within Russia occurred at the same time as social discontent exploded within the urban working class.

Reason 4: Broken trust with his people

There were several key events that broke the bond between the Tsar and his people: Bloody Sunday in January 1905; the broken promises of the *October Manifesto*; political sabotaging of the First and Second Dumas; severe social repression under Stolypin; the economic and social disaster of war; Nicholas making himself personally responsible for the disaster of the war by becoming Commander in Chief; and the perceived sexual corruption of Tsarina Alexandra and Rasputin. Nicholas's unsuitability for the role of governing Russia was demonstrated by his inability to recognise the extent of his damaged reputation within the popular psyche. Through all this, Nicholas not only forfeited the confidence of the working classes but also the traditional supporters of tsarism – the ruling classes, the bureaucracy and the Church – who gradually abandoned him between 1906 and 1917. This broken trust proved fatal.



▲ Source 11.1 Tsar Nicholas II at the window of his railroad car, 1917

11.3 What role did ideas play between 1896 and 1917?

Ideology is important because revolutions are a contest of ideas of how to best govern a country. In this regard, Nicholas tried to operate his country by using the traditional autocratic structures of isolating the intelligentsia through repression, censorship, lack of political parties and no form of parliament. Revolutionary ideologies emerged in opposition to the existing order of Tsarist Autocracy. In Russia, these were liberal reforms, Marxism and Marxism–Leninism. These ideologies were utilised by individuals and popular movements to justify revolutionary action. So to what extent did these ideas challenge Tsarist Autocracy?

February Revolution	October Revolution	Analysis
Ideas involved	Ideas involved	February was motivated more by economic and political protests against Tsarist Autocracy, whereas October was motivated by the ideological belief in Marxism.
Tsarist Autocracy	Marxism–Leninism	
Liberal reforms	All Power to the Soviets	
	'Peace, Bread, Land'	

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Interestingly, the two 1917 revolutions were remarkably different in their utilisation of ideology. The February Revolution witnessed the spontaneous rejection of Tsarist Autocracy in favour of liberal reforms and an elected government. The October Revolution, however, was the opposite. Lenin's propaganda from April onwards was full of Marxist terminology – adopted and adapted by Lenin for Russian which was called Marxism–Leninism. His argument for a second revolution was based on the belief that power had not transferred into the blistered hands of the proletariat, but rather into the white palms of liberal bourgeoisie landowners. Class-based Marxist ideals were used to justify taking power on behalf of the workers and peasants. Marxism legitimised revolution.



▲ Source 11.2 Lenin addressing the crowd in Red Square, Moscow



11.4 What role did individuals play between 1896 and 1917?

There is an interesting contradiction. On the one hand, Lenin once said: 'It is impossible to predict the time and progress of revolution. It is governed by its own more or less mysterious laws.' While on the other hand, his prominent writings such as *What Is to Be Done?* (1902) and his *April Theses* (1917) strongly promoted the idea that there was method to creating a revolution. So, what role do significant individuals play in creating revolutions?

Maintained existing order	Challenged existing order	Analysis
Nicholas and Alexandra	Kerensky	Tsarist leaders couldn't protect the existing political order from popular movements in February, and Kerensky couldn't protect the Provisional Government from the Bolsheviks in October.
Witte and Stolypin	Lenin	
Rasputin	Trotsky	

Despite their good intentions, the influence of significant individuals within the existing order resulted in a destabilised government that fatally lost all support by February 1917: Nicholas's decision to join wars, use violence and lead the war effort, Witte's reforms led to the poor conditions that fuelled Bloody Sunday, Stolypin's reforms were covered by oppression, and Alexandra's blind devotion to Rasputin.

Alexander Kerensky was dominant in calling for a revolution in February 1917 and became a member of the new Provisional Government after the Tsar abdicated. His initially popular leadership was undermined by the consequences of continuing to fight World War One, which resulted in the eventual overthrow of his government in October.

In contrast, all the other main revolutionary leaders were absent during the February Revolution and had been in exile for most of the previous two decades. They had dedicated their lives to planning and initiating revolution, yet it caught them by surprise. In fact, lecturing students in Switzerland just three weeks before the February Revolution erupted, Lenin stated: 'We older ones will not live to see the revolution in our lifetime.' It can be concluded that leaders did not cause the 1905 Revolution nor the February Revolution, which instead were achieved by economic discontent from popular movements.

Deeper analysis suggests that the crucial role revolutionary leaders play is in manipulating ideology, taking advantage of poor decisions by the government and harnessing the power of popular movements, in order to impose their vision by overthrowing the traditional government. Historian William Doyle appears correct in his admission that 'it would be truer to say that the revolutionaries had been created by the revolution' rather than vice versa.

Comparing leaders

Leader	Role in 1905	Role in February 1917	Role in October 1917	Summary
Tsar Nicholas II 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enacted Bloody Sunday Lost Russo-Japanese War Promises of Duma in <i>October Manifesto</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ignored warnings Ignored needs of protestors and asked police to suppress crowds Sacked Duma Abdicated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Imprisoned with his family in the Ural Mountains by the Provisional Government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Belief in Tsarist Autocracy and willingness to use violence lost all support, which ended the once powerful Romanov Dynasty
Kerensky 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joined Socialist Revolutionary party Defence lawyer for victims of 1905 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Founding member of Provisional Government Vice Chairman of Petrograd Soviet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failed June Offensive Crushed Bolsheviks during July Days protests Inadequate defences of Winter Palace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial popularity lost because of his support of continuing to fight World War One plus inability to solve economic problems
Trotsky 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supported the Mensheviks Leader of St Petersburg Soviet October Strikes Arrested in December and exiled again until 1917 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only returned to Russia in May and joined Bolsheviks in July 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Released from prison during Kornilov Affair Elected Chairman of Petrograd Soviet Organised the takeover of Petrograd 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marxist revolutionary leader with influential writing and charismatic oratory Crucial strategic role in October Revolution
Lenin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formed Bolsheviks in 1903 but mostly in exile from 1896 to 1917 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only returned to Russia in April to Finland Station and <i>April Theses</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Escaped to Finland after failed July Days then returned on 7 October to convince reluctant Bolshevik Central Committee of need for immediate revolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marxist revolutionary leader with influential writing and charismatic oratory Crucial visionary role in initiating October Revolution



11.5 What role did popular movements play between 1896 and 1917?

Popular movements are the ‘politics of the street’. Workers, peasants, soldiers, sailors – men and women – had shared grievances that often erupted into spontaneous events. The discontent of popular movements was captured by the revolutionary political parties and their raw energy created a revolutionary atmosphere that fuelled momentum for change.

Role of popular masses: workers’ protests and peasants’ uprisings

	Workers’ protests	Peasants’ uprisings
Pre-1917	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experienced poor conditions and low wages after Witte’s industrial reforms Involved in Workers Petition/March and Bloody Sunday (Jan 1905) 800 000 strikes in cities throughout Russia (from Jan 1905), largest being General Strikes (Oct 1905) New St Petersburg Soviet represented workers (Oct 1905) Marxist Bolshevik and Menshevik parties represented workers (proletariat) Strikes at Lena Goldfields resulted in massacre of workers (1912) which increased strikes Conscripted to fight in World War One (from 1914) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experienced backward agrarian system caused poor conditions with land and food shortages. Socialist Revolutionary Party represented peasants Uprisings throughout 1905. Believed that land should be owned by those who work it. Destroyed manor houses owned and redistributed land. Represented by new All Russian Union of Peasants (June 1905) Stolypin’s reforms benefited peasants (1906–11) Conscripted to fight in World War One (from 1914)
1917	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strikes at Putilov Steel Works (18 Feb 1917) International Women’s Day protests (from 23 Feb 1917) Petrograd Soviet represented workers and supported Bolsheviks (Mar 1917) Lenin claimed to represent workers and soviets (Apr 1917) and wanted a second revolution for the proletariat Involved in July Days protests Trotsky’s Red Guard formed from workers (Aug 1917) and overthrew Provisional Government (Oct 1917) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uprisings in mid-1917, angry at Provisional Government’s slow land redistribution. Land taken by peasants Peasant soviets formed throughout Russia to voice peasant needs Supported the Bolshevik takeover of the Provisional Government

Analysis – How significant were the masses in achieving the February and October revolutions?

While Lenin had been planning for revolution since 1895, it happened without him in February 1917. This illuminates some significant elements of genuine revolution. First, they originate from below – from discontent of the masses – rather than being imposed from above. Second, they are spontaneous, rather than calculated and planned. Third, they involve the majority rather than a select few. Fourth, they must touch every aspect of society – social, economic and political. The February Revolution began because of social and economic discontent from the war, but had far-reaching political consequences.

Between March and October, the popular movements were indeed significant, with daily street demonstrations and strikes, such as the July Days. Yet the spontaneous role of the crowd in October was limited. Lenin's belief that a revolutionary should be guided by the head not the heart, and the party disciplined with centralised authority, was perfectly executed in October. A small group of well-trained Red Guards with specific strategic roles achieved his goal: political control of the largest country in the world. Conservative historian Richard Pipes argued: 'Communism did not come to Russia as a result of a popular uprising: it was imposed on her from above by a small minority hiding behind democratic slogans.'

Role of military: soldier and sailor mutinies

	Soldier mutinies	Sailor mutinies
Pre-1917	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditionally, identified themselves with working class – peasants and workers in uniform Defeats at Port Arthur and Mukden in Russo-Japanese War (1904) 400 mutinies in Russian army in 1905–06 Heavy losses led to demoralisation in World War One 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Humiliating defeat at Battle of Tsushima in Russo-Japanese War (1905) Several mutinies in 1905 with the most famous being on the battleship <i>Potemkin</i> in the Black Sea (June 1905) Heavy losses led to demoralisation in World War One
1917	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Petrograd Garrison deserted Tsar to support protestors in February Revolution Represented by new Petrograd Soviet Order No 1 ordered soldiers to obey Petrograd Soviet before Provisional Government Provisional Government's support for war and failed June Offensive resulted in mass desertions Halted General Kornilov's advance to Petrograd Organised by Military Revolutionary Committee to support October Revolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sailors killed 75 officers in February Did not support Provisional Government because they continued fighting the war Sailors from Kronstadt marched on the Provisional Government in failed July Days Organised by Military Revolutionary Committee to support October Revolution



Analysis – Why did the troops support the revolutionaries rather than the existing government?

Revolutions are forced overthrows of existing governments and so, by definition, require the support of armed military organisations. At the very heart of the military is the professional culture of discipline and following orders.

A key reason that the 1905 'revolution' failed was because the Tsar's military ultimately remained loyal but with some exceptions. Soldiers and sailors supported him in the 1904 Russo-Japanese War but sailors later mutinied on the battleship *Potemkin*. Similarly, they went to war for him in 1914, but by February 1917, even they recognised the futility in continuing this support. The pattern was initial support but then rejection as the Tsar's decisions proved poor.

The successful story of the 1917 revolutions is based on military unwillingness to defend the old order and willingness to support the position of protest. Trotsky argued that the most significant day in the February Revolution was 26 February because it was the day the soldiers began to join the protestors, turning the strikes into dangerous and purposeful revolts. Soldiers were perhaps more willing to break ranks because of the negative experiences of World War One. Soldiers mutinied against their garrisons and commanders to lead crowds to successfully control Petrograd. Anger over the continuation of the war effort was a critical factor, meaning that by October many of the soldiers and sailors identified with the promises of the Bolsheviks and joined the Red Guard to attack their former bosses. In fact, Trotsky ascribed Bolshevik success in October purely to the effectiveness of Bolshevik agitation at the war front plus the military involvement of the Petrograd Garrison and Military Revolutionary Committee.



▲ Source 11.3 Down with the icons of the old regime! *Soldiers burning paintings, 1917* by Ivan Vladimirov

Role of political parties

Political parties opposed the tsarist government and provided alternative political perspectives. They agitated for urgent change and provided solutions, which became increasingly welcomed in 1916 and 1917 during the disastrous World War One.

Octobrists	Kadets	Socialist Revolutionaries	Mensheviks	Bolsheviks
Conservative liberal policies that wanted constitutional monarchy. Initially, supported government until poor management of war in 1915.	Progressive liberal policies that wanted constitutional limits on Tsar's authority. Formed Provisional Government in February 1917 and wanted to continue fighting the war.	Socialist policies that wanted land reforms for peasants. Controlled the Petrograd Soviet with Mensheviks in 1917. Limited support for continuing the war.	Socialist policies that wanted reforms for industrial workers. Controlled the Petrograd Soviet with Socialist Revolutionaries in 1917. Limited support for continuing the war.	Socialist policies that wanted to lead an industrial worker revolution. Opposed war and promoted peace. Led by Lenin and Trotsky to overthrow government in October.

So what were the revolutionary perspectives? Middle-class liberals such as the Octobrists and Kadets parties both wanted constitutional monarchy. The cautiously conservative Octobrists peacefully accepted the reforms of the *October Manifesto* and Fundamental Laws compared to the more progressive Kadets who rejected both these proclamations as not creating a genuine parliament. Although popular, both wanted to reform and modernise tsarism not overthrow it. Hence, it was the radical Marxist revolutionary parties who provided the main challenge to tsarism – Socialist Revolutionaries and Social Democrats (Menshevik and Bolshevik factions).

Analysis – Why were the Bolsheviks able to defeat the other revolutionary parties?

A crucial issue in understanding 1917 is to understand why the popular Socialist Revolutionaries or Mensheviks did not seriously challenge the Bolsheviks for political power, resulting in failure of potential socialist coalition. Milyukov, the leader of the large Kadet Party, argued that the Bolsheviks 'went in the direction which they had chosen once and for all towards a goal which came nearer with every new, unsuccessful, experiment of compromise'. Factors contributing to the defeat of other revolutionary parties include the following.

- 1 All other revolutionary parties considered the events of February to be a genuine revolution and therefore had cooperated with the Provisional Government rather than trying to overthrow them. Lenin aggressively promoted the need for the second revolution to occur to transfer power from the liberal bourgeoisie to the proletariat.
- 2 Both the Provisional Government and the revolutionary parties were prepared to wait for the anticipated national elections to the Constituent Assembly in November. Lenin supported the sole rule of the Bolsheviks rather than a popularly elected coalition of revolutionary parties.
- 3 All other revolutionary parties, especially the Mensheviks, supported the continuation of the war, believing that defeating the bourgeois Germany was the most revolutionary cause. Lenin directed his ideology into opposing the war.
- 4 There was not a tradition of political parties fighting each other for public promotion, support and the vote. Lenin proved to be the most politically cunning and ruthless.
- 5 Liberal parties like the Kadets and Octobrists failed to develop symbols of power as compared to the Bolsheviks' publication of pamphlets, collections of political songs and the parading of flags.



What role did women play in the 1917 revolutions?

Since the 1860s, women had played an active role throughout the development of Russia's revolutionary tradition. The revolutionary parties believed that focusing on women's issues detracted from their political agenda. Women contributed directly and indirectly to the revolutionary cause.

Pre-1917 – impacted by Witte's industrial reforms by moving families to major cities, actively involved in the 1905 Workers' March and resulting Bloody Sunday massacre, subsequent riots and protests, including the General Strikes in October, and Stolypin's agrarian reforms. Significant consequences of World War One on the home front resulted in their outpouring of protest in February 1917.

February – massive march on International Women's Day advocating a solution to the food shortages and an end to the war began a powerful protest movement. Their involvement on the streets continued throughout the revolution.

March to September – established the League of Equal Rights and League of Women's Equality who organised a demonstration of 40 000 women to convince Provisional Government of the need to give all women the vote. An All Russian Congress of Women was held in April. While some spoke at mass meetings, many more organised the printing and distribution of revolutionary leaflets and newspapers. The Bolsheviks established a women's group called *Rabotnitsa*, meaning 'Working Woman', which produced a newspaper of the same name.

October – initiated the establishment of the Women's Death Battalion, which was used by Kerensky to unsuccessfully protect the Winter Palace.

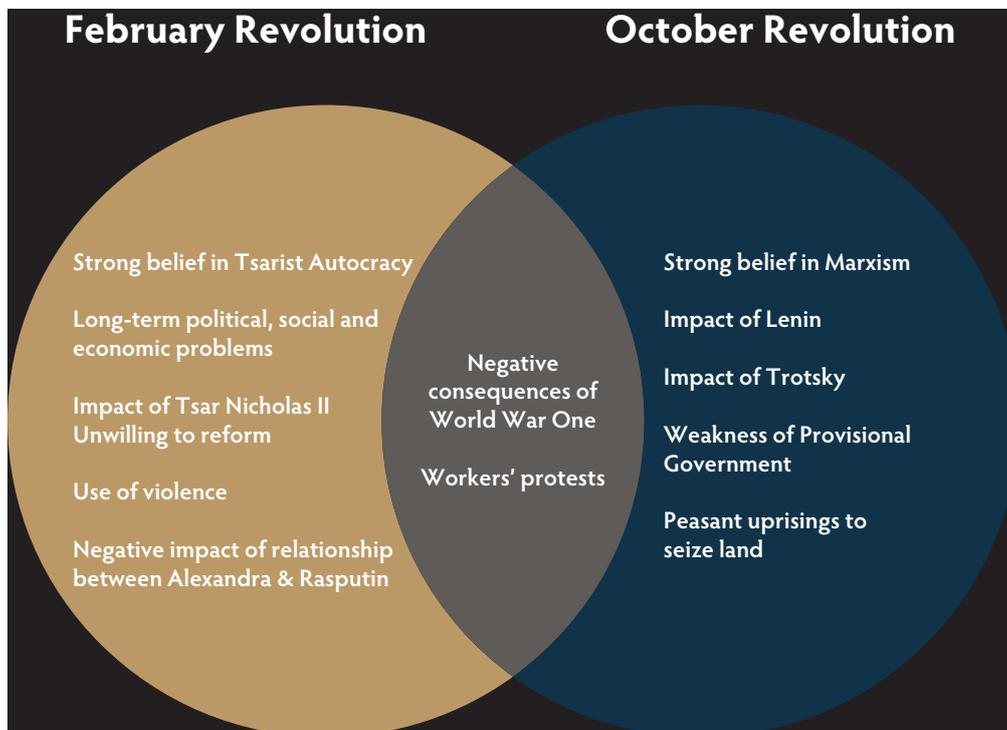


▲ Source 11.4 International Women's Day march

11.6 Comparing the causes of the February and October revolutions

What were the main causes of the February Revolution? Put succinctly, a series of tensions was generated to which Tsar Nicholas II and his government were unwilling to respond. Instead of reform, violence. While the Russian Revolution was never inevitable as Marxist theory suggests, the long-term problems of the existing order had been exacerbated by Nicholas and Alexandra's mismanagement of the short-term triggers of the war and subsequent revolution of February 1917.

What were the main causes of the October Revolution? Initial enthusiasm over the liberal reforms of the Provisional Government was dashed by the failure of dual government, continuation of the war and the disastrous Kornilov Affair. The power vacuum was seized by Lenin's ruthless initiative and Trotsky's strategic brilliance to build Bolshevik popularity.



▲ Source 11.5 Differences and similarities between the two 1917 revolutions

Deeper analysis suggests that some issues that initially seem unique to each revolution are actually in common. For example, the decisions of significant individuals (the leadership of Nicholas and Alexandra, and Lenin and Trotsky) were major causes of each revolution. And more, powerful ideas were crucial causes for both revolutions because Lenin believed in Marxism as strongly as Nicholas believed in Tsarist Autocracy.

11.7 How did environmental conditions help cause revolutionary events?

No understanding of the revolution is complete without considering the interplay of its causes. Environmental conditions contributed to the outbreak of revolutionary events, which in turn, increased revolutionary fervour. Each of these events contributed to a growing sense at every level of Russian society that major political and social upheaval could occur at any time – and needed to. Despite revolutionary events seeming to suddenly break out between 1896 and 1917, given the harsh conditions in Russia, many events were not unexpected.

So how did environmental conditions contribute to the outbreak of revolutionary events? Here are some examples.

- Freezing climate and lack of fertile land resulted in a backward agrarian existence for peasants. Overpopulation exacerbated these problems because Russia had Europe's highest birth rate, doubling the peasant population between 1850 and 1900.
- Vast geography made for multiple time zones, minority groups and vegetation zones making Russia very difficult for the Tsar to rule.
- Many revolutionaries were caught by the tsarist secret police, the *Okhrana*, especially under Stolypin. Siberia was the remote but vast central area in Russia whose isolation and harsh conditions limited population numbers. That made it ideal for exiling revolutionaries like Lenin and Trotsky.
- Tragedy at Khodynka Field in Moscow after the Tsar's coronation in 1896. A dry autumn caused the devastating 1891–92 famine which led to years of poor crop yields, poverty and food shortages. Hence, the promise of free food and drink attracted an unexpectedly large crowd of half a million people, which ended in a stampede that killed and injured thousands.
- Agricultural productivity was stagnant due to the famine and recession of the 1890s. Hence, Witte's industrial reforms prompted rapid migration of peasants to cities, which almost doubled the population of St Petersburg between 1890 and 1910.
- Industrial waste, river pollution and water politics became major problems for governmental authorities, scientists and industrialists. Considerable public debate occurred around the dangers of industrial waste pollution in water sources.
- Deplorable living and working conditions in St Petersburg – exacerbated by extreme cold weather – led to the Workers Petition and March in January 1905. The tragic outcome was Bloody Sunday.
- Siberian goldfields were part of the Russian Empire's new exploitation of the vast region's natural resources, which deforested the hills and polluted the rivers. Being so remote left mining companies unaccountable. The goldfields on the Lena River dominated Russian consciousness when miners were unjustly massacred in 1912 after striking due to the appalling work environment. The isolation and desolation of the Lena Goldfields shaped the entire sad story.
- During World War One, instead of trench warfare and stalemate like the Western Front, the land terrain on the Eastern Front encouraged massive attacking battles with strategic manoeuvres. Despite numbering more than one million soldiers, Russia suffered a series of demoralising defeats, such as the Battle of Tannenberg in August 1914 which destroyed the Russian Second Army.
- Millions of war refugees from these regions flooded into Petrograd, which worsened the living conditions for lower classes.
- On the home front, shortage of food resulted in riots as early as 1915. Added to this was a viciously cold winter in 1916–17 resulting in fuel shortages. For example, temperatures in the overcrowded Petrograd apartments rarely rose above 9 degrees Celsius. This, combined with the shortage of necessities, led to increasing incidence of malnutrition and disease which created intolerable conditions of daily existence.
- Food shortages created desperation for women in Petrograd who spilled into the streets on International Women's Day in February 1917. The brutal winter meant that the major Neva River was still frozen, which allowed crowds from working districts to bypass bridge blockades and pour into the city centre.

- Complaints over the Provisional Government's slow distribution of land resulted in widespread peasant uprisings during 1917. Peasants forcibly seized land from private owners. Parts of Russia with the most fertile soil witnessed the most disturbances. This problem was exacerbated by the peasant soldiers deserting the army in the thousands to return home to seize land before they missed out.

FOCUS QUESTIONS 11.1

- 1 Choose three events and explain how environmental factors contributed to that revolutionary situation.
- 2 Identify two environmental issues that were common underlying causes of many of these revolutionary events.
- 3 How might dissatisfaction under Tsar Nicholas been different if environmental conditions had been favourable instead of adverse?
- 4 Summarise how environmental conditions help cause revolutionary events.

11.8 Who's who in the Russian Revolution, 1896–1917?

Armand, Inessa: passionate Marxist revolutionary who met Lenin in Paris in 1910 and became his mistress.

Buchanan, George: British Ambassador in Russia from 1910 to 1917. He sent a respectful warning to Tsar Nicholas about the February Revolution. His involvement and eyewitness accounts provide helpful insights.

Chernov, Viktor: leader of the Socialist Revolutionary Party which focused on needs of peasants.

Cossacks: a fiercely independent people group within Russia who fought for the tsars from the late 1700s in return for their freedom. They became a military fighting class (similar to the knights of medieval Europe) who fought numerous wars for the tsars and attacked the protesting workers at Bloody Sunday to protect Tsar Nicholas.

Durnovo, Pyotr: influential member of the upper class who became Minister of the Interior under Prime Minister Witte. Gave prophetic warnings to Tsar Nicholas in 1914 about the revolutionary dangers of joining World War One.

Engels, Friedrich: co-writer of the influential 1848 *The Communist Manifesto* with Karl Marx. Marxism was adopted by the main revolutionary parties and individuals.

Gapon, Georgi: Russian priest and working-class leader who led the Workers March in January 1905 to present a respectful petition to Tsar Nicholas. The resulting massacre was called Bloody Sunday, which permanently broke trust between the Tsar and his people.

Gorky, Maxim: influential Russian writer and political activist who wrote about many events such as the Bloody Sunday massacre in 1905.

Kennan, George: an American who worked with the American Foreign Service from 1926 to 1953; he wrote three books on the revolution and Russian foreign policy.

Kerensky, Alexander: key revolutionary who was an active member of the Fourth Duma and investigated the Lena Goldfields massacre of 1912. His significant leadership role was in 1917 as Prime Minister of the unpopular Provisional Government that was overthrown by the Bolsheviks in October 1917.

Lenin, Vladimir: a relentless Marxist leader who disagreed with Martov on party membership and organisation in 1903 and formed the Bolsheviks. Provided the central vision for the successful October Revolution in 1917.



Martov, Julius: a passionate Marxist leader who disagreed with Lenin on party membership and organisation in 1903 and formed the Mensheviks.

Marx, Karl: co-writer of the influential 1848 *The Communist Manifesto* with Friedrich Engels. Marxism was adopted by the main revolutionary parties and individuals.

Nikolaevich, Nikolai: popular Commander in Chief of the Russian forces during World War One until he was wrongly replaced by Tsar Nicholas in August 1915.

Okhrana: government secret police who eliminated revolutionaries to protect Tsarist Autocracy.

Rasputin, Grigori: a rural spiritualist who significantly influenced the royal family, especially the Tsarina, from 1905 until his assassination in 1916.

Reed, John: an American journalist who was in Petrograd and wrote an enthusiastically positive account of the October Revolution.

Rodzianko, Mikhail: chairman of the Fourth Duma (1912–17) who provided warnings to Tsar Nicholas II during the February Revolution.

Stolypin, Pyotr: most influential role was as Prime Minister from 1906 when he restored the authority of tsarism after the turmoil of 1905 through reforms and repression, until his assassination in 1911.

Trotsky, Leon: a Marxist revolutionary who became a significant leader of the Bolsheviks in 1917 and was crucial in the strategic overthrow of the Provisional Government in October.

Tsar Nicholas II: leader of Russian Empire for 23 year reign, whose belief in Tsarist Autocracy led to a series of poor decisions and created a revolutionary situation. His abdication in 1917 ended the Romanov Dynasty.

Tsarina Alexandra: loving German wife of Tsar Nicholas who provided strong support for her husband. Leadership of the Russian Government in 1915–16, manipulated by the advice of Rasputin, led to its overthrow in February 1917.

Tsarevich, Alexei: Nicholas and Alexandra's youngest child and only son. His serious medical condition of haemophilia was the direct catalyst for Rasputin's influence over the royal family.

Witte, Sergei: influential government minister who promoted modernisation through industrial reforms and the formation of a parliamentary Duma.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 11.1: INADEQUATE EVIDENCE?

One of the problems of history is that there are many topics for which we may never have adequate evidence to reach firm conclusions. Historians fill this evidence gap with their own educated guesses. What do you think about the following issues?

- What might have motivated Nicholas to abdicate?
- How important were the failed July Days protests really in teaching the Bolsheviks lessons about how to strategically takeover Petrograd?
- Why did the Bolshevik Party gain support in 1917?
- Did Kerensky really need to release Trotsky and the Bolsheviks from prison to defend Petrograd from Kornilov?
- Why were Kerensky's defensive preparations for the Bolsheviks' takeover so inadequate?

THE STORY SO FAR

- Life in the Romanov Dynasty was based around a ruler with complete authority. Tsarist Autocracy was implemented with a complex web of competing government, administration, police and religious organisations. Even the social structure was designed to support tsarism.
- Opposition to tsarism had become prominent by the early 1900s through the adoption of Marxist ideas by the Bolshevik, Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionary parties. Lenin and Trotsky were simply two of the many leaders who devoted their professional and personal lives to pursuing revolution.
- In 1905, this popular discontent finally moved to mass action, sparked by the Bloody Sunday massacre in January. Nicholas reluctantly granted civil liberties and the Dumas through his *October Manifesto*.
- Prime Minister Stolypin temporarily saved tsarism from collapse through limiting the effective power of the Dumas and implementing agrarian reforms. By 1913, Russia's economic recovery and severe police repression had thwarted the demands of the small revolutionary groups.
- World War One played a crucial role in compounding the existing military, political, economic and social problems. Nicholas demonstrated his misguided beliefs by assuming that his personal control of the army would unite the nation, that Alexandra was politically competent and that Rasputin was harmless.
- Economic and social grievances of the workers erupted in February 1917, resulting in a Provisional Government and Petrograd Soviet to replace the abdicated Tsar.
- Despite liberal reforms, Dual Authority gradually failed as mass protests by workers, peasants, soldiers and sailors increased. Lenin's arguments for a second revolution gained support after Kerensky's mishandling of the Kornilov Affair, resulting in a simple overthrow of the Provisional Government in October.

Use the QR code or visit the digital version of the book and watch the video summarising the chapter.





Develop your historical thinking skills

Establishing historical significance

Use evidence from all chapters so far to write short paragraph answers.

- 1 What were the significant causes of revolution?
- 2 What role did ideas and individuals play in challenging the existing order?
- 3 What was the role of popular movements in challenging the existing order?
- 4 To what extent did social tensions and ideological conflicts contribute to the outbreak of revolution?

Using quotes as evidence

Write a sentence using a short phrase from one of the quotes below or contrast the views from a few quotes. You can also use any of the quotes in this chapter. Quotes can be used directly or paraphrased in your own words.

The country so radically vomited up the monarchy that it could not ever crawl down the people's throat again. **Leon Trotsky**

Dual power proved an illusion, masking something very like a power vacuum. **Sheila Fitzpatrick, historian**

Without Rasputin, there could have been no Lenin. **Alexander Kerensky, member of Fourth Duma**

No WW1, no October Revolution. **Graham Darby, historian**

In October 1917, the Bolsheviks were pushing against an already open door. **Michael Lynch, historian**

Constructing historical arguments

Write an essay using evidence from this chapter to develop your own argument.

- 1 'Economic factors were the main contribution to the revolutionary situation in February 1917.'
- 2 'War was the cause of both revolutions in 1917.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?
- 3 'Ideas and individuals were more important than popular movements in creating the 1917 revolutions.'

To what extent do you agree with the above statements? Use evidence to support your responses.

Analysing historian's interpretations

Debate: Why did the Russian Revolution occur?

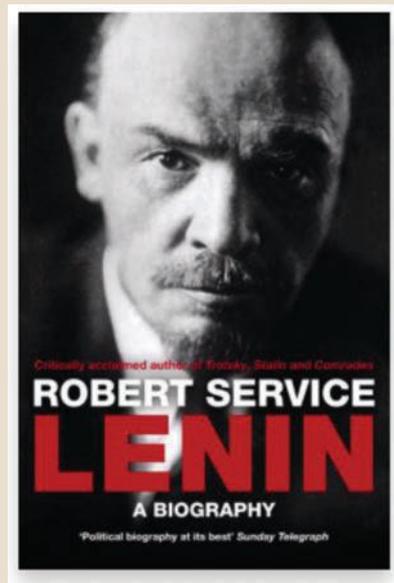
Robert Service (1947–present)

Nationality: English writer and academic at Oxford University

Helpful books: *The Russian Revolution 1900–1927* (1999); *Lenin: A Biography* (2000)



▲ Source 11.6 Robert Service



▲ Source 11.7 *Lenin: A Biography* (2000)

Point of view

Service argues that the revolutions occurred because of the problems of successive governments and not because of the popularity of the revolutionary ideas and leaders.

Reasons (evidence)

The primary cause of the breakdown of Russian tsarism was the regime's inability to adapt and political instability. Russians were then betrayed by Provisional Government bloodlust at the war front and food shortages at home. His critical argument is that Lenin's influence has been overstated.

Quotes

If Lenin had never existed, a socialist government would probably have ruled Russia by the end of [1917].

The Russian masses were hijacked into acceptance of the coup of October by a tiny intellectual elite of megalomaniacs.

What's your point of view?

What's your point of view about what caused the February and October revolutions in 1917?

Area of Study 2

Consequences of revolution: Challenges and responses, changes and continuity, significant individuals and experiences of groups in Russia, October 1917 to 1927

The Bolsheviks did not inherit a ship of state, they took over a derelict hulk.

– LYNCH, 2000

Overview

After 20 years of writing and agitating for revolution, Lenin finally had the opportunity to implement his perfect communist society. But this new society was not created easily. Why? First, there was conflict over the direction and shape of a communist society. Second, Lenin's government had inherited the key problems of whether to withdraw from World War One and how to restore economic stability. Third, there was still strong opposition to Lenin and his minority Bolshevik Party.

As a result, the future of the revolution became endangered. The Bolsheviks were fighting for their political survival. Despite gaining the support of the Second Congress of Soviets, the Bolsheviks received less than one-quarter of the vote in the newly elected Constituent Assembly and promptly dismissed it at gunpoint. There was also continued opposition from various political parties and the traditional conservative groups, which resulted in the destructive Civil War from 1918 to 1920. These key conflicts frustrated Lenin's initial dreams of transforming the old regime into a classless utopia. Lenin's government needed to become more authoritarian and radical in order to stay in control of a rapidly dividing country. He introduced terror through the **Cheka** and **Red Army** during the Civil War, initiated an economic breathing space with the New Economic Policy, and crushed the internal opposition of the Kronstadt Revolt. His responses to these crises were decisive.

The period up to 1927 has been divided into four chapters (see Chapters 12 to 15) analysing how Lenin's regime attempted to transform the 'derelict hulk' he had inherited. These chapters examine events from the Bolshevik takeover of power in October 1917 to mid-1921, when all internal and external enemies were defeated, and the revolution was finally stabilised. Chapter 16 analyses Lenin's legacy and Chapter 17 examines the key crises and responses. The underlying essential question is to what extent were Lenin and his new government able to implement the communist utopia that they had dreamed of, written about and spoken of for decades?

Cheka a Russian acronym meaning the 'All Russian Extraordinary Commission to Fight Counter-Revolution, Sabotage and Speculation'

Red Army the army of the Soviet Union



▲ Source 12A Lenin giving a speech at Sverdlov Square, 5 May 1920

Timeline of key events, October 1917 to 1927

1917

- ▶ **November:** Land Decree: Lenin fulfilled his promise of land by authorising the redistribution of large landholdings among the peasants, albeit by authorising an illegal process that had already begun.
- ▶ **November:** Voting for the Constituent Assembly: Lenin allowed the elections to continue. Not surprisingly, the Socialist Revolutionaries received the highest percentage of the votes, given their mass support from the peasantry.
- ▶ **December:** Formation of the Cheka: Despite its small beginnings, this group of secret police became a prominent force behind the new government. It was given extensive powers to execute enemies of the government.

1918

- ▶ **18 January:** Dismissal of the Constituent Assembly: This demonstrated Lenin's unwillingness to form a broad-based coalition government of many revolutionary parties. It also revealed his justification of force as an acceptable political weapon. The ends always justified the means for the new government.
- ▶ **March:** Treaty of Brest-Litovsk: Lenin's 1917 promise of peace was fulfilled. The new government's determination to withdraw Russia from World War One was demonstrated by the high conditions demanded by the Germans in the treaty.
- ▶ **July:** Murder of the royal family: Eliminating Nicholas and his family was perceived as preventing a royal return to the throne. But it further illustrated merciless Bolshevik violence.

- ▶ **28 August:** Attempted assassination of Lenin: Fanny Kaplan's close but failed assassination of Lenin directly led to the new government's implementation of Red Terror against its opponents.

1918–20

- ▶ **Civil War – Red, White and Green armies:** Many separate groups and leaders fought against the Bolshevik government. Their reasons and desired outcomes were different, but their disillusionment with the government was shared. All armies were defeated due to the Bolsheviks' greater military and psychological strength.
- ▶ **Foreign intervention:** Frustrated at Russia's withdrawal from World War One, former Allied nations entered Russia to provide support for the White armies. Defeating the new communist government may have returned Russia to the world war.
- ▶ **Policy of War Communism:** Implemented in order to help win the Civil War, these policies devastated rural Russia. Grain requisitioning discouraged peasants from producing a surplus, resulting in severe famine, killing nearly 10 million people.

1921

- ▶ **March:** Tenth Party Congress: After three years of military, economic and social turmoil, Lenin called for unity.
- ▶ **March:** Defeat of the Kronstadt Revolt: The sailors' execution for their criticism of the establishment of a one-party state demonstrated Lenin's unwillingness to tolerate any internal opposition.

- ▶ **March:** Introduction of the New Economic Policy: Lenin's pragmatism was demonstrated by his willingness to adopt some aspects of capitalism in order to stimulate the devastated economy. It was an ideological departure from pure communism.
- ▶ **March:** Treaty of Riga: This peace treaty ended the Polish Soviet War and established new national borders.

1922

- ▶ Formation of the USSR: This was an initiative taken in a time of peace that established massive government control of land, people and resources.

1922–23

- ▶ Lenin suffers strokes: Lenin's illness left him paralysed and forced his withdrawal from public life in Moscow.

1923

- ▶ **October:** Scissors crisis: Trotsky identified significant problems between the increasing prices for industrial goods and lowering prices for agricultural goods.

1924

- ▶ **January:** Death of Lenin: The outpouring of grief at Lenin's death signalled the grief of the nation and the ending of his vision of the creation of a communist utopia.

1927

- ▶ End of New Economic Policy: The NEP was ideologically unpopular and economically unsuccessful. It was always believed to be a temporary policy and was abandoned when Stalin came to power in 1928.



12

CONSOLIDATING POWER: THE FIRST SIX MONTHS

You are bankrupt. You have played out your role. Go where you belong: to the dustbin of history!

– TROTSKY TO THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTIONARIES AND MENSHEVIKS,
27 OCTOBER 1917



Overview

Lenin's and Trotsky's major efforts had been devoted to actually establishing power rather than to formulating a clear direction once in power. There was no honeymoon period, as the crises facing the new government within the first six months were urgent. Bolshevik hold on power was fragile. The October takeover needed the support of the Second Congress of Soviets and Constituent Assembly in order to gain legitimacy. It also needed to address the immediate crises of the war: unequal land distribution and chronic food shortages. These tasks were complicated by ideological battles within the Bolshevik Party. This chapter analyses the ways in which Lenin and the Bolsheviks confronted the immense task of transforming Russia into a socialist society worthy of their original ideals.

Key issues

After completing this chapter, you should be able to answer these questions.

- How did the Bolsheviks establish their one-party dictatorship?
- Who was Felix Dzerzhinsky?
- How successfully did Lenin fulfil his promise of 'Peace, Bread, Land!'?
- What New Decrees were issued to create a socialist society?
- What initiatives were made in education and women's rights?
- How did cultural expression and artistic experimentation change under the Bolsheviks?

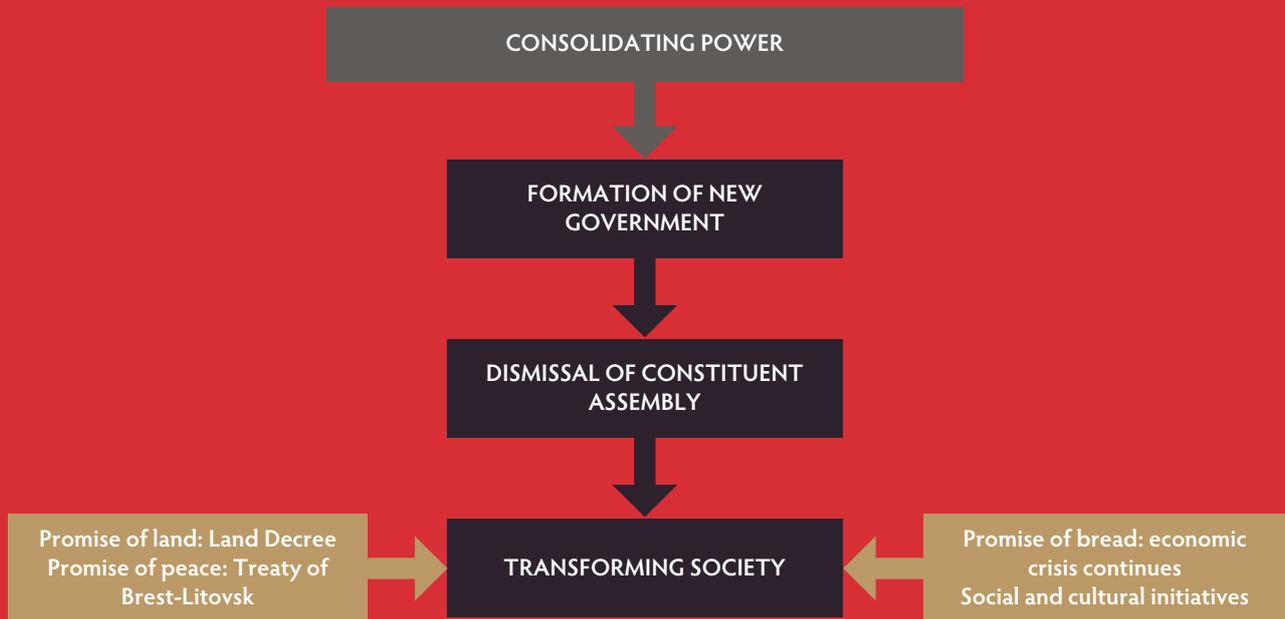
Digital resources for this chapter

In the *Interactive Textbook*:

-  Video and audio sources and questions
-  Digital activities

◀ Source 12.0 Propaganda poster by Dmitry Moor from 1918

Flow of chapter



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Chapter timeline

What are the key events of the Russian Revolution covered in this chapter?

NOVEMBER 1917

Land Decree



JANUARY 1918

Constituent Assembly dismissed



DECEMBER 1917

*Social reforms
Cheka formed*



MARCH 1918

Treaty of Brest-Litovsk

12.1 How did the Bolsheviks establish their one-party dictatorship?

Lenin and Trotsky's takeover left them in control of Petrograd. There was no opportunity for a slow and peaceful political transition. The membership of the Bolshevik Party was only 300 000 and it seemed unlikely that they would be able to expand their power. After the announcement of the new Soviet government on 26 October 1917, Lenin's first move was to extend his control of Russia, beginning in Moscow. Conflict erupted immediately after news of the events in Petrograd reached the Moscow Soviet. Posters and newspapers were published refuting Bolshevik authority and criticising their actions. The most crucial action occurred when Kerensky and his loyal Cossacks returned to fight riding a white horse with church bells ringing. When his ultimatum that the Bolshevik forces surrender was rejected, his Cossacks fired on and killed several of them. Kerensky lost all support because he was considered just like the old tsar.

Gaining control over Moscow proved a hard struggle. After a week of bitter street-fighting, with artillery freely used, and an estimated 700 casualties, the capital was secured by the Bolsheviks. Lenin confidently claimed on Thursday 2 November that there is 'not a shadow of hesitation in the masses of Petrograd, Moscow and the rest of Russia' towards Bolshevik rule. Despite Lenin's bravado, their hold on power was very weak.



▲ Source 12.1 *The Taking of the Moscow Kremlin in 1917*, by Konstantin Ivanovich Maximou, 1938

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Kerensky was never captured by the Bolsheviks. He returned secretly to Petrograd in January 1918 posing as a Swedish doctor. British Ambassador Lockhart supplied a British visa for Kerensky's false passport, allowing him to escape Russia with some Serbian troops. He then organised anti-Bolshevik resistance movements in Paris, Berlin and London.



AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

In March 1918, Lenin moved the location of the Soviet government from Petrograd to Moscow. The government met in the Moscow Kremlin and Lenin had his private study and lived on the third floor!

12.2 Action 1 – role of Sovnarkom

Commissars while the new Bolshevik government was officially called the Government of People's Commissars, the individual ministerial roles were renamed Commissar

Sovnarkom the powerful all-Bolshevik cabinet of ministers in the new government in 1917

The Bolsheviks described themselves as leaders of a nationwide movement of workers, soldiers and peasants. Now they could begin dismantling the old regime. They announced to the Congress of Soviets that their official title would be 'Government of People's **Commissars**'. They replaced the bourgeois title of 'Ministers' with the more proletarian 'People's Commissars', and the 'Cabinet' was renamed **Sovnarkom**. The Sovnarkom was an incredibly powerful group consisting of 15 Bolshevik leaders, each of whom was in control of specific governmental departments, with Lenin as Chairman. Trotsky, for instance, became Commissar for Foreign Affairs. Theoretically, they were expected to gain authorisation from the Congress of Soviets, but in practice they acted quite independently.

▼ **Source 12.2** Sovnarkom sitting at the Smolny Institute on 5 January 1918. In the middle of the photo are Vladimir Lenin and Alexandra Kollontai. Behind them is Joseph Stalin.



AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Provisional Government officials were so hostile to the Bolsheviks that they went on strike and refused to hand over keys to government offices and safes, so the new Sovnarkom members had to temporarily work from home! The employees of the State Bank also refused to pay out money to the new Bolshevik government.

More importantly, although the Sovnarkom was intended to represent the soviets, it quite openly became purely Bolshevik, as Lenin believed only Bolsheviks were capable of leading Russia towards a better future. Immediately after the October takeover, he unequivocally argued that 'there must be no government in Russia other than the Soviet Government'. This push for exclusive leadership angered the other revolutionary parties, which had anticipated the establishment of a socialist coalition.

Lenin established three executive bodies within the new government:

- Politburo – policy-making arm of the Communist Party
- Orgburo – organising arm of the Communist Party
- Secretariat – appointed people to implement decisions of the Communist Party.

12.3 Action 2 – impact of the Cheka

Perhaps the greatest weapon introduced by the Bolsheviks to establish political control was the formation of a security police. Established in December 1917, the 15-man team was initially a temporary administrative body designed to carry out investigations. It had no powers of arrest. Yet this changed rapidly. By the end of December, it was granted the power of arrest. In January 1918, it was assigned armed units. In February, it was given the powers of conducting trials and executions. At the end of 1917, the Cheka had 23 men, but this had grown to 10 000 within a mere six months. By 1921 it had grown to 100 000 men. Its primary function was revealed by its name, Cheka, a Russian acronym meaning the ‘All Russian Extraordinary Commission to Fight Counter-Revolution, Sabotage and Speculation’. An order was issued to all soviets in February 1918 demanding the immediate arrest and execution of those who were agents of enemy spies, counter-revolutionary agitators or organisers of revolts against the government, or those profiting from selling weapons to counter-revolutionaries.

12.4 SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL



▲ Source 12.3 Founder and head of the Cheka, Felix Dzerzhinsky

speech-making. Our Revolution is in serious danger. We tolerate too good-naturedly what is transpiring around us. The forces of our enemies are organizing ... Do not think that I am on the look-out for forms of revolutionary justice. We have no need

Felix Dzerzhinsky (1877–1926)

Background: **Dzerzhinsky** was born in Poland to parents of noble descent with their own estate. Felix's father was a maths and physics teacher, but he was raised by his well-connected aristocratic mother after his father died when Felix was only 5 years old. Felix joined the Social Democratic Party and helped organise factory workers into trade unions. He was arrested in 1897 for Marxist revolutionary activity but escaped from Siberia two years later. On his sixth arrest, he was exiled to Siberia for nine years until the Provisional Government released all political prisoners in 1917.

Leadership: Appointed in December 1917 as a member of the Bolshevik Sovnarkom in two roles: first, as Commissar for Internal Affairs and, second, as head of Lenin's feared all-powerful political police, Cheka, whose role was to eliminate the forces of counter-revolution. In his very first speech as head of the Cheka, Dzerzhinsky declared 'This is no time for

Dzerzhinsky Felix Dzerzhinsky was the leader of the powerful secret police organisation called the Cheka

continued ...



... continued

for justice now. Now we have need of a battle to the death! I propose, I demand the initiation of the Revolutionary sword which will put an end to all counter-revolutionists. We must act not tomorrow, but today, at once!' He was the architect of the Red Terror from 1918. Dzerzhinsky led the Cheka and then its replacement, the Government Political Administration (OGPU).

Nickname: 'Iron Felix' because he was an incorruptible, ruthless and fanatical communist.

Influence: Dzerzhinski was a highly respected and feared leader because of his decisiveness, speeches and detailed organisation. His deep-set eyes blazed unblinkingly with fanatical fervor. Historian Richard Deacon wrote in his *A History of the Russian Secret Service* (1972) that Dzerzhinsky 'was ruthless, cold, clear-headed, gifted with organisational talents and insisted from the start that he must have full powers and not be subject to any supervision. Such was the regard Lenin had for the man that he was given these powers without reservation'.

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Dzerzhinsky's early life was full of contradictions. At his baptism, his parents ironically named him Felix Szczasny which meant 'happy'. Yet as the sixth of eight children as a 14 year old, Felix killed his 12-year-old sister Wanda with a hunting rifle! He later gave up on school because he was carried away by reading romance novels. As a child he wanted to become a Catholic priest, but at age 18, only two months before graduating high school, was expelled and jailed for aggressive anti-government actions!

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Dzerzhinsky died on 20 July 1926. He gave a two-hour speech to the Bolshevik Central Committee and then immediately died of a heart attack at the meeting!

12.5 Action 3 – influence of propaganda

A revolution attempts to transform every aspect of society. It is not minor reforms but a significant overhaul of society. Lenin's faced two immediate difficulties. First, in October 1917 the Bolshevik Party membership was only 350 000 but the party had to sell its new ideology to the country's massive population of 140 million. Second, Lenin had to educate the population about what the concepts of 'communism', 'socialism', 'proletariat' and 'bourgeoisie' actually meant, and then convince them of their value.

Lenin's solution was immediate. One of Lenin's first decisions was to appoint Anatoly Lunacharsky as the first Propaganda Minister. Lunacharsky was responsible for removing any images or monuments of the Tsar. He was also required to promote Bolshevism to the Russian people through erecting new monuments, street decorations, poster art, leaflets, films and public celebrations. Given the semi-literate population of Russia, visual messages were very effective. While the use of visual aids was not a new concept in Russia, the intensity of publication and prioritisation of this medium was. Propaganda would serve as a constant education for the pupils of Lenin's gigantic new revolutionary school.

Propaganda is a modern Latin word meaning 'to spread'. Propaganda is a form of communication aimed at spreading a specific message, often pushing the government's point of view. The aim is to present only one point of view or perspective, creating an emotional response. Effective propaganda results in the viewer believing that the message is true and that they should act on it.



▲ Source 12.4 Anatoly Lunacharsky, the first Bolshevik Propaganda Minister

Common propaganda symbols

It was in this context that the powerful medium of soviet propaganda posters was launched. Poster art became the centrepiece of spreading Lenin's propaganda message as they were able to convey deeper political and economic issues effectively, quickly and cheaply. Posters appeared everywhere and became a distinctively unique feature of Russian towns and villages, designed by poster artists such as Viktor Deni and Alexander Apsit. Common symbols became the new language of the victorious Bolsheviks that everyone was required to learn.



Red – used from the earliest days of Bolshevik rule. Red had been used as the colour of revolution since 1872. It symbolised the blood of martyrs and the fire of faith.



Lenin – his image was often used and drawn oversized to symbolise his power and dominance.



Hero – a soldier/peasant/worker was often used as the central image to convey their centrality to communism. Who defeated the Tsar? The ordinary person. Who will benefit from communism? You will. Images often conveyed a sense of struggle to show that the proletariat had achieved well-earned victories.



Chains – represented the struggle of the hero and the victory over oppression.



Hammer and sickle – represented the worker (a blacksmith's hammer) and the peasant (a sickle used to harvest crops).



Crowds – crowds of people were often included to show that the people were unified behind Lenin, or adored him, or were better off now that the Bolshevik government was in power.



Sun – the contrast between the dark past and the bright future. The light of the sun represented the hope of a dawning classless utopia.



Capitalists – drawn to look excessively wealthy and greedy, wearing formal evening suits, with evil or animalistic faces and having a fat stomach.

	<p>Church – the theme of destroying the old often included images of the Church with evil priests.</p>
	<p>Red Star, with five points – this had been the symbol of the Red Army from 1918 but became common in posters from 1924.</p>
	<p>St George defeating the dragon – the revolutionary hero now defeats the bourgeois monster.</p>
	<p>Blacksmith – used to represent the proletariat as there was a blacksmith in every town, whether urban or rural.</p>

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AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

A public competition was held in mid-1918 to decide a national symbol of coins, flags, stamps and the coat of arms for the new communist society. The winner being the image of a hammer and sickle to represent the workers and peasants.



AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Postage stamps became an ideal form of mini-propaganda because they could be circulated throughout Russia and the world. But the new government was initially too poor to create new stamps so they were forced to use the already printed tsarist ones but with revolutionary slogans written on top. Three new stamp designs were created – a peasant, a blacksmith and a soldier.



▲ Source 12.5 The three stamp designs: soldier (*Left*), peasant (*Centre*) and worker (*Right*)

12.6 Action 4 – dissolution of the Constituent Assembly

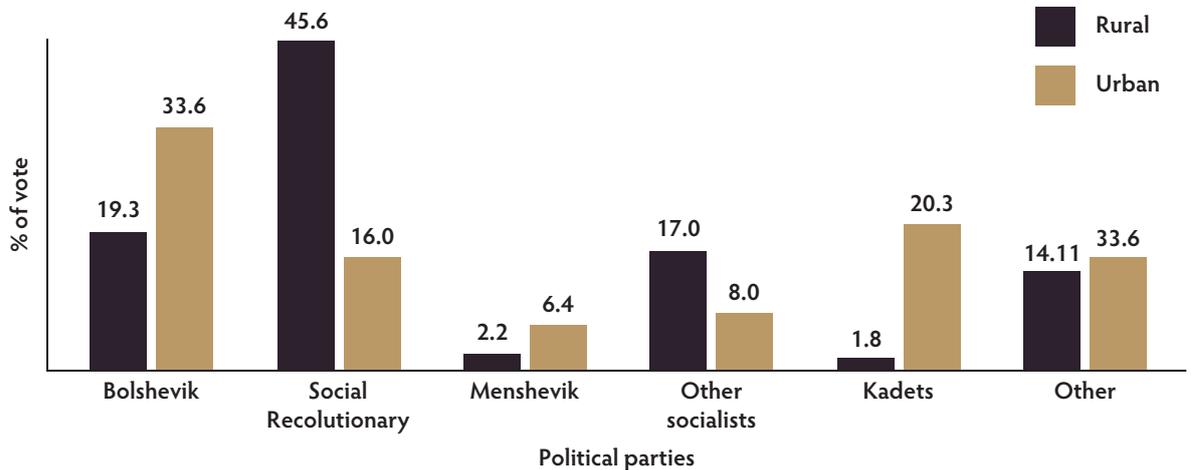
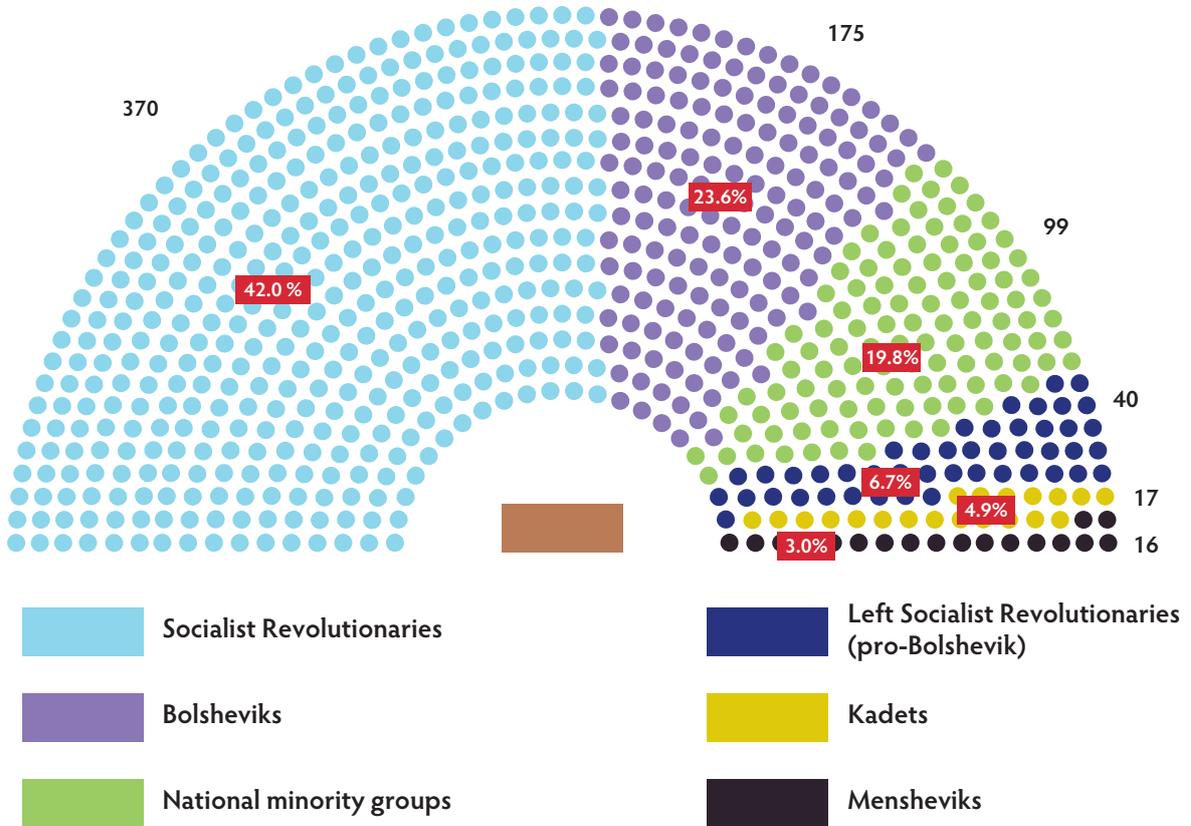


The Provisional Government had initiated elections for Russia's first democratically elected parliament, called the Constituent Assembly. The intelligentsia had been arguing for nearly 100 years that this could be the only authentic answer to Russia's problems. Before the October Revolution, even Lenin repeatedly declared the importance of this body to the future of Russia.

The Bolsheviks allowed the elections to proceed in November 1917 for fear of otherwise appearing undemocratic. The election was a crucial indicator of whether Bolshevik claims of popular support were justified. Were the people really convinced that the Bolsheviks represented the nation? More than 47 million of the 80 million people who were eligible chose to vote and thus created the most representative political body in Russian history.

◀ Source 12.6 'The Socialist Revolutionary Party – Only in battle will you obtain your rights!', the Socialist Revolutionary Party's election poster, directed at workers and peasants

Election results



▲ Source 12.7 Constituent Assembly election results, November 1917, by proportion of vote. Cited in Kowalski, *The Russian Revolution*, p. 103

The results were not surprising. The majority of voters were peasants from rural provinces where the Socialist Revolutionary policy to end private ownership was popular. Conversely, the Bolsheviks were primarily an industrial workers' party, and their popularity was therefore limited to urban areas. Instead of providing a mandate to rule, this vote became a thorny reminder that the Bolsheviks were not sweeping their way through Russia with the same effectiveness they had achieved in Petrograd only a month earlier.

The Constituent Assembly met at the Tauride Palace in Petrograd on 18 January 1918. The Assembly approved some of the Bolshevik government's early decrees on peace, land and the formation of independent national entities. Tseretelli, a leading Menshevik and a moderate socialist, then condemned the way in which the Bolsheviks had



assumed power. In reply, the Bolsheviks, through a man called Sverdloff, read a declaration which was defeated by 273 votes to 140. The Bolshevik troops then forced the Assembly to conclude. One bitter supporter of the Assembly summarised the events of the day with the words: 'On our side were legality, great ideals and faith in the triumph of democracy. On their side were activity, machine-guns, weapons'. Anti-Bolshevik Western historian Richard Pipes stated even more bluntly: 'The machine gun became for them the principal instrument of political persuasion'.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 12.1: LENIN'S PERSPECTIVE



Lenin justified the Bolshevik action this way:

As long as behind the slogan 'All power to the Constituent Assembly' is concealed the slogan 'Down with the Soviets', civil war is inevitable. For nothing in the world will induce us to surrender the Soviet power. And when the Constituent Assembly revealed its readiness to postpone all the painfully urgent problems and tasks that were placed before it by the soviets, we told the Constituent Assembly that they must not postpone for a single moment.

And by the will of the Soviet power, the Constituent Assembly, which has refused to recognise the power of the people, is dissolved. The Soviet Revolutionary Republic will triumph no matter what the cost.

Source 12.8 Cited in Lynch, *Reaction and Revolutions*, p. 105

- 1 Select two brief quotes from this speech that demonstrate Lenin's attitude towards the Constituent Assembly.
- 2 What was Lenin's key argument about the Constituent Assembly in the final paragraph? Was this a fair complaint?

Analysing interpretations of the dismissal of the Constituent Assembly

Kolchak Alexander Kolchak was an admiral who led a White Army against the Bolshevik government during the Civil War

- 1 Historian William Chamberlin identified two reasons for the failure of the Assembly. First, as the Bolshevik government had already determined its land and peace legislation, the Assembly had no genuine topics to debate. It was left to simply authorise the policies of the Bolsheviks. Second, the Assembly collapsed due to the absence of a Russian parliamentary tradition. Chamberlin (*The Russian Revolution 1917–1921*, p. 371) argues that, had the Bolsheviks failed to win the Civil War, Russia would not have reinstated a Constituent Assembly under Chernov, but rather would have welcomed a military dictator like General **Kolchak** or Denikin because this was more familiar.
- 2 Lenin's dismissal of the Constituent Assembly was a prime example of the fragility of the Bolsheviks' hold on power. From Lenin's perspective, Russia was still at war with Germany, there was growing opposition to the new government from allied countries and the majority of the nation supported non-Bolshevik parties. He was also struggling to unify the various factions within the Bolshevik Party. Hence, Lenin's dissolution of the Assembly left his political opponents without any legitimate power base from which to undermine the new government.
- 3 The dismissal of the Assembly demonstrated how deeply Lenin believed that the Bolsheviks represented the workers and peasants. In this mindset, the Constituent Assembly was simply an unnecessary sideshow.
- 4 Figs (*A People's Tragedy*, p. 505) writes: 'It was as if the Bolsheviks were psychologically unable to make the transition from an underground fighting organisation to a responsible party of national government. They couldn't bring themselves to exchange their leather jackets for ministerial suits.'

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 12.2: CREATIVE TASK



Lenin's dismissal of the Constituent Assembly made enemies of the other revolutionary parties instead of harnessing a coalition of socialist forces. Write a speech by Lenin to the Bolshevik Central Committee arguing why it was necessary for him to dismiss the Assembly.

12.7 How successfully did Lenin fulfil his promise of 'Peace, Bread, Land!'

Lenin's memorable speech at Finland Station made popular the catch cry of 'Peace, Bread, Land!' These three key grievances became the platform for his popularity and a blueprint for action. How quickly and effectively did he fulfil his promises once in power?

The promise of land

The land question was one of the easiest to solve on an administrative level. Throughout 1917, the peasants had been claiming that the land they worked on should be theirs and many villages had already formed revolutionary detachments to seize land from landlords. Sophia Kossak and husband Stefan were landowners whose land in Ukraine was seized by peasants in January 1918. In her memoirs, called *The Blaze* (1927), she described village meetings where the peasant women organised and motivated crowds to forcefully take over land. The Bolsheviks simply legitimised events like this by issuing a decree from the Second All Russian Congress of Soviets. Rather than being an original statement, this was adapted from the agrarian policy of the Socialist Revolutionaries, who were traditionally considered the voice of the peasants. The Land Decree was significant because it legitimised the new government in the eyes of the peasants.

The Decree on Land, 8 November 1917

- 1 Private ownership of land shall be abolished for ever ... All land ... shall become the property of the whole people, and pass into the use of those who cultivate it.
- 2 The right to use the land shall be accorded to all citizens of the Russian State (without distinction of sex) desiring to cultivate it by their own labour, with the help of their families, or in partnership, but only as long as they are able to cultivate it ... Peasants who, owing to old age or ill health, are permanently disabled and unable to cultivate the land personally, shall lose their rights to the use of it, but, in return, shall receive a pension from the State.
- 3 Land tenure shall be on an equality basis ... there shall be absolutely no restriction on the forms of land tenure – household, farm, communal or co-operative, as shall be decided in each individual village and settlement.

Source 12.9 Akhapkin (Ed.), *First Decrees of Soviet Power*



▲ Source 12.10 The title page of the 'Land Decree'

The promise of bread

War Communism

a series of economic policies instituted between 1918 and 1920 to attempt to win the Civil War

Solving the food crisis proved far more difficult. Given that the Provisional Government had continued fighting in the war, combined with a poor harvest in 1917, the economic crisis was terrible by the time Lenin took power. This was the main crisis that Lenin failed to solve. Chapter 14 examines the worsening economic situation between 1918 and 1920 due to the impact of the Civil War and policies of **War Communism**.

The promise of peace: The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, March 1918

World War One was a crucial factor in the downfall of both the Tsar and the Provisional Government. Hence, it became the most urgent barrier standing in the way of the Bolsheviks and a secure future. Lenin 'declared war on war', calling for immediate peace negotiations. No winners. No losers. Just peace.

Trotsky was Commissar for Foreign Affairs and the logical candidate for chief negotiator for the Russian delegation. After early talks resulted in a ceasefire agreement on 15 December 1917, Trotsky voiced a different policy to Lenin. He was able to persuade the Central Committee to adopt his strategy of stalling the peace process so that communist agitators could attempt to lead tired German soldiers towards mutiny and a revolution in Berlin.



◀ Source 12.11
Territorial losses
in the Treaty of
Brest-Litovsk

KEY
STATISTIC

The Germans had proposed a peace treaty that placed severe penalties on Russia. Their demands included:

- one-third of European Russia from the Black Sea to the Baltic Sea (this area totalled 1 million square kilometres and contained 45 million people)
- control over the fertile Ukraine region, Russia's major grain source
- three billion roubles in gold as compensation for damage to German property and industry
- the Russian army to be demolished and Russian warships to be disarmed
- prisoners of war to be exchanged without negotiation.

Heated arguments took place within the Central Committee as many leaders disagreed with the humiliating and costly demands of the treaty. Eventually, Lenin issued an ultimatum: agree to the treaty or accept his resignation. Despite this show of force, the decision to accept the treaty only succeeded by one vote, with Lenin receiving support from men such as Trotsky, Stalin and Zinoviev.

However, both the German army and the peace delegation grew tired of Trotsky's stalling and ended the armistice in February 1918 by launching an offensive against Petrograd. Lenin had to move the Bolshevik government to Moscow as bombs fell on the city. Despite the humiliating conditions, the peace treaty was quickly signed in a small Polish town between Russia and Germany called Brest-Litovsk on 3 March 1918. Over the next six months, Germans transported 35 000 wagon loads of corn and other foodstuffs and raw materials out of Ukraine to support their troops still fighting the war. The Bolsheviks were saved from further payments as the Allied victory in World War One forced Germany to sign the equally humiliating Treaty of Versailles in 1919, which voided the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.



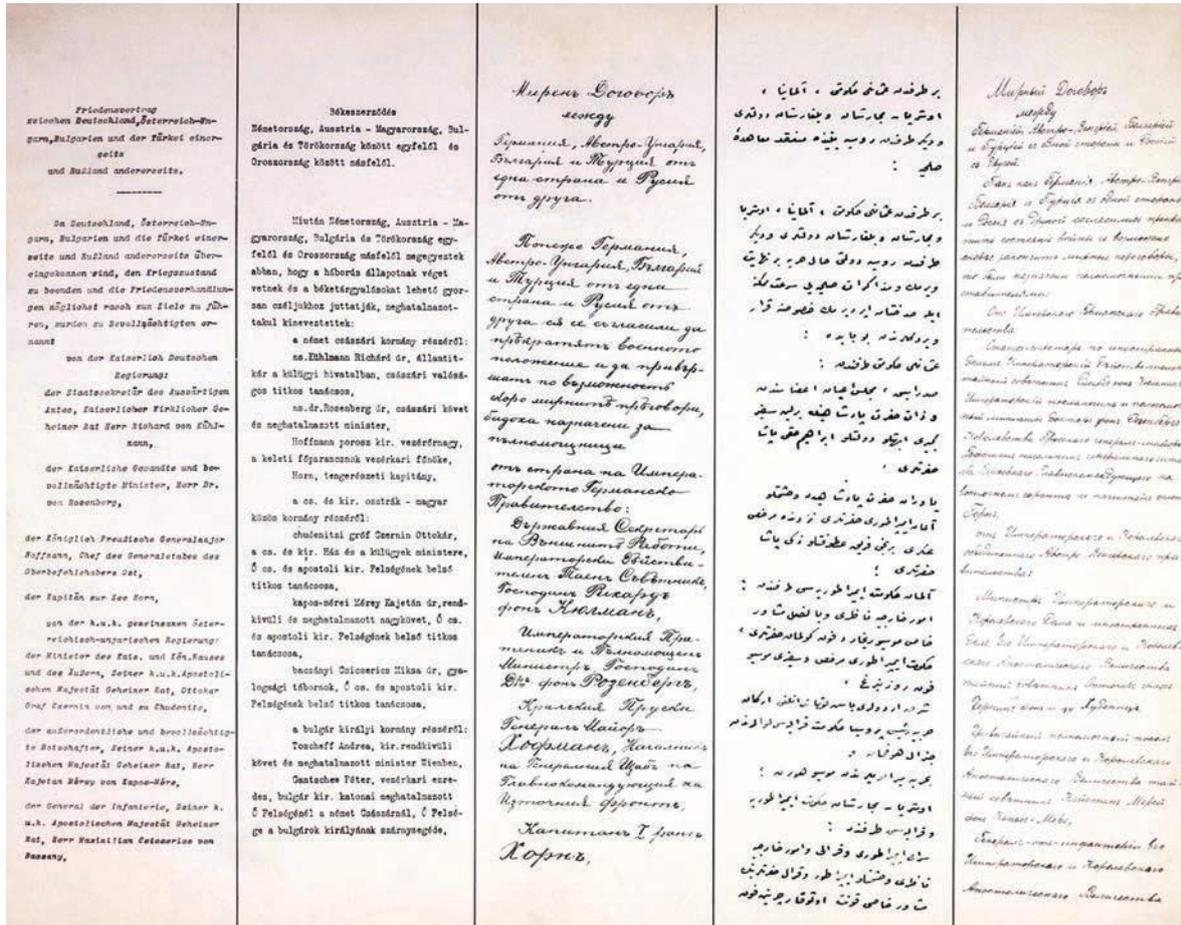
▲ Source 12.12 Trotsky and members of the Russian peace delegation are welcomed by German officers to peace negotiations at Brest-Litovsk.

12.8 How did Lenin and Trotsky navigate the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk?

The signing of the peace treaty reveals four intriguing elements about the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky.

- 1 Lenin and Trotsky considered themselves to be victors. Trotsky deliberately embarrassed and annoyed Germany's chief negotiator, Field-Marshal Hindenburg, even at Brest-Litovsk before officially surrendering.
- 2 Lenin and Trotsky believed themselves to be international revolutionaries. Russia was simply the model for the eventual proletarian conquest of the world, which helps explain their willingness to agree to a treaty that had such devastating implications.
- 3 Lenin and Trotsky were masters of persuasion. The brilliant minds and arguments of these men are revealed through their ability to overcome significant opposition to the treaty from within their own party. Lenin had fought and won similar verbal battles over the October Revolution and the dismissal of the Constituent Assembly.
- 4 Lenin's motivations are difficult to assess. After German foreign policy documents were seized, it was revealed that Germany had been providing substantial financial support to Lenin since 1914 and this continued after October 1917. The aim was for Lenin to withdraw Russia from the war, allowing Germany to focus all its physical resources on the Western Front. Did Lenin push for peace to fulfil his promise to the Russian people or to his German employers?

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▲ Source 12.13 The Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty

12.9 What New Decrees were issued to create a socialist society?

The Bolsheviks actively introduced sweeping innovations that had a dramatic impact on social and cultural life in Russia. The Bolshevik Government introduced over 100 New Decrees. For example, traditional roles of women were redefined making Lenin boldly declare that ‘No state, no democratically enacted legislation, has done half as much for women as the soviet government in the first few months of its existence’. A fascinating book produced by Bolshevik leaders Bukharin and Preobrazhensky, called *The ABC of Communism*, was published in early 1918, which explained the communist perspective on all aspects of life. Cultural change was a new weapon of class struggle.

8 November 1917 – Decree on Land

- land belonging to the tsar, Church or nobles was handed over to the peasants

12 November 1917 – Workers Decrees

- working day limited to 8 hours with a 48-hour week
- rules made about overtime and holidays
- workers to be insured against illness and accidents
- factories put under control of workers committees instead of wealthy bosses

1 December 1917 – Decree on Press

- all non-Bolshevik newspapers banned

6 December 1917 – Decree on Private Ownership

- right to own large houses was abolished. Such houses now became the property of the local soviet so that several families, rather than one, could occupy the space.

18 December 1917 – Decree on Marriage

- only civil marriage, not church marriage, was recognised by the state
- marriage could take place without a priest

20 December 1917 – formation of Cheka

- secret police (Cheka) established under Felix Dzerzhinsky to eliminate political opposition, spies and counter-revolutionaries

27 December 1917 – Decree on Nationalisation of Banks

- All banks were nationalised and brought under the control of the State Bank.
- All gold held in private banks now belonged to the state.

31 December 1917 – Decree on Divorce

- divorce was made easier and could be obtained by either partner.
- full judicial equality was granted to men and women.

31 January 1918 – Decree on Introduction of Western European calendar

- Russia’s Julian calendar, which was 13 days behind the Western Gregorian calendar, was abolished on 31 January 1918. The new day became 14 February.
- The Russian alphabet was pruned of ‘unnecessary’ letters and symbols.

19 January 1918 – Decree on Dissolution of Constituent Assembly

- Democratically elected Constituent Assembly was permanently dissolved.



9 February 1918 – Decree on Religion

- Complete separation of Church from state and school from Church was established.
- Every citizen was free to profess any or no religion.
- Teaching of religion was banned in both public and private schools.
- Churches were denied the right to own property.
- A new socialist ritual of Octobrina was introduced to replace traditional baptism.

3 March 1918 – Decree on Peace

- Treaty of Brest-Litovsk finally signed after being initially passed by the Second Congress of Soviets in October 1917.

FOCUS QUESTIONS 12.1

- 1 Which of these New Decrees do you consider to be the most radical?
- 2 Which New Decree:
 - a attacked the wealthy classes?
 - b benefited women?
 - c benefited workers?
 - d benefited peasants?
 - e increased Bolshevik control?
- 3 Suggest why the Bolsheviks disliked religion.

12.10 What initiatives were made in education and women's rights?

Bolsheviks saw the family as an instrument of social engineering. Tsarist law required that women were subordinate in family and society, a wife to obey her husband, take his name and live wherever he wanted to live. The Bolsheviks implemented a fresh mindset that was more advanced than most Western countries. The Decree on Marriage and Divorce (December 1917) and the Family Code (October 1918) enabled marriage by mutual consent, between any races or religions, without a church ceremony, divorce freely available to either person, with husbands to pay maintenance to divorced wives. Critics of these new laws argued that the negative impacts of the breakdown of traditional family structure (such as increased divorces, homeless children and abortions) outweighed the new freedoms. Education of children also became a priority to modernise Russia. Creches and kindergartens were established so that children could be educated from an early age and mothers could join the workforce. Literacy levels improved dramatically.

Kollontai Alexandra Kollontai; a feminist socialist who was instrumental in improving women's rights; the only female Commissar in the Bolshevik Government Sovnarkom

The Women's Department, or Zhenotdel, was formed a few months before the October Revolution. Led by Bolshevik leaders Alexandra **Kollontai** and Inessa Armand, it aimed to rally women to the support of the new regime. It was backed by Lenin and Trotsky because they believed that activating women was crucial to unite and ignite the new society. Kollontai and Armand held the first All Russian Congress of Women on 19 November 1918. Three hundred women were expected but over 1000 attended. Lenin spoke and called for an end to women's domestic slavery and drudgery, for high standards of sexual morality and for avoidance of prostitution. Lenin said in 1918:

Comrades, in a certain respect this congress of the feminine section of the proletarian army is of particularly great significance ... It has been observed in the experience of all liberation movements that the success of a revolution depends on the extent to which women take part in it. The Soviet Government is doing everything to enable women to carry on their proletarian socialist activity independently.

Source 12.14 Cited in Karen M Offen (Ed.), *Women, the Family, and Freedom: 1880–1950*, pp. 287–9

	1896	1926
Percentage of married women	44%	51%
Percentage of women in the Russian population	43%	51%
Percentage of widows	22%	16%
Number of divorces	85 547 in 1924	122 760

Source 12.15 Figures taken from Elizabeth Waters, 'Family, marriage and relations between the sexes' in Acton (Ed.), *Critical Companion to the Russian Revolution 1914–1921*, London: Arnold (1997), p. 363



◀ **Source 12.16** Alexandra Kollontai was the only female Commissar in the Bolshevik Government Sovnarkom and was instrumental in improving women's rights. See a detailed profile in Chapter 14.



▶ **Source 12.17** Maria Spiridonova was a main leader of the radical left Socialist Revolutionary Party and the most influential female leader after Kollontai.



◀ **Source 12.18** Inessa Armand was the first director of Zhenotdel, the Bolsheviks's Women's Department, and was deeply trusted by Lenin.

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

In order to completely replace the old regime, Lenin urged people to adopt new first names and surnames. His suggestions included Marlen (short for Marxism-Leninism) for boys, and Engelsine (after Engels) and Octobrine (to commemorate the 1917 October Revolution) for girls.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 12.3: SOURCE ANALYSIS



Alexandra Kollontai's speech 'To the Women Workers'

Comrades women workers!

For many centuries woman was oppressed and had no rights. For many centuries she was just an appendage to the man, his shadow. The husband provided for his wife, so long as she obeyed her husband's will, meekly endured her own powerlessness, her own domestic and family slavery.

The October Revolution liberated women. Now the peasant woman has the same rights as the peasant man, the worker woman has the same rights as male worker has. Everywhere the woman can vote and everywhere she can become a member of a Soviet or a commissar or even a People's Commissar ... In communist society, a woman and a man must be equal. Without equality of women and men there is no communism.

Go to work, comrades working women! Liberate yourselves! Build nurseries, maternity houses, help the Soviets set up public canteens, help the Communist Party build a new happy life. Your place is amongst those who are fighting for the emancipation of working people, for equality, for freedom, for the happiness of your children! Your place, working women and peasant women, under the red revolutionary banner of worldly victorious communism!

Source 12.19 From marxists.org, translated by Mikita Tsikhanovich and Andy Blunden

- 1 According to Kollontai, in what ways were women 'liberated' in the new society?
- 2 How does Kollontai encourage working women to be involved in the new society?



◀ Source 12.20 1920 propaganda poster titled 'What the October Revolution has given to the worker and peasant women'. The woman gestures proudly towards a library, kindergarten, workers club and school for adults. Women were free to attend universities, work, divorce, own property, vote and get elected.

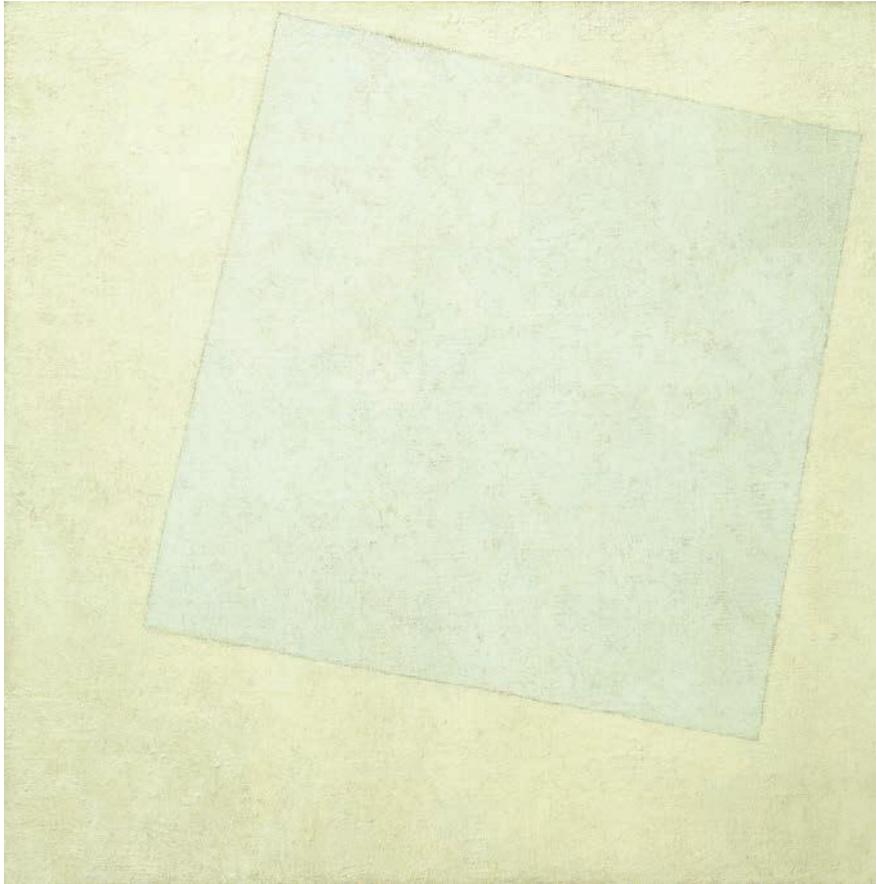
12.11 How did cultural expression and artistic experimentation change under the Bolsheviks?

Soviet Art

Attempts to reinvent Russian society resulted in a profound era of artistic transformation. Experimentation was welcomed. Boundaries were pushed. The movements of Suprematism and Constructivism impacted all creative spheres, from fine art, to architecture to fashion. This meant that often traditional art was abandoned in favour of more democratic and abstract art. Development of the arts, film, literature and music was encouraged, which made Russia one of the world's leading centres of creative expression. Intense competition also emerged between different artistic groups, each striving to win the favour of government authorities. However, in his *Communist Policy Toward Art* (1923), Trotsky argued that 'Art must make its own way and by its own means. The Marxian methods are not the same as the artistic. The party leads the proletariat but not the artistic processes of history'. Soviet Art was born.



◀ Source 12.21 Constructivist artist Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International* (1919–1920) made from industrial materials



◀ Source 12.22 Suprematist artist Kazimir Malevich's *White on White*, 1918. Suprematism employed simple geometric forms as its artistic basis.



◀ Source 12.23 *The Formula of the Proletariat of Petrograd* by Pavel Nikolayevich Filonov

12.12 Why did Lenin argue for State Capitalism?

Marxism proposed that socialist revolutions erupt from the oppression of a traditional capitalist stage. Russian industry was underdeveloped. While Mensheviks had argued that this capitalist stage was a necessary precursor, the Bolsheviks had always argued that it could be bypassed. But due to coming to power earlier than even he expected, and inheriting a country in economic and social turmoil, Lenin conceded that there would need to be a temporary economic transition period called State Capitalism.

Not all business and industries could be nationalised immediately as Marxist theory would have suggested and Lenin would have preferred. Instead, an economic compromise emerged. The government would exercise control over larger industries, trade with foreign countries and weapons factories, and finance through a centralised banking sector. However, workers and peasants were allowed to exercise control over the land and factories that they seized when Sovnarkom passed the Land Decree and Decree on Workers' Control respectively. Historian Tom Ryan describes this economic compromise as 'a quasi-capitalist economy, regulated and held accountable by a socialist government for the benefit of all Soviet citizens.'

State Capitalism was a public acknowledgement that it would take time to convert a capitalist economy to a socialist one. Lenin wrote in a pamphlet called *Can We Go Forward If We Fear To Advance Towards Socialism?* in late October 1917 that 'state monopoly capitalism inevitably and unavoidably implies a step, and more than one step, towards socialism! ... For socialism is merely the next step forward from state-capitalist monopoly. Or, in other words, socialism is merely state-capitalist monopoly which is made to serve the interests of the whole people and has to that extent ceased to be a capitalist monopoly.'

State Capitalism was an early ideological compromise. It not only recognised the power of the revolutionary peasants and worker movements, demonstrated his cunning ability to manipulate crises to sound in his favour, but also that Lenin was pragmatic; willing to make practical decisions over ideological ones when needed. These reflections all provide valuable understandings of Lenin's leadership mindset. While Lenin was a dominant political operator, he made economic decisions quickly, seemingly without a central blueprint.

FOCUS QUESTIONS 12.2

- 1 What was State Capitalism?
- 2 Why did Lenin feel it was necessary to make this economic compromise?

▼ Source 12.24 *Mighty Culture Creates a Mighty Cooperation*, Anonymous, 1918.





THE STORY SO FAR



The Bolsheviks acted quickly after assuming power to set up a Communist state. This comprised five main aspects.

- 1 Peace** – despite the humiliating cost of losing vast amounts of its best industrial and agricultural land, Trotsky signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany as he wanted to expand the revolution throughout the world, not just get the best deal for Russia.
- 2 Economy** – the Bolsheviks gave the land previously owned by the wealthy nobles to the peasants, and factories were handed over to workers' committees. Banks were nationalised.
- 3 New Decrees** – introduced socialist policies that aimed to modernise social and cultural life in Russia, including banning religion; brought in an eight-hour day for workers, as well as unemployment pay and pensions; and passed initiatives in education and women's rights.
- 4 Propaganda** – Lenin created a propaganda department to promote his ideology and new government throughout Russia.
- 5 Dictatorship** – The expectation of a revolutionary socialist coalition government lay in ruins when Lenin establishing Sovnarkom, dismissing the Constituent Assembly, declaring the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', all supported by Dzerzhinsky's police Cheka who eliminated political opposition. A Bolshevik one-party dictatorship was quickly established.

Use the QR code or visit the digital version of the book and watch the video summarising the chapter.



Develop your historical thinking skills

Define key terms

Use information from this chapter to define these key terms.

- Cheka
- Sovnarkom
- State Capitalism
- Treaty of Brest-Litovsk

Establishing historical significance

Use evidence from this chapter to write short paragraph answers.

- 1 How did the Bolsheviks establish their dictatorship?
- 2 Why was Felix Dzerzhinsky an important individual?
- 3 How successfully did Lenin fulfil his promises of 'Peace. Land. Bread'?
- 4 What changes did the Bolsheviks make to social and cultural life?

Using quotes as evidence

Write a sentence using a short phrase from one of the quotes below or contrast the views from a few quotes. You can also use any of the quotes in this chapter. Quotes can be used directly or paraphrased in your own words.

The question of peace is the burning question, the most pressing question of the present time. **Lenin**

We declare war on war! **Lenin**

Our opponents feared the explosive power of their negotiations with the Bolsheviks. **Trotsky on the negotiations with the Germans over the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk**

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was a 'humiliation without precedent or equal in modern history'. **John Wheeler-Bennett, English historian**

It was necessary to make the foe feel that there was everywhere about him a seeing eye and a heavy hand ready to come down on him the moment he undertook anything against the Soviet Government. **Felix Dzerzhinsky**

The illiterate person stands outside of politics. First it is necessary to teach him the alphabet. Without it, there are only rumors, fairy tales, and prejudices, but not politics. **Lenin**

The Russian Revolution launched a vast experiment in social engineering ... [it] went horribly wrong, not so much because of the malice of leaders, most of whom had started with the highest of ideals, but because their ideals were themselves impossible. **Orlando Figes, historian**

All forms of everyday life, morality, philosophy and art must be restructured according to Communist principles. Without this any future development of the Communist Revolution is impossible. **Petrograd Collective of Communist-Futurists**

But the floods of decrees calculated to make life wretched for the men and women who had stood at the pinnacle of the old order did nothing to relieve the misery of the proletarians whose interests the new government now claimed to serve. **W. Bruce Lincoln, historian**



Analysing historical sources as evidence

This propaganda poster was commissioned by the new government to celebrate the first anniversary of the Bolshevik regime in October 1918.



▲ Source 12.25 Apsit's *The Year of Proletarian Dictatorship* (1918). The caption at the top can be translated as 'Proletarians of all countries, unite!'.

- 1 Who do the two main figures represent?
- 2 What do the symbols in the foreground represent?
- 3 What is the meaning of the sun and factories in the background?
- 4 Identify some of the other symbols in this poster. What might they symbolise?
- 5 Summarise the main message of this poster.
- 6 Evaluate to what extent this image is an accurate representation of the Bolsheviks' first year in power. What events support this message? What doesn't?

Analysing historian's interpretations

Debate: How successfully did the Bolsheviks transform Russian society?

Name: Christopher Hill (1912–2003)

Nationality: British

Helpful book: *Lenin and the Russian Revolution* (1947)

Point of view

Lenin was a superb leader who made life better for Russian people by introducing the pure qualities of communism.

Reasons (evidence)

Lenin removed oppression through his genuine focus on improving the daily experience of the proletariat, such as the Land Decree, social reforms, initiatives in education and women's rights, New Decrees and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

Quote

The revolutionary process abolished a regime of despair and created a new world of hope.

What's your point of view?

What's your point of view on the Bolsheviks' transformation of Russian society in their first six months in power? Were they successful?



▲ Source 12.26 Christopher Hill

ТЫ



13 CIVIL WAR

Civil war never has and never can create a government that has the backing of the whole country.

– VIKZHEL, THE ALL-RUSSIAN EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE UNION OF RAILWAY WORKERS, 1917

ЗАПИСАЛСЯ

ДОБРОВОЛЬЦЕМ?

Overview

Despite Lenin and Trotsky's deep beliefs in the inevitability of a worldwide revolution, one never occurred. This turned their immediate focus to saving the revolution in Russia from defeat. Lenin faced two challenges to his authority that the Bolsheviks fought concurrently with the same army, strategies and general location. First, there was the internal threat of a Russian civil war where the Bolshevik forces (called the Reds) were confronted by many separate anti-Bolshevik forces (called the Whites) and the peasants (called the Greens), who fought for independence from both. Second, there was the external threat in 1918 and 1919 where several foreign nations sent in troops in a bid to force Russia to rejoin World War One and re-engage the Germans on the Eastern Front. An entire book could be devoted to the Civil War itself. This chapter will attempt to provide a clear outline of the events and significance of this crucial period.

Key issues

After completing this chapter, you should be able to answer these questions.

- How did the attempted assassination of Lenin impact policy?
- Why were the Whites such an internal threat?
- Why was foreign intervention such an external threat?
- Why did the Bolsheviks win the Civil War?
- Who was Leon Trotsky (Part 2)?
- How was the royal family murdered?
- What was the significance of the Civil War?

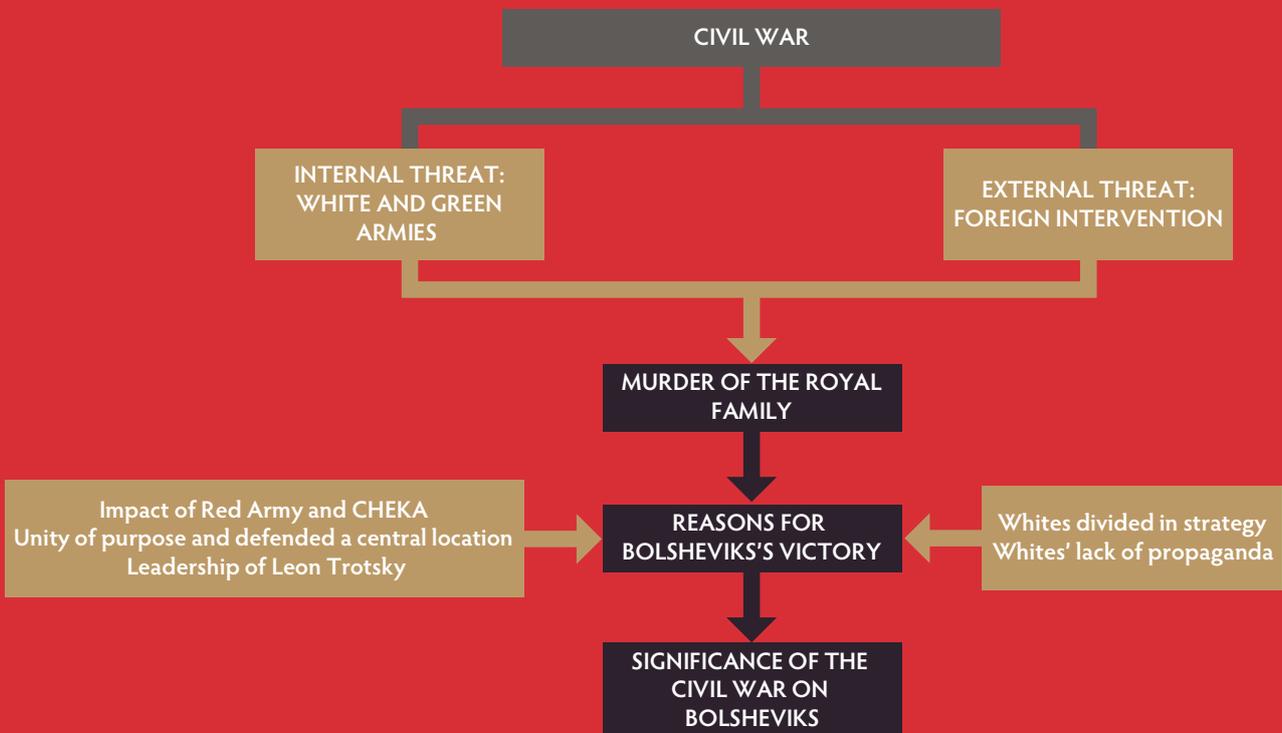
Digital resources for this chapter

In the *Interactive Textbook*:

-  Video and audio sources and questions
-  Digital activities

◀ **Source 13.0** 'Have You Volunteered for the Red Army?' poster by Dmitry Moor

Flow of chapter



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Chapter timeline

What are the key events of the Russian Revolution covered in this chapter?

JULY 1918

Murder of royal family



1918–1920

White armies attack Bolsheviks

1919–1921

Polish–Soviet War and Treaty of Riga



AUGUST 1918

Assassination attempt on Lenin

1918–1920

Foreign troops invade Russia



1920–1921

Green armies fight for independence

13.1 Attempted assassination of Lenin

On 30 August 1918, a crucial event took place that directly changed the policies and approach of the Bolshevik government. Lenin had only been in power for 10 months. Despite the assassination of Michael Uritsky, the Head of the Cheka in Petrograd, that morning by a Socialist Revolutionary student, Lenin continued his afternoon program in Moscow. He was to make two open-air speeches to the ordinary Russians, accompanied only by his chauffeur. After the second, he was approached by a group of women, one of whom held out her arm to push the crowd of workers away, while another, Fanny **Kaplan**, pulled out a revolver and shot at Lenin three times.

Kaplan Fanny Kaplan was a radical anarchist who shot Lenin twice in a failed assassination attempt in August 1918



▲ **Source 13.1** *Attempt on Vladimir Lenin's life, Aug. 30, 1918* by M. G. Sokolov. Fanny Kaplan is leaving the scene in the background.

Two shots hit Lenin: one in the left shoulder blade near to the collar bone, and the other more dangerously in the base of his neck. Bleeding profusely, Lenin demanded to be taken directly to the Kremlin as he feared being ambushed on the way to the hospital. He stubbornly walked up the stairs, refusing to be carried. The major problem was that there were only Bolshevik leaders and their families in the Kremlin and two surgeons only arrived in the early hours of the following morning. Lenin immediately asked, 'Is the end near? If it's near tell me straight so that I don't leave matters pending.' Doctors refused to operate as a bullet was close to his spine and surgery may have resulted in paralysis or death. From this point on, he suffered severe headaches and migraines. All the events of the next two chapters need to be read in this light.

Fanny Kaplan

The assassin Fanny Kaplan was from Ukraine, angry that it had been sacrificed to the Germans in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and that Lenin had closed down the Constituent Assembly. She stated coldly that 'I have long had the intention of killing Lenin. In my eyes he has betrayed the revolution'. Kaplan was an anarchist and had been imprisoned for terrorism under the tsarist regime. Kaplan was executed three days later without either a trial or establishing whether she had worked alone or as part of a conspiracy.



▲ **Source 13.2** Fanny Kaplan



AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Women in the Kremlin suggested sending out to get some lemons to help disinfect the wounds. Lenin refused, fearing that the local grocer might not be politically reliable.

Analysis of the failed assassination

The most significant outcome of the failed assassination was the direct introduction of a policy of Red Terror by the Bolshevik government. The shooting was direct proof to the government that counter-revolution was real, active and dangerous. Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks became the tools of the class enemy. The policy of Red Terror was implemented to defeat enemies of the government and dominated the Bolshevik mentality during the Civil War that followed. On 1 September 1918, a Bolshevik newspaper, *Krasnaya Gazeta*, summarised this new and radical approach.

We will turn our hearts into steel, which we will temper in the fire of suffering and the blood of fighters for freedom. We will make our hearts cruel, hard and immovable, so that no mercy will enter them, and so that they will not quiver at the sight of a sea of enemy blood. We will let loose the floodgates of that sea. Without mercy, without sparing, we will kill our enemies in scores of hundreds. Let them be thousands; let them drown themselves in their own blood. For the blood of Lenin ... let there be floods of the blood of the bourgeois – more blood, as much as possible.

Source 13.3 *Krasnaya Gazeta*, 1 September 1918

FOCUS QUESTIONS 13.1

- 1 Why did the newspaper demand that hearts be cruel and hard?
- 2 What is the tone, or emotion, of this article?
- 3 Write down the phrase that you think best summarises the main point of this article.

13.2 Why did the Civil War begin?

It is indeed difficult to state exactly when the Civil War commenced. Why? Internal dissent began as soon as the Bolsheviks had seized power in October 1917. As discussed in Chapter 10, the Bolsheviks received immediate opposition from the Socialist Revolutionaries and Kerensky. Even as early as December 1917, General Kornilov was gathering a volunteer army from the Don Cossack region to fight against the government. In fact, in his 1915 publication called *Socialism and War*, Lenin wrote 'Convert the imperialist war into civil war.' Most historians, such as Richard Pipes, are in agreement that Lenin wanted and even provoked Civil War. Pipes argues that 'Lenin regarded the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk as the opening gambit of an international revolution: he believed that it would set off a general civil war that his regime would inflame and assist until socialism triumphed on a global scale'. Similarly to Pipes, historian Orlando Figes argued that Lenin desperately needed Civil War to complete his revolution.

requisitioning the confiscation of goods (often foodstuffs such as grain), frequently with a high degree of force

*The story of the Civil War is often told as a conflict in which the Bolsheviks were forced to fight by the Whites and the Allied intervention in Russia. In this left wing version of events the Reds were not to blame for the 'extraordinary measures' they were forced to take in the Civil War – the rule by terror, the **requisitionings**, mass conscriptions and so on – because they had to act decisively and quickly to defend their revolution against counter-revolutionaries. But this misses the whole point of the Civil War and its relationship to the revolution for Lenin and his followers.*

In their view the Civil War was a necessary phase of the class struggle. They embraced it as a continuation of the revolution in a more intensive and military form. 'Our Party is for civil war!' Trotsky told the Soviet on 4 June 1918. 'Long live civil war! Civil war for the sake of the ... workers and the Red Army, civil war in the name of a direct and ruthless struggle against counter-revolution.'

Lenin was prepared for a civil war and perhaps even welcomed it as a chance to build his party's power base. The effects of such a conflict would be predictable: the polarisation of the country into 'revolutionary' and 'counter-revolutionary' sides; the extension of the state's military and political power; and the use of terror to suppress dissent. In Lenin's view all these things were necessary for the victory of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

Source 13.4 Orlando Figes, *Revolutionary Russia 1891–1991: a history*, Metropolitan Books, New York, 2014, pp. 109–10

FOCUS QUESTIONS 13.2

- 1 Why would the Bolsheviks be blameless for the 'extraordinary measures' taken during the war?
- 2 Why did Trotsky support the civil war?
- 3 What were the 'predictable' effects of a civil war?

KEY HISTORIAN



▲ **Source 13.5** Richard Pipes

Richard Pipes (1923–2018)

Richard Pipes's antagonism towards extreme regimes was developed during his childhood in Poland. His family fled to the United States in 1939, one month before Poland was invaded by Nazi Germany. Pipes served in the US Army Air Corps as a 20 year old. Educated at Harvard University, he then lectured there from 1950 until his retirement in 1996. Pipes's political and historical expertise saw him promoted to several significant roles within the US government. For example, he headed a team of analysts during the Cold War called 'Team B' that analysed the strategic capacities and political intentions of the Soviet Union and reported directly to the US President.

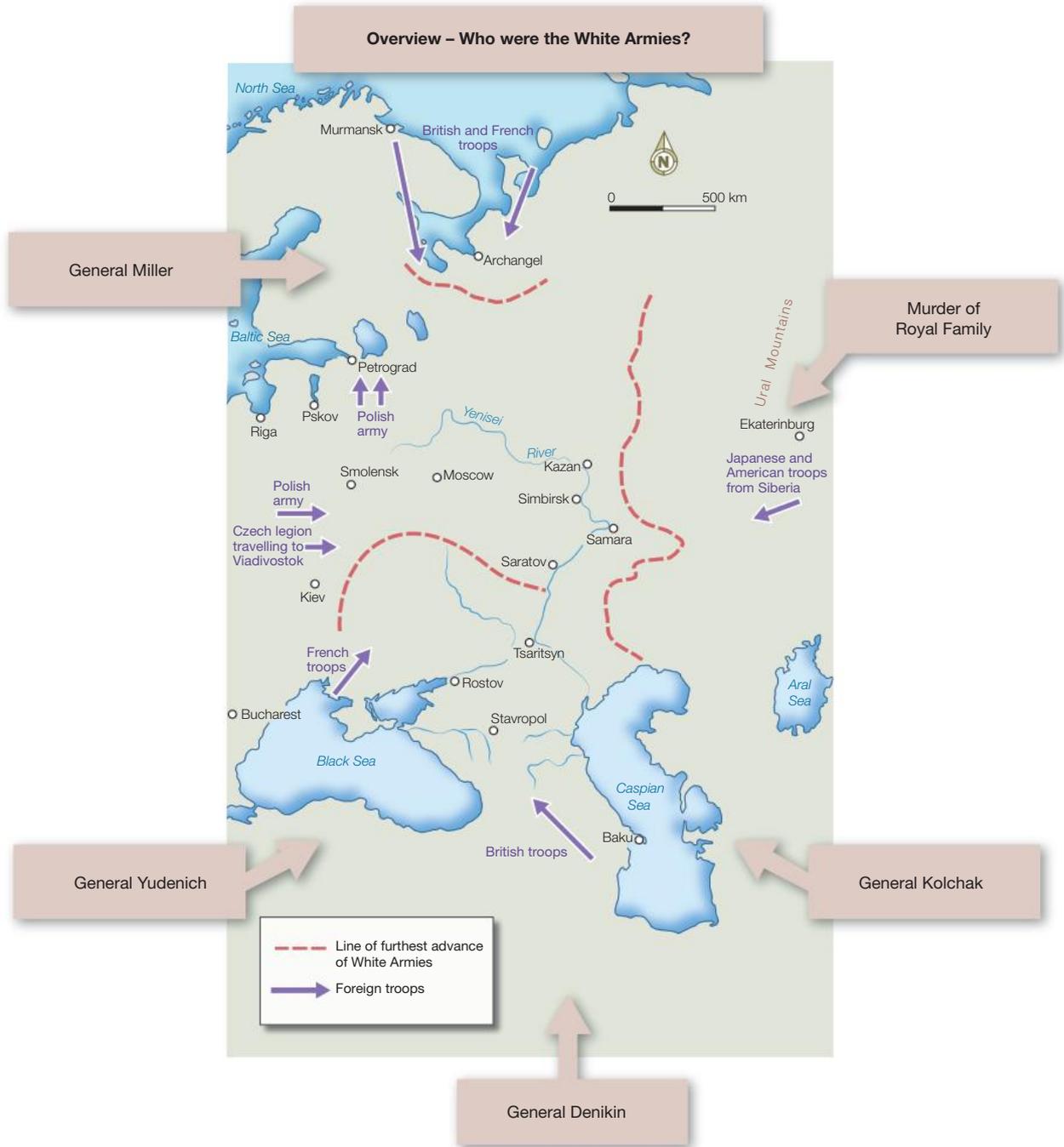
Pipes's extremely conservative political approach meant that he was antagonistic towards the Soviet Union, Bolshevism and the Communist Party, which has been demonstrated in his 21 books. This has resulted in a damning and narrow interpretation of the theory of communism and Lenin. He argues that the disastrous October Revolution of 1917 was a coup d'état driven by a small group of influential Bolsheviks to create a one-party privileged society. At the core of his views is his liberal conservatism, which is suspicious of any ideology that rejects previous traditions and values. His most fundamental argument was that the whole ideology of communism was flawed, not just its implementation by Lenin and Stalin. In his view, the concept of communism 'rested on a faulty philosophy of history as well as an unrealistic psychological doctrine'.



13.3 Why were the White armies such an internal threat?

The White armies comprised the traditional conservative forces in Russia. They were led by officers from the former Russian army and were supported by peasants, landowners, businessmen and ousted political groups like the Socialist Revolutionaries who wanted to defeat the new Soviet government. These powerful generals threatened from every direction. Although the following threats are listed separately for clarity, each attack overlapped and for more than three years provided a serious and constant opposition to the Soviet government.

Threats		Summary of significance
1	July 1918: Murder of the royal family  ▲ Source 13.6 The room where the Romanovs were murdered	The royal family was murdered by local Bolsheviks to prevent them from being captured by the White Armies.
2	September 1918: General Miller's northern threat  ▲ Source 13.7 Left: General Miller; Right: General Wrangel	The Socialist Revolutionaries established a government in the north, but it was overthrown by a military coup in September 1918 led by General Wrangel, who opposed any form of revolutionary, socialist government.
3	October 1919: General Yudenich's north-western threat  ▲ Source 13.8 General Yudenich	General Yudenich led an army of 14 400 Russian soldiers who had been captured and then released by the Germans. Their biggest challenge to the Reds was an attack on Petrograd in October 1919, but they were defeated by the Reds on the outskirts of the city. At the same time, General Denikin's forces reached their closest point to Moscow before being defeated at Orel.
4	1918–20: Admiral Kolchak's eastern threat  ▲ Source 13.9 Admiral Kolchak	Kolchak had been Admiral of the Black Sea Fleet during World War One and his hatred of socialism led him to focus on establishing an anti-Bolshevik government in Siberia. He commanded a powerful army of 100 000 soldiers and was supplied with one million rifles and 700 field guns by the Allies. In March 1919 he advanced into Red territory along the Trans-Siberian Railway. An English periodical called the <i>Annual Register</i> , which sought to record the most significant events in each year, described Kolchak as being the most important of the anti-Bolshevik forces, who had 'the support of the entire outside world'. However, Kolchak resigned in January 1920 after 80% of his anti-Bolshevik peasant conscripts deserted. He was shot by the Red Army.
5	December 1917–20: General Denikin's southern threat  ▲ Source 13.10 General Denikin	Denikin was an old-fashioned nationalist who wanted to restore the old regime. He commanded a maximum of 150 000 soldiers and advanced through Ukraine and Kiev close to Moscow. In March 1920, he handed over command of his White forces to General Wrangel.

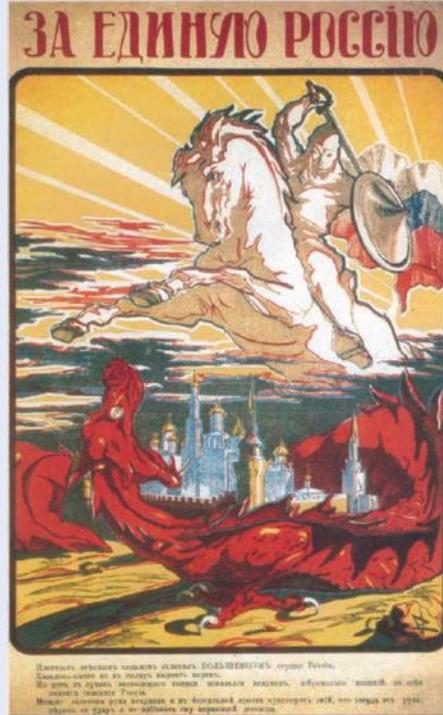


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▲ Source 13.11 Internal and external threats to the Bolsheviks



ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 13.1: IMAGE ANALYSIS



▲ Source 13.12 Left: Soviet propaganda depicting the mighty sword of the Red Army forcefully cutting off the advancing hand of the White armies; Right: White propaganda – ‘Two worlds, two systems’

- 1 What are the key features and symbols of each image?
- 2 Which image is more effective in communicating its message?

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

The Russian Revolution used many symbols from the French Revolution. The Marseillaise was sung as the anthem of the February 1917 Revolution and the White armies took their name from the white royal colour of the French monarchy.

13.4 What was the nature of the Red Terror and White Terror?

Red Terror was an official government policy issued after opposition to the new regime increased, ultimately sparked by Fanny Kaplan's attempted assassination of Lenin in August 1918. Under the cover of the Civil War, Red Terror included intimidation, arrests, violence and executions carried out by the Cheka, led by the ruthless Felix Dzerzhinsky. The Terror was directed against any who were considered a threat to the Bolsheviks such as Whites, Socialist Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, tsarists, liberals, members of the Orthodox Church, resistant 'kulak' peasants, striking or unproductive workers, or Red Army soldiers who had deserted. All of this resulted in a significant expansion of not only the membership – it grew from a few hundred to 200 000 people in a mere two years – but more importantly in its freedom to act without restrictions. Beating, burning, branding, strangling, scalping and mass shootings were some of the brutal methods used regularly under Red Terror. However, a variety of ultra-horrific forms of terror torture appeared throughout the Civil War.



▲ Source 13.13 A Cheka badge representing that they were the 'sword and shield' of protecting the revolution



▲ Source 13.14 Victims of the Red Terror in Crimea, 1918

However, it would be false to believe that terror was only from the Reds. Organised violence was also prominent under White Terror, as could be expected during any war. Mass executions – such as shooting and hangings – were common. For example, dominant White Admiral Kolchak authorised the death sentence for any Red Army members or Bolshevik supporters who attempted to overthrow him or his forces. He imposed prison sentences, harsh labour camps, mass floggings, burning whole villages and capital punishment, all without investigation or mercy. Some of the more brutal White Terror methods included gouging out the eyes of victims, cutting off tongues, slicing strips of victims' backs, burying victims alive or tying them to horses who ran in different directions and literally pulled the victim apart. Major General William S. Graves, who commanded American occupation forces in Siberia, testified that the massacres in eastern Siberia were so gruesome that anti-Bolshevik forces killed 100 for every one person killed by the Bolsheviks.

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

White Army General Kornilov had the same ruthless mindset as Dzerzhinsky. On different occasions he demanded 'I give you a very cruel order: do not take prisoners!', 'The greater the terror, the greater our victories', and that his aim was to win even if it meant 'to shed the blood of three-fourths of all Russians'.



◀ Source 13.15 Farmers and labourers shot dead by White Army soldiers under Admiral Kolchak in Omsk, 1919.



Red Terror torture methods

Below is a list of some of the methods of torture employed by the Bolsheviks, chiefly through the Cheka. These brutal and upsetting techniques were reminiscent of medieval torture and used to instil utter fear into their enemies.

- Being fed large amounts of salted fish and not being allowed water.
- Being forced to dig a big hole then buried alive.
- 'human gloves': burning the victim's hands in boiling water until the skin could be peeled off to create a perfect skin glove.
- Sawing through a victim's bones while they were alive.
- Hammered nails in a wine barrel so that the sharp ends were pointed inside, put the victim inside with the lid nailed closed, and rolled them down a hill.
- Tightening a leather strap around the victim's head until the skull was crushed.
- Fixing a tin full of rats to the victim's stomach, then heating the can so that the rats ate through the guts to escape.
- Tying the victim to a plank then slowly pushing it into a raging fire.
- 'ice statues': pouring water on the naked victim in winter so that the water froze, creating a living human ice statue.
- Killing family members until the suspected counter-revolutionary turned themselves in.



▲ Source 13.16 *In the basements of the Cheka* by Ivan Vladimirov, 1919.

KEY
STATISTIC



Terror by the numbers

- Up to 200 000 killed directly by the Red Cheka.
- 20 000 to 100 000 victims of White Terror.
- 700 000 Red soldiers and 225 000 Whites killed in action or died from their wounds.
- 300 000 to 600 000 victims of anti-Jewish pogroms from both Reds and Whites.
- 50 000 in government concentration camps by the end of 1921.

Source 13.17: *Revolutions and Counter-Revolutions: 1917 and its Aftermath from a Global Perspective* (Rinke, Stefan, Michael, Wildt (Eds), 2017)

13.5 Why was foreign intervention such an external threat?

While the initial revolution created a lot of anxiety, Lenin's subsequent political stance stirred up intense anger in Europe's conservative corridors of power. The Allied countries refused to recognise the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and preferred to gather support for a White government that would continue the war. The catalyst for foreign intervention was Lenin's dramatic declaration on 18 January 1918 that all foreign debts were cancelled 'unconditionally and without any exception'. By cancelling repayments of the country's national debt, Russia saved a massive 80 billion roubles in gold, which equated to two-thirds of its total national wealth. In addition, Lenin confiscated all foreign-owned property located in Russia, which further antagonised international companies.

These bold actions escalated foreign intervention, centring on espionage, propaganda, financial aid and the encouragement of revolts and coups against Lenin's young Bolshevik government. While foreign powers supported the White armies, they were rarely involved in actual fighting. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk had only given Russia a brief break from international war and military action. After the military, financial and psychological exhaustion of four years of World War One, several nations mounted another major campaign, this time against the Soviets.

The communists were convinced of their ultimate victory both in Russia and throughout Europe. Zinoviev, a Bolshevik leader, boldly exclaimed in May 1919: 'Old Europe is rushing towards revolution at breakneck speed. In a twelve-month period, we shall have forgotten that there was ever a struggle for communism in Europe, for all of Europe will be Communist.'

▼ **Source 13.18** The brutality of battle



April 1918: British threat – British marines landed in several locations, including Russia's two most northern ports, Archangel and Murmansk. Perhaps their most significant role was to provide invaluable physical and financial resources to the White armies. Winston Churchill announced to the House of Commons in August 1919 that Great Britain alone had spent £70 million over the last nine months in support of anti-Bolshevik forces.

April 1918: French threat – French troops were involved in the landing at Archangel with the British, yet were the first foreign nation to withdraw one year later in April 1919.

April 1918: Japanese threat and August 1918: American threat – Both these countries sent troops to Siberia, but for different reasons. The Japanese sent 70 000 troops, hoping to gain more territory, while the Americans went to restrain the Japanese, protect the Trans-Siberian Railway and, some believe, to support Admiral Kolchak's new government.



May 1918: Czech Legion threat – The involvement of the Czech Legion is a fascinating story of poor circumstance. The legion of 30 000 men planned to travel east on the Trans-Siberian Railway and then travel by ship from Vladivostok back to the battlefields in Western Europe. Although Lenin had agreed to the Czechs undertaking this trip through Russia, local Bolshevik groups reacted in a hostile way. The armed Czechs became even more of a target when they aligned themselves with anti-Bolshevik Socialist Revolutionary units to form an independent republic in the Volga. The resulting battles against the Reds meant that the Czech Legion had to fight its way across the vast countryside until they could escape Russia.

Polish-Soviet War and Treaty of Riga



▲ Source 13.19 Polish borders before and after the Treaty of Riga

February 1919 to March 1921: This expansionist conflict was viewed by the Bolsheviks as a significant act of foreign intervention in the Civil War. Historian Evan Mawdsley argues that the most serious military operations of 1920 were between Red and Polish forces, accounting for two-thirds of known frontline losses in 1920. So what was the war all about? It was fought in Russia's west, primarily over control of disputed territories in Ukraine and Belarus. These were strategically important to Lenin because control would allow the Bolsheviks to expand the communist revolution into Western Europe. However, the idea of a Bolshevik victory threatened Poland's very existence as an independent state.

Both forces were relatively even. Initially, the Polish force had about 110 000 soldiers compared to the 120 000 under Bolshevik control but both armies grew to around 750 000 by mid-1920. In the hostility of attack and defence, Kiev, the capital of Ukraine, changed control 16 times. However, the most dramatic battles occurred in mid-1920 when

the Polish front collapsed, allowing the Red Army to drive quickly through Poland. The Polish army retreated to their last possible line of defence, the Vistula River, which was near the Polish capital of Warsaw. Determined defence and clever counter offensives resulted in a miraculous Polish victory. Bolshevik advance towards Warsaw had been unexpectedly stopped. Success at the Battle of Warsaw led to a Polish counterattack of the retreating Bolshevik forces a month later in September. Poland finally weakened the Bolshevik resistance with victory at the Battle of the Neman River.

With both sides exhausted, a ceasefire was called in October 1920. Both sides declared victory – the Polish forces had defended their state from Bolshevik invasion while the Bolsheviks had stopped the Polish from controlling Ukraine. After long negotiations a formal peace treaty, called the Treaty of Riga, was finalised in March 1921. Riga was the capital of Latvia where the treaty was signed. The treaty not only established the Polish–Soviet border but also allowed the Bolsheviks to defeat the last White Russian general, Wrangel.

Deeper analysis suggests the crucial significance of Polish victory. It would be 20 years before the Bolsheviks would send their invading armies in an attempt to make revolution in Europe. British historian A.J.P. Taylor argued that ‘Soviet leaders abandoned the cause of international revolution’. Marxist belief in inevitable world-wide revolution was thwarted.

Overall impact of foreign intervention

The overall effect of foreign intervention in Russia remains uncertain ... it has often been suggested that foreign intervention assisted the Red victory by helping Bolsheviks to portray their opponents as tools of rapacious imperialists and to blame economic problems in Soviet Russia on hostile capitalist encirclement.

Source 13.22 David Foglesong, ‘Foreign Intervention’ in Acton (Ed.). *Critical Companion to the Russian Revolution 1914–1921*, London: Arnold (1997), pp. 102–3

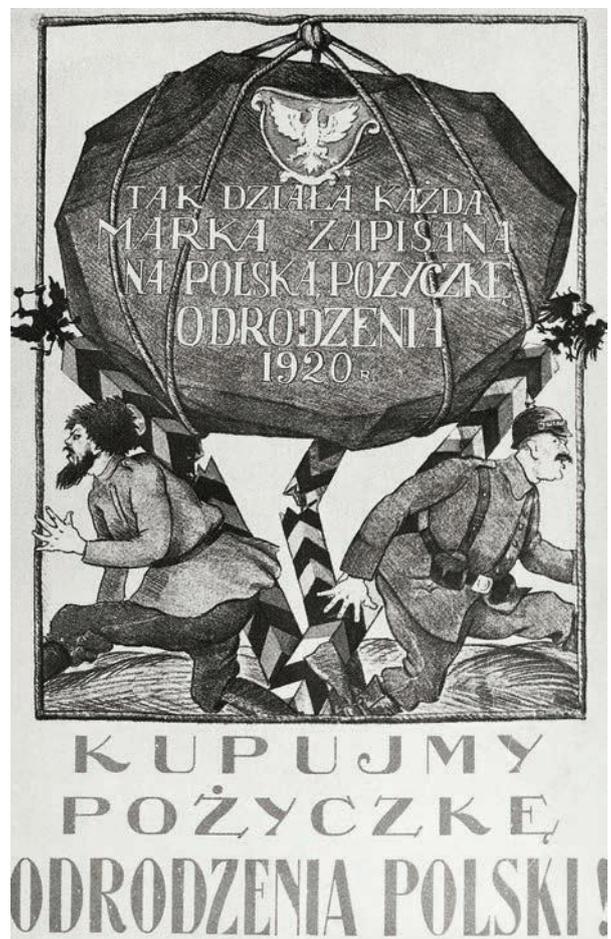
FOCUS QUESTION 13.3

- 1 Do you think foreign intervention helped or hindered Red victory?

► **Source 13.21** Poster celebrating Poland’s independence and liberation from Russia and Germany



▲ **Source 13.20** Polish volunteer troops leave to fight against the Bolsheviks.





13.6 Why did the Bolsheviks win the Civil War?

At the lowest point of the war, the Bolsheviks only retained control of one-fifth of the old Russian Empire. So how was the new government able to conquer both an internal and foreign opposition?

Why the Reds won

1 The Red Army

The Red Army was crucial to the survival of the Bolsheviks. It was formed in January 1918 by the Council of People's Commissars and should not be confused with the Red Guard that was established in preparation to defend Petrograd against General Kornilov in August 1917. Workers and peasants were conscripted to the army, which meant that the new government could claim not only to be the saviours of the nation, but also saviours actively supported by the proletariat.

Trotsky became their leader because of his appointment as Commissar of War in March 1918. He enforced strict military discipline that was best encapsulated by the compulsory Oath of the Red Warrior. This oath of loyalty committed each individual to 'observe the strictest revolutionary discipline', to protect all public property from damage and robbery, and to defend the Soviet republic against all foreign invaders. To these causes the Red Army pledged to 'give my whole strength and life itself'. By 1920 the Red Army had grown to five million men. Trotsky also cleverly recruited 50 000 former tsarist military officers to lead the Red Army, but in doing so had to appoint loyal Bolsheviks to watch their every move to ensure their allegiance to the Reds.



▲ Source 13.23 *Fight the White Army with a Red Wedge* (1919) by El Lissitzky. The Reds successfully pierce and break the Whites.

2 The Cheka

Like the sound of a bolt being shot, the two syllables, Che-ka, would stop any conversation.

– Volkogonov

The Cheka, along with the Red Army, became significant instruments of terror. They stringently enforced compliance to the communist government by committing atrocities against both the White armies and dissident workers and peasants. Stories included waiting outside upper-class schools and killing the children as they came out, imprisoning the wives of political opponents and seriously wounding prisoners before burying them alive. Nikolai Krylenko, Bolshevik Commissar for Justice, stated sadistically that ‘We must execute not only the guilty. Execution of the innocent will impress the masses even more’.

According to historian Sheila Fitzpatrick, the official Cheka figures revealed that in just 20 provinces in 1918 alone, they exposed 142 counter-revolutionary organisations and were confronted with 245 separate revolts that required suppression. At least 8389 people were shot and 87 000 arrested.



According to historian Steven Smith, the overall number of executions carried out by the Cheka during the three years of the Civil War was 140 000, with another 140 000 killed in the process of eliminating peasant and other uprisings. By comparison, the Tsar’s *Okhrana* had executed ‘only’ 14 000 people in a period of 50 years.

Bolshevik Nikolai Bukharin made a famous quote in a speech in 1921 that is often attributed to Lenin: ‘One cannot make omelettes without breaking eggs.’ He perceived the Civil War as a period where the Bolsheviks acted as the sledgehammer that smashed the eggs open. Violence was justified.

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Dzerzhinsky committed incredible atrocities but also had a surprising humane side. He not only ran the violent Cheka but also headed a large children’s charity.

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

A Soviet joke

Q: How many times can you tell a good joke in the Soviet Union?

A: Three times: Once to a friend; once to a Cheka officer; once to your cell mate.

3 Unity of purpose

Patriotism was a key psychological factor as it bred high morale and dedication. The Reds had a greater commitment to the cause as they were defending their nation on their own soil. It became an urgent battle for survival: victory would consolidate the revolution, but defeat would see their recent gains evaporated. Bolshevik propaganda represented the Whites as the combined evil forces of tsarism, the bourgeoisie, superstition and foreign capitalists.

4 Defending a central location

Although the White armies controlled the majority of Russian soil, the area retained by the Reds included the cities of Petrograd and Moscow. The surrounding areas were industrial strongholds, which meant that equipment, ammunition, war supplies and, most significantly, the hub of the railway system were able to be controlled and utilised by the Reds.



▲ Source 13.24 'Left-wing' Communism: an Infantile Disorder (1920), V.I. Lenin

Why the Whites lost

1 Divided in purpose and strategy

The Whites had no common unity of purpose because they were drawn from a vast background of foreign motivation and political ideology. Some Whites were socialists, whereas others were conservatives who promoted a return to tsarism. Geographical distance meant a lack of cooperation or unification of leadership. Equipment was not shared. Military tactics were not forged in common. White offensives were often months apart rather than launched simultaneously. Ultimately, instead of fighting a combined White force, the Red Army simply fought several separate battles, one after the other, until each White army was defeated, surrendered or simply withdrew.

2 Lack of propaganda

The Whites were unable to capitalise on the despair of the peasant communities with effective propaganda. Despite the starvation and desperation of the rural communities exacerbated by the war, the Whites did not present themselves as a better alternative to the Reds. As the White armies were drawn primarily from the old middle and upper classes, they did not approve of seizing land from the traditional landowners. The White armies therefore experienced less commitment from the peasant recruits and also greater desertion as the Reds were considered to be the lesser of two evils. The Whites also relied on the practical support from the Allies, triggering Lenin's declaration that the opposition were merely puppets of foreign enemies.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 13.2: SYNTHESIS ACTIVITY



- 1 Consider the six reasons in the previous pages why the Red Army won and White armies lost. List them in order of importance, with 1 being the most important, in explaining why the Bolsheviks won the Civil War.
- 2 Justify why you believe that the reason you have chosen is the most significant.



▲ Source 13.25 A poster of the Russian Civil War, 1918–22, which says: 'Long Live World October [revolution]! Workers conquered power in Russia. Workers will conquer power in the entire world.'

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 13.3: HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS



Gordon Greenwood argues that the Whites lost rather than that the Reds won:

Much was due to the driving initiative, the disciplined order and the ruthlessness of the Bolsheviks themselves. They possessed in Lenin a leader of great strength and astuteness, and in Trotsky an organiser of extraordinary capacity. The policy of terror subdued opposition and aided their cause, but the victory was not due to terrorism. The Bolsheviks were faced by a motley array of oppositionists, who had little in common. It was difficult to maintain effective co-operation between socialist revolutionary leaders and army generals of the old regime. There was little co-operation of policy or strategy between the White leaders, and this lack of unity was to prove fatal to the counter-revolutionary cause.

Source 13.26 Greenwood, *The Modern World*, 1973

- 1 How does Greenwood support his view?



13.7 SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL



Leon Trotsky (1879–1940)

Part 2

He strikes me as a man who would willingly die fighting for Russia provided there was a big enough audience to see him do it.

Source 13.27 Lockhart, the British Vice-Consul in Moscow, after meeting Trotsky in February 1918

Trotsky's brilliance as a tactician and motivating orator was a prime factor in the October takeover and victory in the Civil War. For the three years of the war, he lived in an armoured train and travelled around the Reds' defences inspiring the troops and promoting their 'inevitable' victory. His train carried his support staff, which included engineering specialists, as well as printing presses, a court of justice, map room, several motor cars, and munitions and troops. It travelled an estimated 105 000 kilometres during the course of the war.

*The myths about Trotsky's train were numerous. Red Army men came to expect that it would bring them long-awaited reinforcements, artillery and ammunition, as well as the legendary leader of the army himself, whose personal example would create a breakthrough on the front. Commanders and commissars, on the other hand, awaited Trotsky's peremptory [authoritative and dictatorial] orders with trepidation. Everyone, however, believed that Trotsky's arrival meant that things would get going. More was said than was written about the train, but the **archives** hold much information about this unique symbol of Trotsky's operational revolutionary leadership of the fronts in the civil war.*

Source 13.28 Dmitri Volkogonov, *Trotsky: the Eternal Revolutionary* (1996), p. 163



▲ Source 13.29 Commissar Trotsky with a guard

archive a central location where written material, often secret, is stored by an organisation

Fast train facts



▲ Source 13.30 Armoured train built at Putilov Steel Works in 1918 (similar to Trotsky's)



▲ Source 13.31 Trotsky (on the right) with guests inside his armoured train

continued ...



continued ...

- The train was hastily prepared for Trotsky on 7 August 1918. Originally it had 12 carriages and 250 people and was continually extended thereafter.
- It served as a mobile administration unit.
- The train was highly protected – all carriages were armoured and were protected by machine guns. All crew members were highly armed.
- All personnel wore black leather uniforms.
- Writings completed by Trotsky on the train amount to five volumes, published between 1922 and 1924.

Equipment	Personnel
Needed two engines to pull it	Twelve bodyguards of Latvian Riflemen
Carriages included a secretariat	Several dozen young Communists vied for roles of commanders
Printing press	General security guards
Telegraph station	Machine gun unit
Radio station	Group of agitators
Electric power station	Communications crew
Library	Team of drivers
Aviation unit of two aeroplanes	Unit of track repairmen
Several automobiles	Team of cooks
Garage – mechanics	Musical band

Reasons for Trotsky's widespread popularity

Dmitri Volkogonov was a Soviet military officer specialising in psychological warfare. However, his total belief in the superiority of communism changed over time. His greatest life achievement was writing a massive biographical trilogy on Stalin, Lenin and Trotsky. When interviewed just before his death, he stated: 'I feel very happy that by the end of my life I've freed myself from this horrible nightmare, this primitivism.' In this extract he explains why Trotsky was so popular with the Red Army soldiers in the Civil War.

It seems that the main explanation for Trotsky's immense popularity was the impression he gave that he was capable of sacrificing himself in the name of an idea. The people, above all, saw his dynamism, his decisiveness, his constant movement, they heard his passionate speeches and sensed his implacability [being relentless and merciless], and many were taken with his originality ...

Trotsky was everywhere an object of discussion and argument. In its regular 'Leaders of the Revolution' column of the newspaper of 7th Army, the Krasnyi Shtyk (Red Bayonet), wrote:

In a short space of time he has performed a near miracle: he has created a wonderful army and led it to victories. Trotsky himself is always at the front, the real front where the fighting is eye to eye, where stray bullets do not distinguish between ordinary Red Army men, commanders or commissars. The train and the boat he lives on have frequently come under artillery and machine-gun fire. But Trotsky somehow doesn't notice these inconveniences.

Under enemy fire, as during the revolution itself, he goes on working and working and working ... No one knows where Trotsky takes a rest.

It is true that Trotsky worked prodigiously, but it is also true that he did not make an effort to curtail such panegyrics [self-aggrandising] in the press, which was under his control. Dedication to the revolutionary idea did not prevent him from being vain, from posturing before the mirror of history ...

It was not so much that Trotsky was naïve. He was not, but he was an adventurer who depicted reality as he wished it to be, rather than as it was. This often led him to promise an early victory, future happiness, universal brotherhood and a worldwide Soviet republic. Perhaps it was this aspect of Trotsky – the prophet of a happy future – that drew the crowds. Perhaps it was that he realised that one must promise something to people who were up to their knees in blood, that one must inspire them with something and point to great goals that were close at hand and attainable.'

Source 13.32 Dmitri Volkogonov, *Trotsky: the Eternal Revolutionary* (1996), Harper Collins, London, pp. 158, 159, 161

Trotsky defends the use of terror

Trotsky and Lenin were prolific writers and a lot of our understanding of the Bolshevik psyche comes from their publications. This extract is from one of Trotsky's books, *The Defence of Terrorism* (1920).

The revolution 'logically' does not demand terrorism just as 'logically' it does not demand an armed insurrection ... But the revolution does require of the revolutionary class that it should attain its end by all methods at its disposal – if necessary, by an armed rising; if required by terrorism. A revolutionary class which has conquered power with arms in its hands is bound to, and will, suppress, rifle in hand, all attempts to tear the power out of its hands. Where it had against it a hostile army, it will oppose to it its own army. Where it is confronted with armed conspiracy ... it will hurl at the heads of its enemies an unsparing penalty.

Source 13.33 Trotsky, *The Defence of Terrorism* (1920)

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Chinese communist leader Mao Zedong once famously said, 'Communism has nothing to do with love. It is an excellent hammer which we use to destroy our enemy.'

Trotsky became legendary for his ruthless attitude against those who lost their focus and motivation to the communist cause. For example, at the commencement of the war in the summer of 1918, Trotsky was called to deal with 200 deserters from the Red Army at Svyazhsk who had stolen a boat to escape from the advancing White forces. In one of his most famous acts he called for the immediate execution of the regiment, which was carried out on the river bank.

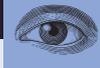
Deutscher is a historian who is sympathetic to the Bolsheviks and defended Trotsky's reluctant use of force, claiming: 'Trotsky has not shrunk from using terror in the Civil War; but he can be said to have been as little fond of it as a surgeon is fond of bloodshed.'



◀ Source 13.34 Trotsky speaking with Red Army soldiers



ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 13.4: VISUAL ANALYSIS



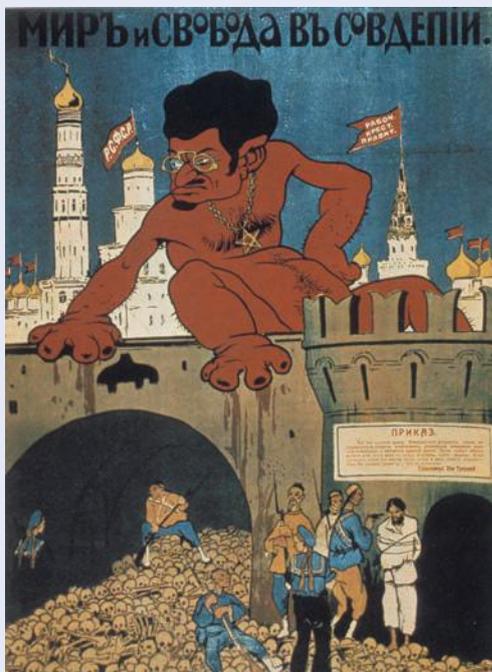
Given the many conflicting sides during the Civil War, and given his prominent and authoritarian role, perceptions of Trotsky were vastly different. Here are two such images.

Positive perspective



◀ Source 13.35 Hero Trotsky portrayed as St George slaying the White 'dragon' of the Civil War

Negative perspective



◀ Source 13.36 Trotsky portrayed as the 'Red Devil' sabotaging Soviet society by disposing of good communists

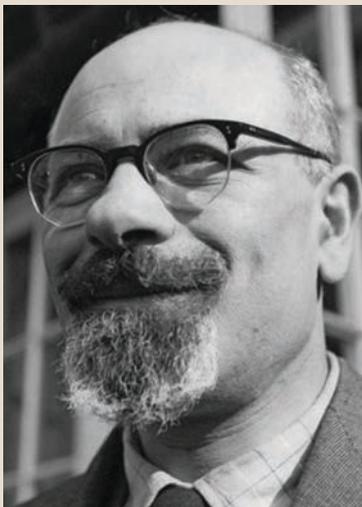
- 1 What are the key features and symbols of each image?
- 2 Which image is more effective in communicating its message?
- 3 Which image do you think best represents Trotsky's role in the Civil War? Use evidence from this chapter to support your answer.

Historian Isaac Deutscher supports Trotsky's desire to create a peaceful society and writes about Trotsky's desire to play a crucial role in the establishment of a new society:

He was now at the summit of his political and military achievement. He had led a revolution, he had founded a great army and had guided it to victory. He had won the adoration of the broad mass of the revolution's well-wishers and the grudging adoration as well as the unforgiving hatred of its enemies. Like other Bolshevik leaders, he hoped that the horrors and terrors of the civil war were over and that the era of peaceful Socialist reconstruction was about to begin. In this he expected to play a part as pre-eminent as the one he had played in military affairs.

Source 13.37 Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*, p. 446

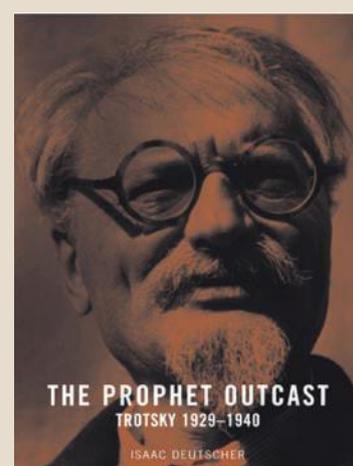
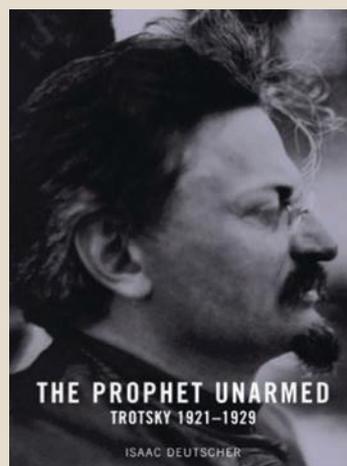
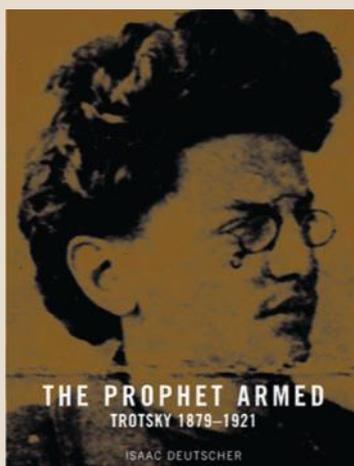
KEY HISTORIAN



Isaac Deutscher (1907–1967)

Isaac Deutscher was a British journalist, historian and political activist of Polish-Jewish birth. His family were observant Jews but he lost his faith around his bar mitzvah and converted to Marxism when he left home at the age of 18. At the age of 19, he joined the illegal Polish Communist Party and became the editor of the group's underground publications. He rose to professional prominence with a biography of Stalin in 1949 and later wrote a massive trilogy on Trotsky. This research made him a leading expert on communism. As opposed to Pipes, whose Polish origins turned him against communism, Deutscher was sympathetic to communism and was one of the Western historians who wrote favourably about Lenin and the revolution.

▲ Source 13.38 Isaac Deutscher



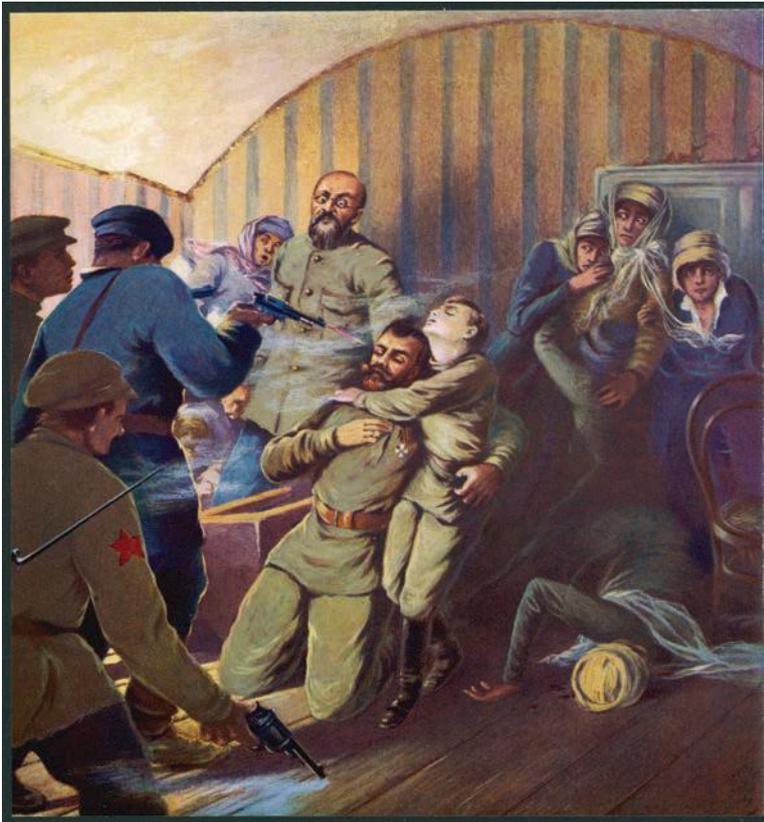
▲ Source 13.39 Deutscher's famous trilogy on Trotsky: *The Prophet Armed*, *The Prophet Unarmed* and *The Prophet Outcast*



13.8 Murder of the royal family

One of the clearest examples of the terror of the Civil War was the brutal murder of Tsar Nicholas II and his entire family at Ekaterinburg on 17 July 1918. On the way back to Moscow for trial, the Romanovs were intercepted by a local Bolshevik group and imprisoned.

The Tsar and his family were woken at 10:30 p.m., instructed to dress and taken to the narrow cellar of the villa under the guise of having their photo taken, but instead were greeted by a detachment of Red Guards. After announcing, 'We must now shoot you', Yurovsky, the chairman of the local Cheka, executed the Tsar with a revolver at close range, followed by the shooting and bayoneting of the Tsarina, Alexei and his four sisters plus their cook, maid, doctor, valet and spaniel Jimmy. Before dawn, their bodies were taken by truck to a deserted mine shaft where they were carefully cut into pieces, soaked in petrol and burnt, with the larger bones dissolved in sulphuric acid. It was declared that 'the world will never know what we did with them'. The killings sent a shock wave of horror throughout the ruling classes of Europe. Communism was a matter for interesting debate, but the murder of the Romanovs was a definitive statement of the permanent rejection of the old regime.



◀ Source 13.40 'The execution of Tsar Nicholas II and his family at Ekaterinburg'. Illustration from *Histoire des Soviets*, Henri de Weindel (1922)

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

The Romanov royal family continues to fascinate Russians. In 1998, remains of the royal family were buried in the traditional Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul in a highly controversial ceremony commemorating the 80th anniversary of their deaths. In December 2000, the Tsar and his family were granted the official title of 'martyrs' by the Russian Orthodox Church, because of the honourable way in which they went to their deaths. Given the location of the 17 bullet holes in the lower wall and floor, it is likely that the family members were shot while kneeling and praying. In 2006, Russian President Vladimir Putin allowed Nicholas's mother to be reburied with the rest of the family.

Although there is debate over whether Lenin gave the order, it appears that the Cheka group in Ekaterinburg decided to execute the family. Felix Dzerzhinsky (*Annual Register*, 1918) stated that his organisation was 'not a court ... and cannot stop to ask whether it may harm particular individuals ... the CHEKA must defend the revolution and conquer the enemy even if its sword falls occasionally on the heads of the innocent'. It was a perfect snapshot of how the Cheka operated: there was no trial, no accusations and no proof of guilt. The 304-year Romanov Dynasty was ended by an indiscriminate initiative.

Possible motives for the royal murders

Motive 1 – White soldiers were relatively close to where the family was being held and members could have been rescued.

Motive 2 – Saving the royal family could have motivated anti-Bolshevik forces.

Motive 3 – It was a demonstration that there was no going back to tsarism.

Motive 4 – Difficulties in communication led to local initiative rather than waiting for orders from central leadership.

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Forty-four bone fragments, seven teeth, three bullets and one piece of cloth were found in a second burial grave in 2008 in Ekaterinburg. Only hours before the ceremony to mark the 90th anniversary of their deaths, Russian police confirmed that DNA testing had proven that these were the remains of Alexei and either Anastasia or Maria. The exciting mystery over the 'disappearance' of the royal family may now finally be closed.

13.9 What was the significance of the Civil War?

Impact on the Bolshevik Party

Rather than crushing the power of the Bolsheviks, the Civil War resulted in the strengthening of their authority to justify more stringent measures of social control. Similar to the Tsar after the failed 1905 Revolution, the Bolsheviks emerged stronger from a crisis that was intended to make them weaker.

Of all members of the Bolshevik Party in 1927, Kochan and Abraham estimated that 33 per cent had joined between 1917 and 1920, while only 1 per cent had joined before 1917. Therefore, many crucial characteristics of the party and attitudes of its members were forged in the environment of war after 1917, rather than through the party's pre-revolutionary political heritage:

- **Psychologically** – the war created a survival mentality, incredible self-belief and a ruthless determination to fight against seemingly overwhelming odds.
- **Politically** – the war shaped the militaristic character of communism, which meant that party members readily accepted the tradition of loyalty and discipline.
- **Organisationally** – the war developed a strong centralised administration characterised by an authoritative leadership with smaller governing bodies.
- **Socially** – the war justified strict sanctions and summary justice on perceived counter-revolutionary threats both inside and outside of the party.



THE STORY SO FAR



- The signing of the humiliating peace treaty to withdraw from World War One only provided a break for a few months as a civil war began in mid-1918. Yet this was a different war – the new revolutionary Bolshevik government was fighting for survival against its anti-Bolshevik opponents.
- The White armies were made up of traditional conservative forces within Russia. The leaders were generals from the Tsar's army – the most important of whom was Admiral Kolchak – and the fighters were peasants, landowners and ousted political groups like the Socialist Revolutionary Party.
- Lenin's regime also faced the external threat of invasion by foreign powers. The British, French, Japanese, Americans, Czech Legions and Poles all were involved in attempting to overthrow the Bolsheviks.
- The Bolsheviks won due to the impact of the Red Army, terror of the Cheka, unity of purpose, the fact that they were defending a central location, and the impact of Trotsky. The White armies lost as they were divided in purpose and strategy and lacked powerful propaganda.
- The Civil War shaped the political nature of the Bolsheviks, who now called themselves communists. The war forced them to adopt dictatorial methods of discipline and control that became an integral part of the nature of the Communist Party, even after the Civil War had been won.

Use the QR code or visit the digital version of the book and watch the video summarising the chapter.



▼ Source 13.41 An all-women unit of Red Army soldiers who fought against General Denikin's White guards, 1919."



Develop your historical thinking skills

Define key terms

Use information from this chapter to write short explanations defining each of the following.

- Civil War
- Fanny Kaplan
- Polish–Soviet War
- Red Terror
- White armies
- White Terror

Analysing cause and consequence

Use evidence from this chapter to write short paragraph answers.

- 1 What was the significance of Fanny Kaplan's attempted assassination of Lenin?
- 2 Why did the Bolsheviks win the Civil War?
- 3 How significant was Trotsky's role in the Civil War?

Using quotes as evidence

Write a sentence using a short phrase from one of the quotes below or contrast the views from a few quotes. You can also use any of the quotes in this chapter. Quotes can be used directly or paraphrased in your own words.

The end may justify the means as long as there is something that justifies the end. **Trotsky**

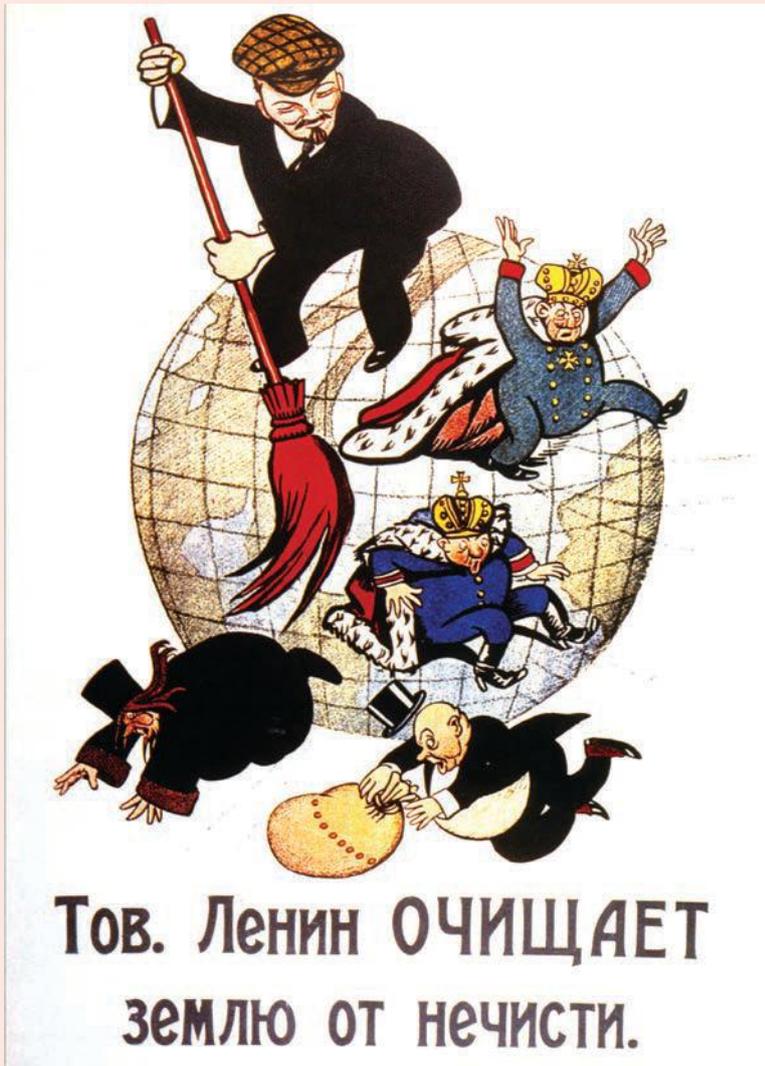
The single-party system became for the Bolsheviks an inescapable necessity. Their own survival, and no doubt the survival of the revolution, depended on it. **Isaac Deutscher, historian**

The Communists might have controlled the railways, the large industrial enterprises and the armed forces, but not the hearts and minds of the people. **Thomas and McAndrew, historians**

To stay in power against the wishes of the overwhelming majority of their subjects, the Bolsheviks had to distort that power beyond all recognition. Terror may have saved Communism but it totally corroded its soul. **Richard Pipes, historian**

Analysing historical sources as evidence

This Bolshevik propaganda poster was published in the early 1920s. The image symbolises Lenin sweeping away the old regime, imperial nations and the wealthy bourgeoisie.



◀ Source 13.42 'Lenin cleanses the world of evil spirits' by Victor Deni

- 1 Why is Lenin standing on a globe of the world?
- 2 Who are the characters that Lenin is sweeping away?
- 3 Lenin is portrayed as the largest character in this cartoon. Symbolically, what does this suggest about the role of Lenin?
- 4 Lenin is using a broom. What might this suggest?
- 5 The cartoon suggests that the defeat of the old regime was as easy as using a broom. Drawing on evidence from 1918 to 1920, why wasn't it as easy as this image suggests?

Analysing historian's interpretations

Debate: How did the Civil War shape the attitudes of the Bolsheviks?

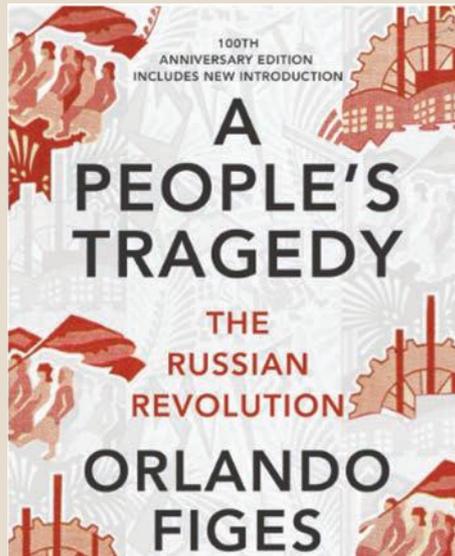
Orlando Figes (1959–present)

Nationality: British

Helpful book: *A People's Tragedy: the Russian Revolution 1891–1924* (1996)



▲ Source 13.43 Orlando Figes



▲ Source 13.44 *A People's Tragedy: the Russian Revolution 1891–1924*

Point of view

Figes argues that 'nothing did more to shape the ruling attitudes of the Bolsheviks than the experience of the Civil War'.

Reasons (evidence)

Defeating internal enemies (the Whites and Greens) as well as the foreign forces over a long three-year period meant that a military attitude, centralised government through Lenin, strong leadership of Trotsky, power of the large Red Army and influence of the Cheka, all became a strong justification for violence. All this permanently created a dominant authoritarian government.

Quote

The Bolshevism that emerged from the Civil War viewed itself as a crusading brotherhood of comrades in arms, conquering Russia and the world with a red pencil in one hand and a gun in the other.

What's your point of view?

What's your point of view about how the Civil War shaped the attitudes of the Bolsheviks?



14

**GOVERNMENT CRISES: WAR
COMMUNISM AND THE
KRONSTADT REVOLT**

The Communists may have controlled the railways, the large industrial enterprises and the armed forces, but not the hearts and minds of the people.

– THOMAS AND MCANDREW (1999)

Overview

The common theme that runs through all wars is their far-reaching impact on every aspect of society. Although the young Soviet Republic won the Civil War and restored peace, it paid a high price. The country was left in ruins. Some of its best workers died in the battles, the people were exhausted, and the communist vision of a proletarian utopia was fading. As well, there was only one communist group for every 1200 square kilometres of Russian countryside, leaving the communists without the total support of the population. Hence, the greatest dangers to the Bolsheviks during this critical year were no longer military opponents but economic devastation, social chaos and ideological disillusionment:

Not only had the revolution occurred in a nation lacking the developed capitalistic society which Marx had envisaged, but the small proletariat had disappeared during the Civil War. True, there were urban workers, but few of them were the experienced and politically conscious men of 1917... The factory workers of the early twentieth century were largely ex-peasants, ill-educated, ill-disciplined, and not particularly interested in the party. Thus, the Bolsheviks, who had regarded themselves as the vanguard of the proletariat, found themselves in the van with nothing to guard.

Westwood, *Endurance and Endeavour*, pp. 281–2

This chapter explores two major crises that came to a revolutionary head in 1921: the economic crisis resulting from the collapse of the economy under War Communism; and the social and political crisis of the open opposition to the regime through the revolt at the Kronstadt naval base.

Key issues

After completing this chapter, you should be able to answer these questions.

- What was the impact of War Communism?
- Who was Alexandra Kollontai?
- Why was the Kronstadt Revolt so threatening to the Bolsheviks?
- How did the Bolsheviks defend their use of force?

Digital resources for this chapter

In the *Interactive Textbook*:

-  Video and audio sources and questions
-  Digital activities

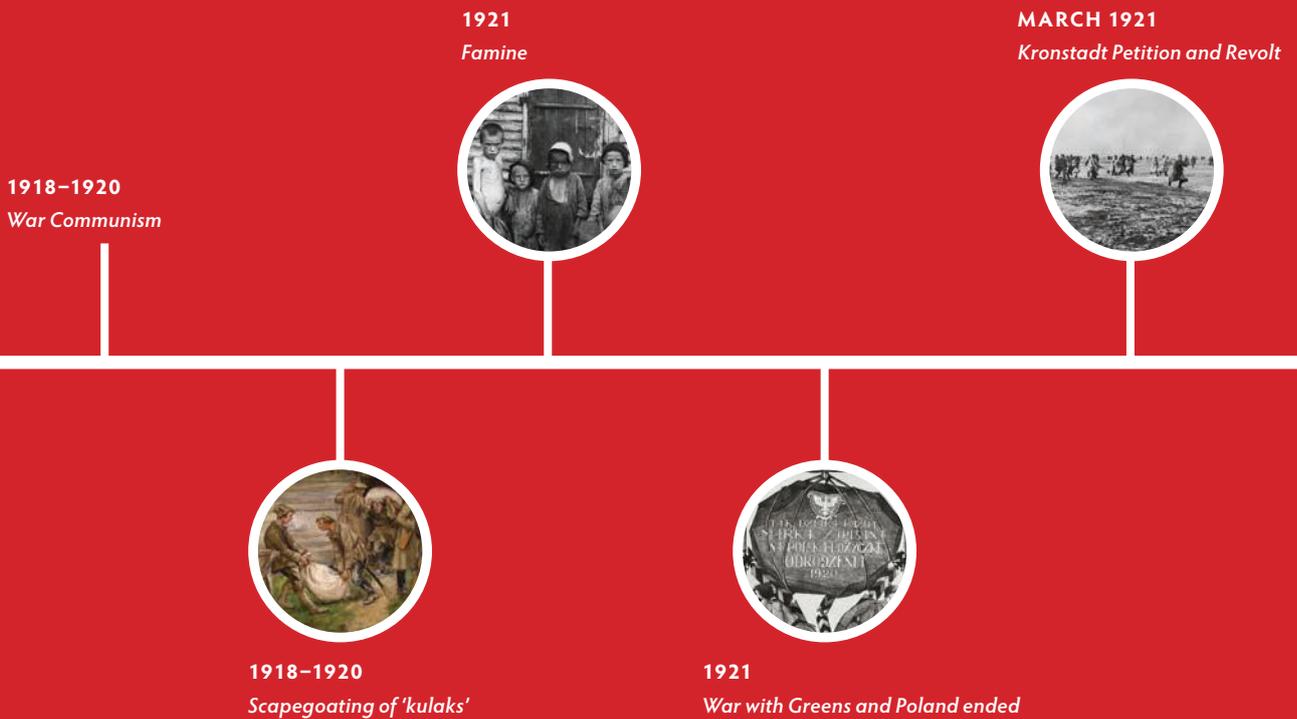
◀ **Source 14.0** 'Help!' (1921). A poster asking for support through the 1921 Famine

Flow of chapter



Chapter timeline

What are the key events of the Russian Revolution covered in this chapter?



14.1 What was the impact of War Communism?

The policies imposed by the Bolsheviks in order to mobilise the nation to fight the Civil War were labelled as 'War Communism'. These economic policies had initially been introduced from June 1918 in an attempt to maintain firm government control over the economy and trade. Several problems emerged during the Civil War, including the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918 (with the loss of the productive territory of Ukraine), food shortages in large cities – especially Moscow and Petrograd – and transport problems such as maintaining the operation of railways.

The forced confiscation of manpower to either the Red Army or to industry (called conscription) and the forced confiscation of grain and food (called requisitioning) were at the heart of War Communism. Other decisions under War Communism during the Civil War included:

- banning of private trade (which resulted in the growth of the black market)
- abolition of money as a means of exchange; trade of goods was encouraged
- militarisation of labour – as wages were the same and there was no money in circulation, people were forced to work but without financial compensation
- establishment of Soviet Farms on large estates
- nationalisation of large-scale industry and railways
- rationing of food
- imposition of a grain tax
- introduction of Communist Sundays, whereby loyal communists were expected to 'volunteer' to aid the war effort.

Although the Bolsheviks had won the Civil War, eliminated their enemies and established political control over the vast Russian territories, it all came at a high price. The result was disaster – political, economic and human disaster.

- British historian Peter Oxley estimated that out of the 10 million deaths during the period of the war, 9.5 million were from famine and disease, whereas only 350 000 died in actual combat. In other words, 95 per cent of deaths during the Civil War were from famine and disease.
- Industrial output had fallen to as low as 15 per cent of pre-war levels, and agricultural output to 60 per cent.
- The number of industrial workers had fallen by half, from 3 024 000 in 1917 to 1 480 000 in 1921.
- Since 1913, coal production had fallen to 30 per cent of pre-war output.
- Since 1913, electrical energy had fallen to 25 per cent of pre-war output.
- Bribes were an accepted aspect of life. For example, a train ticket of 100 roubles sometimes involved a bribe of 500 roubles.
- Savage stories emerged of cannibalism and salted human flesh being sold at markets.



AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

A Russian joke from 1919

A religious instruction teacher asked his class: 'Our Lord fed 5000 people with five loaves and two fishes. What is that called?' A student at the back of the class replied: 'War Communism!'

14.2 Impact 1 – Scapegoating the kulaks

kulaks the derogatory name given by Lenin's government to peasants who were deemed to be selfishly hoarding grain for their own benefit rather than that of the nation

These leeches have sucked the blood from the working people and grown richer as the workers in the cities and factories starved ... Ruthless war on the kulaks! Death to them!

Source 14.1 Lenin in *Comrade Workers, Forward To The Last, Decisive Fight!*
From marxists.org, translated by Jim Riordan

The richer peasants, labelled 'kulaks' by the Communist Party, were blamed for the rising high prices from the critical food shortage. It was believed that they were secretly hoarding grain rather than handing it over. Historians debate whether the food shortage was caused by widespread hoarding, or whether there was simply no extra grain because War Communism removed any incentive for peasants to produce a surplus. Lenin described the kulaks as 'obstinately deaf and indifferent to the cries of the starving workers and peasant poor'. All of Lenin's attempts to stop this perceived hoarding failed, so he resorted to sending detachments of the Cheka to coerce kulaks to give up their grain. Mass terror and suspicion resulted. Food supplies fell as peasants only produced enough grain to feed their families.

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Kulak was a Russian word that meant 'tight-fisted'.



▲ Source 14.2 Cheka members collecting grain from a peasant family, in a watercolour called *Requisition* by Vladimirov

FOCUS QUESTIONS 14.1

- 1 What parts of this image suggest that the Cheka were taking grain by force?
- 2 Why do you think that this image was helpful for Lenin's Government?

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, historians have had greater access to a wider range of primary sources. The following document is a telegram from Lenin to communist leaders in the Penza region, ordering the public murder of suspected kulaks.

11 August 1918

Comrades! The uprising of the five kulak districts should be mercilessly suppressed. The interests of the entire revolution require this, because now 'the last decisive battle' with the kulaks is under way everywhere. One must create an example.

- 1 *Hang (hang without fail so the people will see) no fewer than one hundred known kulaks, rich men, bloodsuckers.*
- 2 *Publish their names.*
- 3 *Take from them all the grain.*
- 4 *Designate hostages – as per yesterday's telegram.*

Do it in such a way that for hundreds of versts [approximately 1 kilometre] around, the people will see, tremble, know, shout: they are strangling and will strangle to death the bloodsucker kulaks.

Telegraph receipt and implementation. Yours, Lenin

P.S. Find some truly hard people

Source 14.3 Pipes (Ed.), *The Unknown Lenin: From the Secret Archive* (1996), Document 24

14.3 Impact 2 – Peasant opposition through Green armies

The impact of peasant opposition to the negative impact of War Communism policies must be considered seriously, given that Lenin argued that the peasants were 'far more dangerous than all of the Denikins, Yudeniches and Kolchaks put together'. Aggressive armed peasant opposition groups during the Civil War were often called 'Green armies'. They were an intriguing but separate collection of peasant and Cossack forces that gave allegiance neither to the Whites nor the Reds. The peasant demands were for greater autonomy from Moscow. They operated primarily in the outer provinces in White-occupied territories and supported movements for national independence. The Civil War becomes far more complex if it is considered as being not just a Red versus White conflict, but also as a Red versus Green, and Green versus White, conflict.

What is remarkable about these peasant wars is that they shared so many common features, despite the huge distances between them and the different contexts in which they took place. Most of the larger rebellions had started out in 1920 as small-scale peasant revolts against the requisitioning of food which, as a result of their incompetent and often brutal handling by the local Communists, soon became inflamed and spread into full-scale peasant wars.

Source 14.4 Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy* (1996), p. 753

British historian Geoff Swain argued that the Civil War was not just about the Bolshevik revolution fighting against tsarist counter-revolution. It was also a clash between different versions of same revolution. The peasants became a

dominant problem for the government, not because they wanted to become the leaders of Russia, but rather because of fundamentally different beliefs about the best shape of the new society. Lenin's government wanted national unity with a centralised government while the Greens merely wanted local independence.

Two of the best case studies of the significance of the peasant opposition to the government are described below.

Case study 1 – Tambov Rebellion

The largest and best organised peasant war was called the Tambov Rebellion, and was a direct protest against grain requisitioning. Alexander Antonov, a Socialist Revolutionary supporter who rebelled against the Bolshevik government, led a group of up to 70 000 partisans, and successfully took control of the Tambov region south east of Moscow. The rebellion was finally suppressed by a 100 000 strong Red Army in mid-1921 who used tanks, heavy artillery and poison gas.



► Source 14.5 The influence of the Tambov Rebellion, 1920–21

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Antonov's forces captured government railway trains transporting requisitioned grain and returned it to the peasant farmers. A Russian Robin Hood!

Case study 2 – Ukraine Rebellion

A former Bolshevik called Nestor Makhno coordinated a large group of peasant guerrilla fighters to control a small area of Ukraine throughout 1919–20. This Revolutionary Insurgent Army numbered up to 110 000, was centred around well-organised cavalry attacks and successfully fought off White armies under General Denikin and later General Wrangel. Red Army officers who were captured were executed but Red Army soldiers were released as ‘proletarian brothers’. By November 1920, Trotsky resorted to terror tactics and unleashed 350 000 Red Army forces with armoured cars, heavy artillery, aircraft and armoured trains to finally destroy the Makhnovist movement.



▲ Source 14.6 Peasant opposition leader Nestor Makhno (centre)

14.4 Impact 3 – 1921 famine

KEY
STATISTIC

The famine of 1921 and early 1922 was mainly a natural disaster, in the form of a severe drought and heavy frosts, but it was worsened by years of war and forced grain requisitioning. The Great Famine can best be illustrated by the example of the province of Samara. The average May rainfall in Samara was 38.8 millimetres but in May 1921 the region received just 0.3 millimetres. Grain requisitioning between 1919 and 1920 exceeded the harvest surplus by a massive 30 per cent, which resulted in the average peasant household being forced to give up 118 kilograms of food, fodder and seed. Ouspensky, a journalist for a Russian newspaper, wrote in 1919: ‘You must understand, too, the psychological side ... In some people they create panic, in others complete prostration, in others again a kind of mystic fatalism.’ By 1920, 8000 members of the requisitioning parties had been murdered by peasants who literally had no more grain or patience to give.

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Government officials in one town advised starving residents to dig up dried bones of animals, grind them into flour and bake a ‘bread substitute’!



◀ Source 14.7 Young victims of the 1921 famine in Samara

A horrific account of starvation

In one house beyond the Volga I saw a family waiting for death, and they had not long to wait. They had no bread, no leaves, no cabbage stalks ... The father raised himself from a wooden settle. He was bleeding from the mouth and was a living skeleton with yellow skin drawn tightly over visible bones ... At the end of the room in the window seat, a handsome lad sat in his rags. He was nearly dead, with strange staring eyes that looked into the next world. It was very quiet in the room. The father whispered a few words, but they could hardly be heard. Once the mother moaned. The boy and girl made no sound at all. Death stood at the threshold.

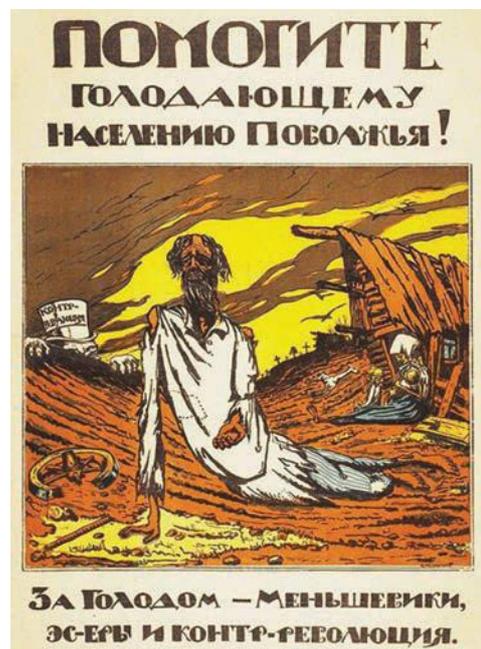
Source 14.8 *Review of Reviews* (1921), pp. 405–7

Cannibalism

The famine also led to stories of murder, cannibalism and black-market trade in human flesh. Starving peasants were seen digging up recently buried corpses, and people committed murder and euthanasia in order to eat human flesh. Illegal trade in human flesh also emerged in local markets, often as human sausages.

International support

The Russian famine was acknowledged worldwide as a humanitarian disaster. Despite fighting against the Soviets in the Civil War, Britain actively supported the famine victims by establishing an appeal called 'Save the Children Fund in Russia', and even re-entered Russia to oversee the allocation of funds. Further, it is estimated that the million tonnes of food and seed imported and distributed by the American Relief Administration saved another 14 million peasants from starvation in the worst famine-hit areas. Both the British and American aid was accepted reluctantly by a humiliated communist regime.



▲ Source 14.9 'Help the Hungry of Volga Region!', 1921



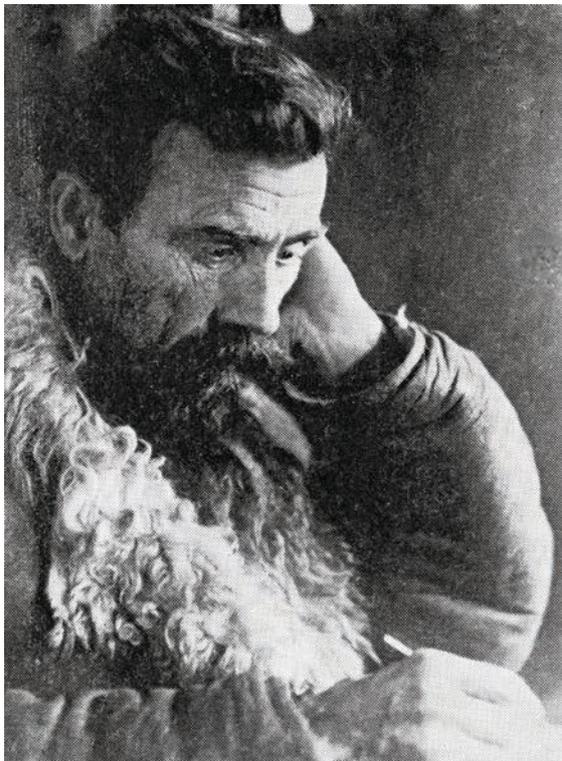
► Source 14.10 Doctors treat malnourished children on a US relief train.

14.5 Impact 4 – Formation of Kollontai's Workers' Opposition

Alexandra Kollontai was a remarkable Bolshevik politician who had been an active revolutionary in both the 1905 and 1917 revolutions. As Commissar for Social Welfare in the new Soviet government, she initiated many of the initial decrees about women and education. However, her support for Lenin and own government had faded by 1920 given the negative impact of the policies of War Communism. Along with Inessa Armand and Sophia Smidovich, she formed Zhenotdel to support working women. In 1921, she became increasingly critical of the Communist party and, with friend Alexander Shylapnikov, formed a faction called The Workers' Opposition, whose aim was to champion workers' rights. Kollontai argued for greater political freedoms (specifically that members of the party be part of debates on policy issues), greater democracy within the party, increased respect for workers from the central leadership, more freedoms for trade unionists to control the national economy, and a reduction in party bureaucracy. Kollontai published a pamphlet criticising the gulf between the party leadership and the proletariat:

The workers ask – who are we? Are we really the prop of the class dictatorship, or just an obedient flock that serves as a support for those, who having severed all ties with the masses, carry out their own policy and build up industry without any regard to our opinions and creative abilities... ?

Source 14.11 Cited in Lynch, *Reactions and Revolutions*, p. 122



▲ Source 14.12 Left: Alexander Shylapnikov; Right: Alexandra Kollontai

Understandably, the group received significant support from workers but none from other Bolshevik leaders. Such a direct and public attack on the government was not tolerated. For a government that claimed to represent the workers, one of its own government members claiming that in reality it did not, was intolerable. Dissent within the party needed to be suppressed. The ideas of the Workers' Opposition were rejected outright, Kollontai's political career ended and the Workers' Opposition faction was banned in 1922.

14.6

SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL



Alexandra Kollontai (1872–1952)

Marxist philosophy

- Kollontai, like Trotsky and Lenin, was an international revolutionary for whom the Russian Revolution was simply one part of the worldwide struggle against capitalism.

Involvement in old regime

- Contributor to *Iskra* newspaper and wrote leaflets inciting workers to overthrow the Tsar.
- Member of the Social Democratic Workers' Party from age 17. Initially, supported the Mensheviks in the split, but joined the Bolsheviks in 1914.
- Marched with the workers during the Bloody Sunday protest in 1905.
- Taught Marxism classes to groups of workers.
- Toured America in 1916 to gain support to end the war.
- In exile in the United States with Trotsky and Bukharin on eve of 1917 February Revolution.
- The only Bolshevik leader to support Lenin's radical *April Theses* from the outset.



▲ Source 14.13 Alexandra Kollontai

Involvement in new society

- A brilliant politician.
- First and only woman elected to the Bolshevik Central Committee.
- Appointed as Commissar for Social Welfare in the new Soviet government, she became a leader in debates on women, sexuality and family.
- Became director of Zhenotdel, the Communist Party's Women's Department, in 1920.
- Opposed War Communism.
- Broke from Lenin in 1921 to lead the Workers' Opposition, which ended her political career.
- Was the Russian Ambassador to Norway, Mexico then Sweden between 1923 and 1945.

Key quotes

*An ebullient and emotional woman, prone to fall in love with young men and utopian ideas, she had thrown herself into the Bolshevik cause with all the fanaticism of the newly converted. (Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy* (1996), p. 292)*

Nothing was revolutionary enough for her. (Trotsky)

Kollontai had made her reputation as a strong defender of the rights of women. Her serious studies of the inhumane working conditions suffered by women and children in factories, along with her tracts attacking prostitution, greatly influenced the Communist Party's early attitudes, as reflected by the wide-ranging reforms regarding women which had been enacted into law. (Sally J. Taylor, historian)

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Kollontai was the only major critic of the Soviet government that Joseph Stalin, the leader after Lenin, did not have executed.

14.7 Why was the Kronstadt Revolt so threatening to the Bolsheviks?

What were the causes of the Kronstadt Revolt?

The authoritarian nature of the Bolshevik Government combined with the devastation of War Communism were direct causes of the Kronstadt Revolt. Kronstadt was an island-based fortress in the bay close to Petrograd. The soldiers and sailors based at Kronstadt were a serious threat to the government because the sailors were a highly trained military force. Complicating the issue was that they were renowned as fearless fighters who had provided the major military support for the Bolsheviks in both the 1905 and 1917 revolutions. In fact, Trotsky considered them heroes of the revolution and described them as 'reddest of the red'.

By early 1921, after three years of economic misery, Russia was economically devastated.

- Income per head had been reduced to one-third of its levels in 1913.
- Industrial production was reduced to one-fifth.
- Coal mining was one-tenth.
- Iron production was one-fortieth.
- The railway system was nearly destroyed.
- In February 1921, over 118 separate peasant uprisings were reported.
- In January 1921, the government announced that the already poor bread ration for Moscow and Petrograd was to be reduced by one-third. (Not a single train load of grain had arrived in Moscow warehouses during the first two weeks of February.)



KEY
STATISTIC

285

These poor economic and political conditions provided a foundational grievance for the Kronstadt sailors. A major crisis loomed because the fledgling government's fragile hold on power meant that it was too weak to withstand any major criticism or disunity. The government had to fight desperately. Lose against Kronstadt and the government would have lost its country.

What was the Kronstadt threat?

The most formidable opposition to the Soviet government came from the internal 'enemy'; when the sailors from Kronstadt challenged the very legitimacy of the new regime. Their 'uprising' in March 1921 came in two forms: first, a political attack on the regime through a civil rights petition that was drafted at a general meeting on 1 March 1921; and second, a military attack on the regime. Historian Orlando Figes describes Russia being on the brink of a third revolution as the key elements of national discontent and a willingness to use force against the ruling elite were activated. All classes of citizens united in opposition to the Soviet regime.



▲ Source 14.14 Map of Kronstadt Bay: the island fortress is only approximately 30 kilometres west of Petrograd.

The Revolt itself

KEY
EVENT



At the core of the Kronstadt Revolt was a declaration of war on the Soviet regime. The sailors hoisted the flag of revolt and added their considerable weight to the thousands of strikers and deserters from the Red Army. They declared they would fight until Soviet rule was overthrown. However, the Soviet forces defeated the revolvers at the Krassnaya Gorka garrison, and then secured a nearby base from which to launch repeated attacks against the island-based Kronstadt garrison. The regime was determined to defeat the sailors before the ice melted.

Lenin's severe response indicates the depth of the threat. He unleashed his two harshest weapons from the Civil War: the Red Army and the Cheka, commanded by Trotsky himself. After days of cannon fire and bombardment, Trotsky ordered the invasion of the Kronstadt garrison on 17 March. The Soviet victory is described in a newspaper article in *The Times* on 19 March 1921.

THE BATTLE OF KRONSTADT

- ALL DAY STRUGGLE
- 15 000 MEN SURRENDER

(From our own correspondent.)
Stockholm, March 18.

Kronstadt fell at 11 o'clock last night. The fortress succumbed to a combined attack of the Soviet troops, numbering 60 000 men led by Trotsky himself.

The Red soldiers converged upon Kronstadt from Oranienbaum, Peterhof, Systerbak and Krassnaya

Gorka, while those forts poured a murderous fire over the heads of the advancing troops on the battlements of the fortress.

The progress of the attack and the desperate defence of the garrison were watched by spectators on the

Finnish coast, where the tremendous cannonading seemed to make the very beach tremble. Red troops clad in white overcoats could be clearly seen early in the morning sunshine marching towards the fort, which sent back an answering fire. Until 3:30 in the afternoon the fire from the batteries of Todtleben, Obtutcherov, Riss and Schnatz continued uninterruptedly, sometimes mingled with the rattle of machine-guns.

After that, however, the fire of those forts seemed to be gradually falling off till it ceased altogether about 9 p.m.

Deserters were seen leaving the fortress and hurrying across the ice to the Finnish frontier. On reaching the coast these fugitives stated that the fortress could not hold out much longer. The garrison was exhausted. The gunners had been at their posts since last Tuesday

without being relieved and were unable to go on. From Oranienbaum, where Trotsky had collected the whole Soviet Seventh Army Corps, the Reds had stormed the Petrogradskaya gate and penetrated into the fortress, where they were joined by the Communists in Kronstadt.

The storm troops, the fugitives added, had been at first repulsed by machine-gun fire, but the forts had been taken when they left. Todtleben and Obrutcherov being the last to surrender.

Some time after 11 in the evening about 800 men, among them all the leaders of the Kronstadt Revolt, reached the Finnish coast. Kronstadt had capitulated. They had been allowed or had managed to escape and find refuge in Finland, while the garrison of the fortress about 15 000 men submitted to the Soviet.

Source 14.15 From *The Times*, 19 March 1921

▼ Source 14.16 The Red Army attacks the Kronstadt naval base across the frozen bay



KRONSTADT FACT FILE

The dates

The uprising began on 26 February and continued through to the defeat of Kronstadt on 17 March. This was the same time as the Tenth Party Congress in Moscow.

The players

16 000 sailors at Kronstadt Naval Base; 60 000 Red Army soldiers under Trotsky.

The action

Days of bombardment and hard fighting ended with Trotsky's forces invading the Kronstadt garrison across the ice.

The result

More than 12 000 sailors fled across the ice to Finland; more than 2000 others were executed by the Red Army.



▲ Source 14.17 Kronstadt victims

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 14.1: IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE



Writers can use language to influence readers' perceptions. Words have positive or negative connotations that convey the deeper opinion of the author.

- 1 What is implied in each of the following ways of describing the crisis at the Kronstadt garrison: mutiny, revolt, revolution, uprising, protest and counter-revolutionary movement?
- 2 Which term is adopted in this chapter? What impression does this term give?
- 3 Which term would you have chosen? Explain why.

Analysis of Kronstadt – Ideological crisis from within

The core crisis of Kronstadt was ideological rather than military. While the Bolsheviks were able to unite under the flag of patriotism in order to defeat the external threats during the Civil War, they were now confronted by the enemy within. The very people who Lenin claimed to be representing were actively and openly attacking the new government. Ironically, the sailors used Marx's directive that 'you have nothing to lose but your chains!' as inspiration to fight *against* communist rule. The peasants, workers, soldiers and sailors were willing to die in their opposition to Bolshevism. Kronstadt was a significant threat because the sailors had been at the vanguard of support for the Bolsheviks since the 1905 Revolution. Lenin was most concerned about opposition from within

factionalism disputes between two or more groups acting in self-interest within a larger group

the leadership of the party itself. Notable leaders like Alexandra Kollontai had led a Workers' Opposition movement, highlighting the economic and political failures of the party. It is no surprise therefore that the essential theme at the Tenth Party Congress was 'unity and cohesion of the ranks of the Party'. **Factionalism** was deemed 'harmful and impermissible' as it could be used by enemies of the party 'to widen the cleavage and use it for counter-revolutionary purposes' (Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 32).

14.8 How did the Bolsheviks defend their use of force?

Defence 1 – Trotsky defends his action by criticising the sailors

Trotsky changed his previously glowing narrative about the sailors, from core revolutionaries to counter revolutionaries. He now accused the sailors of having been unreliable ever since the October Revolution, and therefore key tools for the counter-revolutionary movement:

Beginning as early as 1918, the fronts began to complain that the new contingents of 'Kronstadters' were unsatisfactory, exacting, undisciplined, unreliable in battle, and doing more harm than good ... It would seem that the Bolsheviks marched with bared chests across the ice against the fortress only because of their evil characters and their hatred of the Kronstadt sailors ... Is this not childish prattle? ... The critics try to suggest that everything would have ended in general satisfaction if only the revolution had left the insurgent sailors alone. Unfortunately, the world counterrevolution would in no case have left them alone.

Source 14.18 Trotsky, 'Hue and cry over Kronstadt', *New International*, April 1938

Defence 2 – Trotsky argues that defeating the sailors was necessary to defend the revolution

The following extract was taken from an article by Abbie Bakan called 'A Tragic Necessity', first printed in the *Socialist Workers Review* in November 1990:

The repression of the Kronstadt revolt was a necessity because there is no question that if the Kronstadt rebellion had been successful, it would have been, as Lenin said, 'a step, a ladder, a bridge' to the victory of counter revolution. Its success would have opened the way for the restoration of the Whites, the reactionary forces uniting monarchists, social democratic Mensheviks and foreign armies in a massive assault on the fledgling and isolated workers state.

Source 14.19 Bakan, 'A Tragic Necessity', *Socialist Workers Review*, November 1990

Defence 3 – Eyewitness Victor Serge defends the government's use of force

Victor Serge was an ex-anarchist who, despite initially being repulsed by the massacre, later believed the crushing of the sailors to have been a political necessity:

After many hesitations, and with unutterable anguish, my Communist friends and I finally declared ourselves on the side of the Party. This is why ... the country was absolutely exhausted and production was practically at a standstill; there were no reserves of any kind, not even reserves of stamina in the hearts of the masses ... If the Bolshevik dictatorship fell, it was only a short step to chaos, and through chaos to a peasant rising, the massacre of the Communists, the return of the émigrés, and, in the end, through sheer force of events, another dictatorship, this time anti-proletarian.

Source 14.20 Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary 1901–41*

FOCUS QUESTION 14.2

1 How did Serge argue that crushing Kronstadt was necessary?



▲ Source 14.21 A sailor from Kronstadt being interrogated



▲ Source 14.22 (LEFT) Part of the remaining buildings at Kronstadt garrison today, during winter; (RIGHT) inside one of the fortifications

THE STORY SO FAR

- Economic policies that were introduced during the Civil War were collectively called War Communism. The most hated policies were conscription and grain requisitioning.
- Despite winning the Civil War and consolidating the revolution, Lenin was left presiding over a war-torn and starving nation. The famine of 1921 resulted in millions of deaths and a failing economy.
- The sailors at the Kronstadt garrison, close to Petrograd, published a petition attacking the dominant rule of the Bolsheviks and requesting political and social freedoms.
- Lenin – through Trotsky, the Red Army and the Cheka – brutally attacked and defeated the Kronstadt sailors, and in doing so sent a strong message that opposition to the new government would not be accepted.

Use the QR code or visit the digital version of the book and watch the video summarising the chapter.



Develop your historical thinking skills

Define key terms

Use information from this chapter to define these key terms.

- Kronstadt
- Kulak
- War Communism

Analysing cause and consequence

Use evidence from this chapter to write short paragraph answers.

- 1 What were the consequences of the policies of War Communism?
- 2 Why was the Kronstadt Revolt such a threat to the government?

Using quotes as evidence

Write a sentence using a short phrase from one of the quotes below or contrast the views from a few quotes. You can also use any of the quotes used throughout this chapter. Quotes can be used directly or paraphrased into your own words.

I still believe fervently in the future happiness of mankind but I am sickened and disturbed by the growing sum of suffering which people have to pay as the price of their fine hopes. **Maxim Gorky, writer, in 1921**

The suppression of the Kronstadt rebellion had a shattering effect on the socialists of the world. There could be no more conclusive proof that the Bolsheviks had turned into tyrants. **Orlando Figes, historian**

The Bolsheviks took prompt and effective countermeasures to prevent the mutiny's spread: in this respect, the new totalitarian regime proved far more competent than tsarism. **Richard Pipes, historian**

The Bolsheviks killed their own most loyal supporters at Kronstadt in 1921, because they failed to understand that the revolution no longer required revolutionaries, but obedient servants. **Peter Hitchens, historian**

Lenin apparently never asked himself why, before 1921, the Bolsheviks were incapable of giving the people anything but chaos, civil war, hunger and terror. The fact is, the Bolsheviks had achieved their goal: the Party had power. **Dmitry Volkogonov, historian**

The Bolsheviks were forced to turn increasingly to terror to silence their political critics and subjugate a society they could not control by any other means. **Orlando Figes, historian**

There had been created a centralized, one-ideology dictatorship of a single party which permitted no challenge to its monopoly of power. **Robert Service, historian**



Analysing historical sources as evidence

Kronstadt Petition, 1 March 1921

Having heard the report of the representatives of the crews sent by the general meeting of ships' crews to Petrograd to investigate the state of affairs there, we demand:

- 1 that in view of the fact that the present soviets do not express the will of the workers and peasants, new elections by secret ballot be held immediately ...*
- 2 freedom of speech and press for workers and peasant, for anarchists and left socialist parties*
- 3 freedom of assembly for trade unions and peasant associations*
- 4 the liberation of all political prisoners of socialist parties, as well as all workers and peasants, Red Army soldiers and sailors imprisoned in connection with the working-class and peasant movements*
- 5 the abolition of all political departments because no single party should have special privileges in the propaganda of its ideas and receive funds from the state for this purpose ...*
- 6 the equalisation of the rations of all workers ...*
- 7 the abolition of the Communist fighting detachments in all military units, as well as various Communist guards kept on duty in factories ...*
- 8 that the peasants be given the right and freedom of actions to do as they please with all the land and also the right to have cattle which they themselves must maintain and manage ...*
- 9 we request all military units, as well as the comrades ... endorse our resolution*
- 10 we demand that all resolutions be widely published in the press.*

Source 14.23 Cited in Daborn, *Russia: Revolution and Counter-Revolution 1917–1924*, pp. 122–3

- 1 Analyse the following topics in the petition. What were the sailors' main demands on these issues? List the demand number that helped you develop this point of view.
 - a soviets
 - b Communist (Bolshevik) Party
 - c social issues
 - d economic issues
- 2 Which 'demand' do you consider to be most threatening to the Bolsheviks? Explain why.

Analysing historian's interpretations

Debate: Was the crushing of the Kronstadt Revolt justified?

Sean McMeekin (1974–present)

Nationality: American historian specialising in early twentieth century Europe

Helpful book: *The Russian Revolution: A New History*, Basic Books, New York, 2017



▲ Source 14.24 Sean McMeekin

Point of view

Historian McMeekin criticises Trotsky and Lenin for being uniquely hypocritical – for killing the proletariat they claimed to represent.

Reasons (evidence)

The evidence is simply in the numbers: 60 000 army versus 16 000 sailors. The government made sure that it would win easily to send a strong message that opposition would not be tolerated.

Quote

Trotsky's assault on Kronstadt in March 1921 marked a point of no return. There was no longer even a whiff of pretense that the Communist government had the support of the people over whom it ruled. The Red Terror had been aimed at 'class enemies'; the Civil War was a struggle against 'imperialists and White Guards'. Even the peasant wars had pitted, in theory at least, proletarians against 'capitalist farmers'. But now the world's first 'proletarian' government had begun slaughtering urban proletarians, too. It is no wonder that 'Kronstadt' became, in addition to a black mark on Trotsky's record, a byword of Bolshevik betrayal for European socialists who refused to bow to Moscow.

What's your point of view?

What's your point of view about whether the government's defeat of the Kronstadt Revolt was necessary?



**ИЗ РОССИИ
НЭПОВСКОЙ
БУДЕТ РОССИЯ
СОЦИАЛИСТИЧЕСКАЯ
(ЛЕНИН)**

**15 GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: NEW
ECONOMIC POLICY, 1921–27**

*One small step back in order to take the last big step into
Communism.*

– LENIN

Overview

The more significant a crisis, the greater the need for a radical response. The crisis of the Civil War had significant impact on the new nation. Famine. Uprisings. Revolts. Discontent. Worker and peasant grievances needed to be listened to and addressed. 'Green' peasant rebellions needed to stop. The famine needed to be solved. Peasants needed to produce more grain. Lenin said: 'The national economy must be put back on its feet at all costs. The first thing to do is to restore, consolidate and improve peasant farming.' This chapter explores the economic differences between War Communism and the New Economic Policy, and the outcomes of the new policy.

Key issues

After completing this chapter, you should be able to answer these questions.

- What was the economic impact of the New Economic Policy?
- Why did State Capitalism create an ideological crisis?
- What were the long-term outcomes of the New Economic Policy?

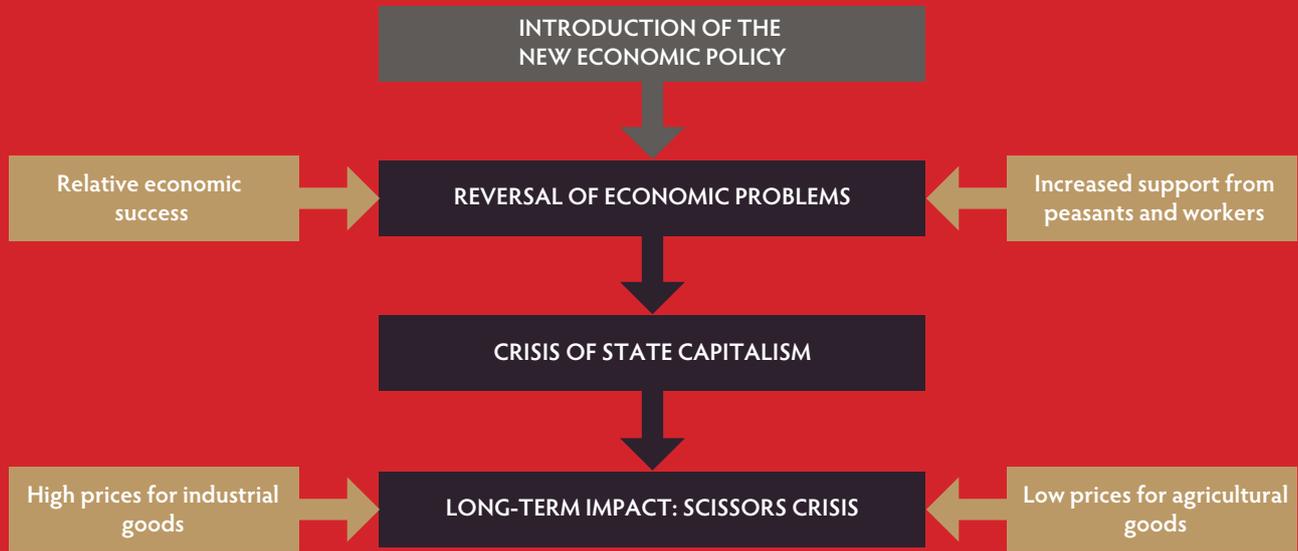
Digital resources for this chapter

In the Interactive Textbook:

-  Video and audio sources and questions
-  Digital activities

◀ **Source 15.0** 'From the NEP Russia will come the Socialist Russia!', Gustav Klutsis, 1930

Flow of chapter



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Chapter timeline

What are the key events of the Russian Revolution covered in this chapter?

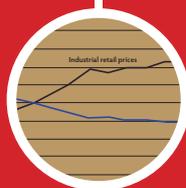
MARCH 1921

*Tenth Party Congress
New Economic Policy introduced*



1927

New Economic Policy removed



1923

Scissors Crisis

15.1 What was the focus of the Tenth Party Congress and the New Economic Policy?

Although he had already been thinking about the need for an economic change, Lenin recognised that the Kronstadt Revolt ‘lit up reality better than anything else’. Kronstadt forced Lenin to act. Hence, the overt focus of the Tenth Communist Party Congress in Moscow on 8–16 March 1921 was ‘unity’. Unity was not a luxury but a political imperative. The regime was facing a massive challenge not just to its legitimacy but to its very survival.



KEY
EVENT

External opposition plus opposition within the party itself needed to be defeated. Internal threats such as Kollontai’s Workers Opposition were more easily rectified with a resolution ‘On Party Unity’ where factions within the party were banned. Solving the economic discontent, however, was far more problematic. Lenin’s decisive response to the long-term economic crisis was to introduce a New Economic Policy (commonly referred to as the NEP). War Communism was over. The new policy not only replaced but reversed the policies of War Communism – practically and ideologically. Ironically, some of the demands of the Kronstadt petition were satisfied by this new policy, which was being formulated and introduced in Moscow at the same time as the sailors were being crushed in Petrograd.

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

When challenged about the introduction of the NEP at the Tenth Party Congress, Lenin reportedly replied in an angry voice, ‘Please don’t try teaching me what to include and what to leave out of Marxism: eggs don’t teach their hens how to lay!’

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 15.1: HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS



Historian Figes attempts to summarise the depth of threats in 1921 by explaining the connection between the economic crisis, the Kronstadt Revolt and the introduction of the NEP:

As the urban food crisis deepened and more and more workers went on strike, it became clear that the Bolsheviks were facing a revolutionary situation. Lenin was thrown into panic: every day he bombarded the local Red commanders with violent demands for the swiftest possible suppression of the revolts by whatever means. ‘We are barely holding on,’ he acknowledged in March. The peasant wars, he told the opening session of the Tenth Party Congress on 8 March, were ‘far more dangerous than all of the Denikins, Yudeniches and Kolchaks put together.’ Together with the strikes and the Kronstadt mutiny of March, they would force the Congress to abandon finally the widely hated policies of War Communism and restore free trade under the NEP. It was a desperate bid to stem the tide of this popular revolution. Having defeated the Whites, who were backed by no fewer than eight Western powers, the Bolsheviks surrendered to the peasantry.

Source 15.1 Figes, *A People’s Tragedy* (1996), p. 758

- 1 According to Figes, what was Lenin’s reaction to the deepening ‘revolutionary situation’?
- 2 According to Figes, what motivated Lenin to introduce the NEP?
- 3 Figes describes the opposition to Soviet rule as a ‘popular revolution’. To what extent do you agree with this analysis? Use examples from the crises of 1921 to support your answer.



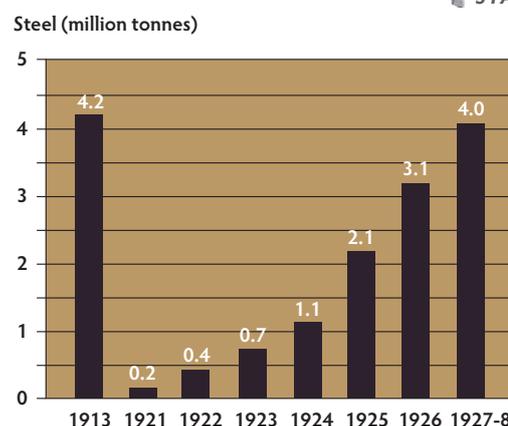
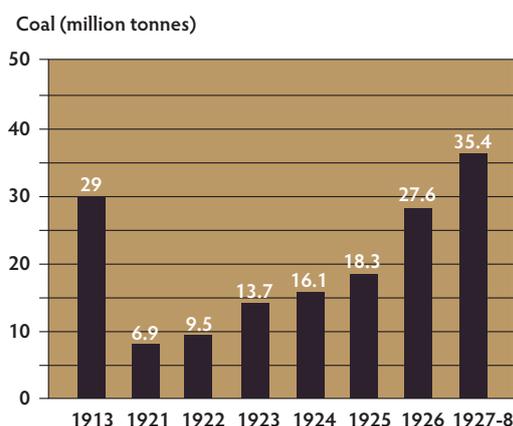
Comparing War Communism and the New Economic Policy

	War Communism, 1918–21	New Economic Policy, 1921–27
Why introduced?	Every aspect of economic and social life had to be directed to winning the Civil War.	To primarily provide food for a starving population that in turn would regain public confidence in the Bolshevik government.
Key characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A planned and deliberate policy ▪ Discriminated against the peasants through heavy food requisitioning ▪ No choice for peasants as surplus confiscated ▪ State control over the economy ▪ Industry and production limited ▪ Consistent with communist ideals ▪ Attempted socialism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unplanned and a simple reaction to the economic crisis of 1920–21 ▪ Favoured the peasants through less tax and greater rewards and incentives for producing a surplus ▪ Extra choice for peasants with their surplus ▪ Individual private control over the economy ▪ Industry and production encouraged ▪ A departure from communist ideals ▪ Allowing aspects of capitalism
<p>KEY QUOTE  Key quote</p>	<p><i>'War Communism ... involved the drastic mobilization of the whole national economy to serve the needs of war ... it meant attacking the interests of the mass of the peasants and workers.'</i></p> <p>(Thomson, <i>Europe Since Napoleon</i>, p. 584)</p>	<p><i>'The NEP was, in the space of a few months, already giving marvellous results. From one week to the next, the famine and the speculation were diminishing perceptibly ... the public were beginning to recover its breath.'</i></p> <p>(Serge, <i>Memoirs of a Revolutionary 1901–41</i>, p. 147)</p>
Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Widespread famine ▪ Industrial and agricultural production fell alarmingly ▪ Widespread anti-Bolshevik uprisings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Grain harvest doubled between 1921 and 1925 ▪ Railways transported twice as much and average monthly wage of factory worker increased by 150% ▪ Greater support from peasants and workers yet confusion from party members and Civil War veterans
Overall analysis	Economic failure	Initial economic success; long-term problems

Results of the New Economic Policy

Compared to the devastation of War Communism, it was an immediate success but was not without its problems. A reintroduction of capitalist practices stimulated the economy.

Russian Industry, 1913–28



Russian Agriculture, 1913–28

	Sown area (million of hectares)	Grain harvest (million of tonnes)
1913	105.6	80.0
1922	77.7	50.3
1925	104.3	72.5
1928		74.4

▲ Source 15.2 Comparison of Russian industry and agriculture, 1913–28. As sourced from Christopher Condon, *The Making of the Modern World* (1987), Macmillan

FOCUS QUESTIONS 15.1

- 1 Why is 1921 the lowest year of production?
- 2 Why did the New Economic Policy improve the economy?

15.2 Why did State Capitalism create an ideological crisis?

Lenin's justification of the NEP – 'bridled capitalism'

Economic improvement created ideological problems. According to Lenin, the NEP was the economic equivalent to the Treaty of Brest–Litovsk – a necessary step despite some problems. He defined the NEP as 'State Capitalism' whereby there was a temporary coexistence of private property with communist property. And this basic plan proved accurate. As historian Michael Adcock states 'the economy quickly struck a comfortable balance between state-run big business and privately-owned small enterprise'.



Lenin publicly defended the shift to the NEP by arguing at the party conference: ‘You must first attempt to build small bridges which shall lead a land of small peasant holdings through State Capitalism to Socialism. Otherwise you will never lead tens of millions of people to Communism.’ Perhaps the best summary of Lenin’s perspective was that the NEP was ‘bridled capitalism’ – capitalism that was restrained, controlled and exploited.

Behind closed doors, however, Lenin admitted that the NEP was a final desperate attempt to respond to an economic crisis that limited the future development of the revolution. In probably one of Lenin’s frankest and rarest admissions of failure, he admitted to a meeting of party delegates that ‘the real meaning of the New Economic Policy is that we have met a great defeat in our plans and that we are now making a strategic retreat’.

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Lenin once said that gold ‘should be used to make toilets after the victory of socialism to remind people of capitalist waste’. Hong Kong jeweller Lam Sai Wing was so inspired by Lenin’s words that he built a 24-carat solid gold toilet. The toilet is valued at A\$5.88 million and has been recognised by the Guinness Book of World Records as the planet’s most expensive toilet. It sits in a garish bathroom in his showroom, complete with gold fittings and a gold toilet brush holder.



Lenin’s economic realism

If nothing else, Lenin was pragmatic. Practical. Real. Improvising, compromise and persuasion were qualities that Lenin used to save the regime from collapse. Introducing the NEP was an excellent example of this. While War Communism was ideologically correct, it provoked serious problems and resentment. Lenin did not reveal an economic blueprint or master plan to address the economic crisis; he simply adjusted his policies in response to changing circumstances. Despite allowing elements of capitalism, the government still retained control of industry, mining, heavy manufacturing and banking. Lenin’s arguments in support of the introduction of the NEP – that ‘War Communism ... was forced on us by extreme want, ruin and war’ and that ‘we must not be afraid of Communists “learning” from bourgeois experts’ – must have been uttered through clenched ideological teeth.

Pragmatism versus idealism

Debates about the change from War Communism to the NEP hinged on ideological versus pragmatic interpretations of the shift. Those favouring pragmatic considerations welcomed the change as the previous policy had failed. Those favouring ideological considerations, however, perceived the change to be undermining the foundations of the party. For traditional communists, the NEP was nothing short of treason.

15.3 What were the long-term outcomes of the New Economic Policy?

Problem 1 – Unequal recovery

A foundational problem with the NEP was that agriculture and industry recovered at different rates. Peasants responded immediately to the removal of War Communism and new capitalist NEP freedoms by planting more crops which boosted agricultural production in one growing season. This was helped by booming harvests in 1922 and 1923. Industry, however, was much slower to recover after the damaging war years because restoring industry required investment in factories and machinery. Lenin's hopes that foreign countries would invest in Russian industry were not realised. So while agriculture and peasantry recovered quickly, industry and urban workers recovered more slowly. This unequal recovery formed the basis of the following two further problems.



▲ Source 15.3 'Against the Kulak's Howl – A Concerted, Collective Front to Sow. Poor and middle peasants, increase sowing, introduce industrial crops, strengthen your household.'



Problem 2 – Creation of kulaks and NEPmen

The NEP had an immediate positive impact on peasants. As they now had a greater incentive to work more, production rose. Controlling the surplus meant that peasants could acquire surplus goods, buy more land and hire labour. Ironically, this created an affluent peasant class of kulak which Lenin had directly tried to eliminate during the Civil War years.

Urban workers in villages and towns also benefited. Trade was now permitted throughout the country. Currency was introduced. A State Bank was created. Private retail shops reopened. As a result, occupations such as shopkeepers, salesmen and market stall holders grew moderately wealthy from capitalist profiteering that had been illegal under War Communism. Commercial middlemen, this class of new money, were called **NEPmen**. Showing off wealth incensed the industrial workers and pure communists because it questioned the most basic communist ideal of socio-economic equality for all citizens. The NEP seemed to block the creation of a pure communist society.

NEPmen a new class who became wealthy from capitalist practices now allowed by the NEP



▲ Source 15.4 The new types of visibly affluent people that emerged after the implementation of the New Economic Policy. *NEPmen* by Dmitri Kardovsky, 1920s

Trotsky wrote a critical article in the Bolshevik newspaper *Pravda* on 16 May 1923 called ‘The Struggle of Cultured Speech’. In the article, Trotsky discussed the contrasting images in Russian society. One of the portraits he painted is of the ‘domineering buccaneer’ – a greedy selfish man making profits from the New Economic Policy.

Our life in Russia is made up of the most striking contrasts – in economics as well as in everything else. In the very center of the country, close to Moscow, there are miles of swamps, of impassable roads – and close by you might suddenly see a factory which would impress a European or American engineer by its technical equipment. Similar contrasts abound in our national life. Side by side with some old-fashioned type of domineering rapacious buccaneer, who has come to life again in the present generation, who has passed through revolution and expropriation, engaged in swindling and in masked and legalised profiteering, preserving intact all the while his suburban vulgarity and greediness – we see the best type of communists of the working class who devote their lives day by day to the interests of the world’s proletariat, and are ready to fight at any given moment for the cause of the revolution in any country.



▲ Source 15.6 The Universal Passage Store in Petrograd (then Leningrad), 1924



AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

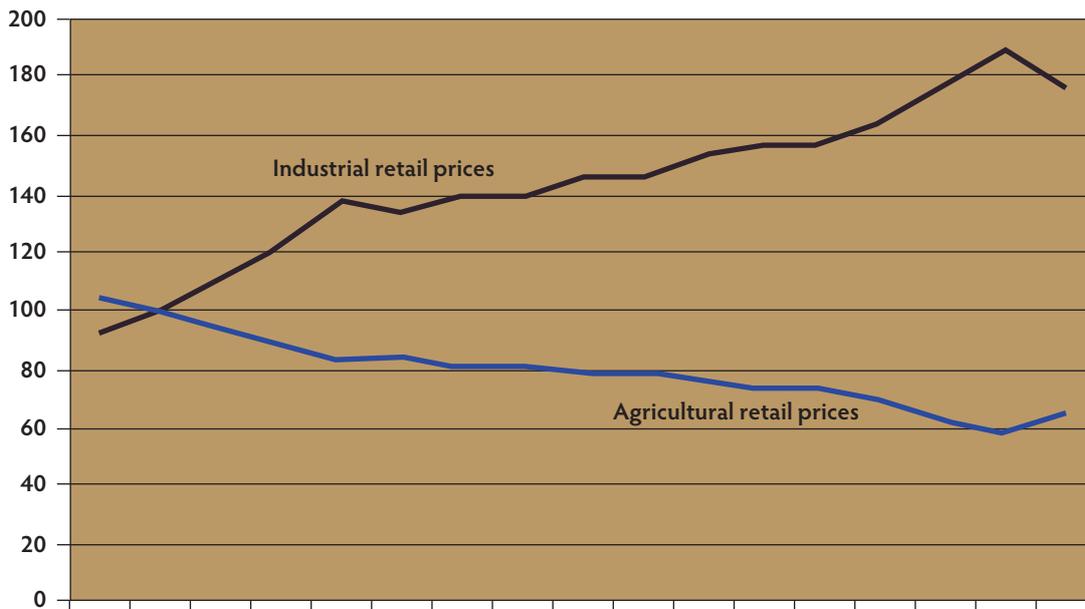
'Pudding is not a luxury, but a basic means of nutrition.'

– Line used by fictional NEPman character Ostap Bender in a 1920s Russian novel

Problem 3 – Creation of a 'scissors crisis', 1923

KEY STATISTIC 

While the early economic gains of the NEP were promising, the economic 'success' did not last. By 1923 there was a concerning trend. Trotsky identified the deeper danger of unequal recovery between agriculture and industry. Peasants growing and selling more food increased their income and therefore their buying power. However, goods manufactured in factories were in limited supply given the slow recovery of the industrial sector. Low production kept prices high. So this is where the unequal recovery became a serious problem – the price for agricultural goods decreased (due to oversupply) as prices for industrial goods increased (due to limited supply). This trend peaked in October 1923 when industrial prices soared to 290 per cent compared with their levels in 1913, while agricultural goods dropped to only 89 per cent of their 1913 levels. Trotsky named this problem the 'scissors crisis' because the graph showing the differences in the prices looked like an open pair of scissors.



▲ Source 15.7 A graph illustrating the 'scissors crisis'. Data based on *Bulleten Gosplana 1923* (Gosplan Bulletin 1923), taken from Mark Harrison (2008), 'Prices in the Politburo, 1927: Market Equilibrium Versus the Use of Force'.

Negative consequences of the NEP, 1924 to 1927

The Bolsheviks were divided about how to address the problem identified through the Scissors Crisis. Lenin could not afford another devastating famine. The left-wing members of the Bolshevik Party wanted tough actions, whereas those on the right wanted to pay higher prices to the peasants to maintain a relationship with the peasantry. The left won and the government responded by returning to the hated grain requisitioning from the Civil War years, closing down the free trade markets and shops, and reducing industrial costs. While this helped lessen the problem, it didn't solve it. The New Economic Policy had served its short-term purpose of stopping the famine and peasant revolts but had created new longer term economic and social problems, which were never fully solved. The scissors opened and never closed.

The significant consequence emerging from 1923 was a sharpened opposition to the NEP – why? Reasons include:

- ideological opposition to capitalism
- opposition to private trade and NEPmen

- inflation of currency
- peasant incomes falling dramatically
- fear of grain strikes by peasants
- peasants reverting to hoarding grain to force prices up
- peasants reverting to subsistence farming – that is, producing only enough to eat
- weaker harvest in 1927.

End of the NEP, 1927

The years between 1924 and 1927 saw a growing desire to transform Russia's dependence on agriculture into becoming a powerful industrial nation. Forced industrialisation – by the government investing heavily in factories, machinery and technology – would truly create a proletarian society and improve the standard of living for workers. Rapid industrialisation would also prepare Russia in case of another world war, which by 1927 seemed a horrible possibility. As a result, the NEP was ended at the Fifteenth Party Congress in December 1927 to be replaced by a Five-Year Plan aimed at directly targeting industrial growth.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 15.2: COMPARATIVE VISUAL ANALYSIS



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Life under the communist regime

Source A: *Negative perspective*

This poster was produced by Dmitry Moor in 1921 and the very title of 'Help!' demonstrates people's desperation under the communist regime.



◀ Source 15.8 'Help!' by Moor

continued ...



... continued

Source B: Positive perspective

This painting is by Stepan Karpov, 1924. It depicts peasants, industrial workers and soldiers working together to celebrate unity of life under the Communist Party (СССР).



▲ Source 15.9 Karpov's 1924 painting, *Friendship of the Peoples*

- 1 Explain the class, clothing and body language of the central figure in **Source A**.
- 2 Identify and explain each of the positive symbols in **Source B**.
- 3 Using **both sources**, compare the main messages about life under communism.
- 4 Which of the sources best represents your perception of life in the communist regime from 1917 to 1927?

THE STORY SO FAR

- Despite winning the Civil War and consolidating the revolution, Lenin was left presiding over a war-torn and starved nation. The famine of 1920–21 resulted in millions of deaths and a failing economy. A radical response was needed.
- Lenin replaced the failed War Communism with the New Economic Policy (NEP), which finally began to bring hope to the troubled nation. Agricultural production increased dramatically, making the NEP an immediate economic success.
- By allowing the introduction of capitalist practices, the NEP undermined socialist ideals which created intense ideological disharmony within the party.
- By 1923, significant economic problems were obvious, with prices of industrial goods high but prices of agricultural goods low. Trotsky called this graph the 'scissors crisis'.
- By 1927, the NEP was replaced by a project that targeted boosting industrial resources and production.

Use the QR code or visit the digital version of the book and watch the video summarising the chapter.



Develop your historical thinking skills

Define key terms

Use information from this chapter to define these key terms.

- NEPmen
- New Economic Policy
- Scissors Crisis

Establishing historical significance

Use evidence from this chapter to write short paragraph answers.

- 1 Outline the main differences between War Communism and the New Economic Policy.
- 2 Explain why the New Economic Policy provoked ideological debate.
- 3 Explain the outcomes of the New Economic Policy, including the ‘scissors crisis’.

Using quotes as evidence

Write a sentence using a short phrase from one of the quotes below or contrast the views from a few quotes. You can also use any of the quotes in this chapter. Quotes can be used directly or paraphrased in your own words.

Let us retreat and construct everything in a new and solid manner; otherwise we shall be beaten.

Vladimir Lenin

The Bolsheviks were transformed from a party of insurrection into a party of state builders.

S.A. Smith, historian

Ultimately, it would be the abandonment of food requisitioning that pacified the countryside and saved the Bolsheviks. **Richard Pipes, historian**

Lenin foresaw that force alone would not be enough to quell the peasants, and he decided that in order to sustain the political dictatorship he had to offer economic relaxations. **Robert Service, historian**

Lenin always insisted that the New Economic Policy introduced in 1921 was really the old economic policy of 1918, but he never attempted to disguise the fact that it was a large-scale retreat, another breathing space, a Brest–Litovsk on the economic front. **Christopher Hill, historian**

Bolshevism proved less a doctrine than a technique of action for the seizing and holding of power.

Leonard Shapiro, historian



Analysing historical sources as evidence

Despite the economic troubles of the early years of the communist regime, propaganda continually told a different story. This 1922 poster boasts about the abilities of the Russian industrial worker; that the NEP was successful.



Source 15.10 Poster, 'Three years of proletarian dictatorship' (1922)

- 1 What visual clues are given to suggest the power of the central proletariat figure?
- 2 There are no peasants in this image. Why might this be the case and why is this a problem?
- 3 What is the main message of this propaganda poster? Do you agree?

Analysing historian's interpretations

Debate: Did Lenin's shift to the NEP bring more benefits than problems?

Sheila Fitzpatrick

Nationality: Australian

Helpful book: *The Russian Revolution*, Oxford, 1982

Point of view

Lenin was a persuasive leader who made strong decisions. And the NEP was the right decision. It saved his regime and was therefore his biggest achievement.

Reasons (evidence)

Given the dire economic misery under War Communism, the NEP provided the much-needed boost to the economy which both saved the country from starvation and the regime from collapse.

Quote

The NEP was 'an improvised response to desperate economic circumstance, undertaken initially with very little discussion and debate in the party and the leadership. The beneficial impact on the economy was swift and dramatic.'

What's your point of view?

What's your point of view about whether Lenin's shift to the NEP brought more benefits than problems?



▲ Source 15.11 Sheila Fitzpatrick

16

LENIN'S FINAL YEARS AND KEY DEBATES

There was no private Lenin behind the public mask. He gave all of himself to politics. He rarely showed emotions, he had few intimates, and everything he ever said or wrote was intended only for the revolutionary cause. He was not a man but a political machine.

– ORLANDO FIGES, HISTORIAN



Overview

Lenin is the key to understanding the Russian Revolution. Even Trotsky argued that the revolution would not have happened without Lenin. He was a visionary revolutionary who adapted Marxist theory to suit the practical realities of a backward Russia – a cause to which he had devoted his whole life. It is crucial to examine the final years of Lenin's life from 1922 to 1924. True priorities are revealed in the final throes of a person's life. So what mattered to Lenin? Lenin's use of violence has become a problematic issue for historians, not in terms of whether Lenin employed it or not, as this is unanimously accepted, but rather in the interpretation of it.

Key issues

After completing this chapter, you should be able to answer these questions.

- How did Lenin impose absolute control?
- What was the nature of Lenin's illness and what were the reactions to his death?
- What were Lenin's final political concerns?
- What were the key debates about Lenin?

Digital resources for this chapter

In the *Interactive Textbook*:

-  Video and audio sources and questions
-  Digital activities

Flow of chapter



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Chapter timeline

What are the key events of the Russian Revolution covered in this chapter?

1921
Ban on factions and other parties

1922
Lenin's first of three strokes

1924
Lenin's death



1922
Formation of the USSR

1923
Bureaucratic nature of the party

16.1 How did Lenin impose absolute control?

Lenin began a purge of members of opposing political parties who were critical of the Bolshevik leadership. While the Tenth Party Congress in March 1921 requested unity, Lenin now enforced compliance. This process was known as eliminating ‘radishes’ – those who were red on the outside but really white on the inside! The Cheka was given unquestioned authority and, by the end of 1922, about one-quarter of the party membership had been expelled. Bureaucrats now controlled the party. This was the type of revolutionary party that Lenin had been advocating ever since the split with the Mensheviks in 1903: stern, disciplined, devoted and organised. Hence, a new system of bureaucratic centralism developed as the main form of government.

Political aftermath of 1921

1921: Ban on factions and political parties

Criticism of Lenin's leadership within the Party became more public in 1920 and 1921 due to the Famine and Kronstadt. Decisions were made at the Tenth Party Congress in March 1921 to ensure unity. Factional groups such as Kollontai's Workers' Opposition were banned, and similarly, opposition parties such as the Mensheviks were made illegal.

1922: Formation of the USSR

After February 1917, six provinces in the former Russian Empire chose to become independent Soviet republics. All signed the Treaty on the Creation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1922. Russia now became known as the USSR or Soviet Union. The government of the USSR was in Moscow. The USSR remained joined in this union until 1991.

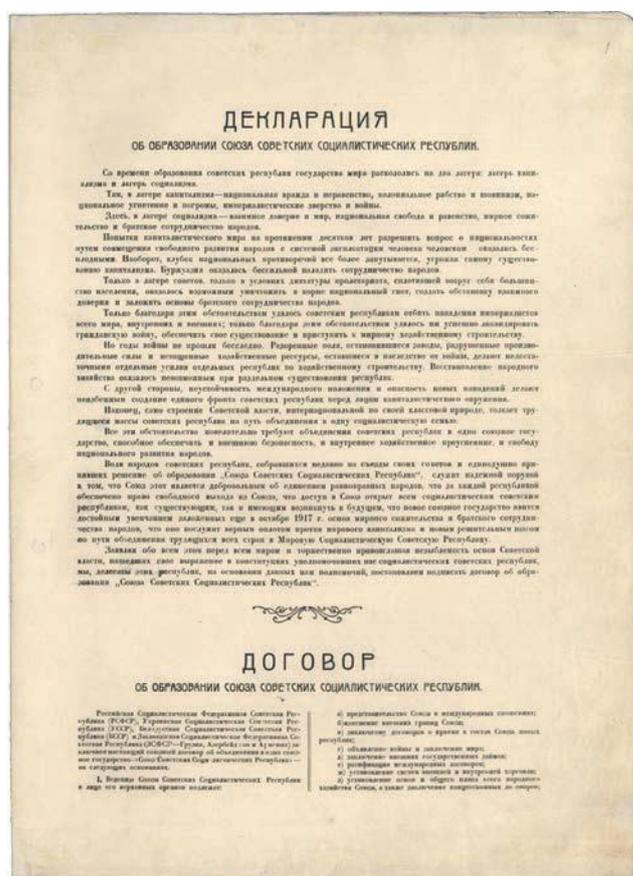
1923: Bureaucratic nature of the party

By 1923 the die was cast ... the once competent, combative, and cultivated elite were supplanted by squadrons of colorless yes-men. Strong personalities such as Alexandra Kollontai were removed or liquidated.

Source 16.2 F. Navailh "The Soviet Model." From: *A History of Women in the West. Toward a Cultural Identity in the Twentieth Century* (1994)

1924: Secret police

The Cheka was abolished in February 1922 and replaced by the GPU (State Political Organisation) and in 1924 by the OGPU (Unified State Political Organisation). Felix Dzerzhinsky was the head of each of these secret police organisations.



▲ **Source 16.1** Treaty on the Creation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, 1922

SUMMARISING LENIN'S GOVERNMENTAL ACHIEVEMENTS

- 1 Introduced a socialist society.
- 2 World War One peace treaty, March 1918.
- 3 Decree on Land, November 1917.
- 4 Social transformation (education, judicial equality and relative freedoms for women).
- 5 Defeated counter-revolution in Civil War.
- 6 Defeated foreign intervention in Civil War.
- 7 Created 'unity':
 - a Dismissed Constituent Assembly, 1918
 - b Crushed Kronstadt sailors, 1921
 - c Abolished all political parties, 1922.
- 8 Stabilised the economy by replacing failed War Communism with New Economic Policy, 1921.

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Lenin started the revolution with a Renault and, like Trotsky, had a Rolls Royce by the end of the Civil War. Luxury and privilege were not denied.

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16.2 What was the nature of Lenin's illness and what were the reactions to his death?

Illness

Lenin suffered two major strokes in 1922, the first in May and the second in December. His third stroke, in March 1923, rendered him paralysed and unable to speak. The great leader of the Communist Revolution was rarely seen in person as he was confined to a wheelchair and in a frail condition. Yet, while his body was immobilised, his brain was active and he became an avid letter writer. Politburo members like Stalin and Kamenev visited him regularly, but Trotsky rarely visited.



◀ Source 16.3 Lenin in 1923, after a stroke

Reason for illness

Lenin's illness remains undiagnosed. So what was the possible cause of his strokes? In August 1918 an assassination attempt was made on Lenin's life. One bullet pierced his collar bone while another remained lodged in the base of his neck. He disregarded the constant headaches after his recovery. Bolshevik Dr Forster saw lead poisoning as the primary reason for his strokes and death. Despite being in good health for the two years after the assassination attempt, he began getting headaches and insomnia in 1921. In April 1922, doctors removed the bullet from his neck in an attempt to cure these illnesses and perhaps caused damage in the process. One month later, he suffered his first stroke.

Death

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin died on 21 January 1924.



Reactions to Lenin's death

Trotsky's initial grief

Lenin is no more. We have lost Lenin ... Medicine has proved itself powerless to accomplish what was passionately hoped for, what millions of hearts demanded ... And now Lenin is no more. These words descend upon our consciousness like gigantic rocks falling to the sea.

Source 16.4 Trotsky speaking at Tiflis Station, 22 January 1924

Postage stamps

The Postal Department issued a special series of stamps with Lenin's portrait.

Renaming Petrograd

Petrograd was renamed Leningrad as a permanent reminder of the Russian leader.

Public grief

The announcement was made to the delegates of the Eleventh Soviet Congress. There were screams and sobbing noises from the hall. The public showed signs of genuine grief: theatres and shops closed down for a week; portraits of Lenin, draped in red and black ribbons, were displayed in many windows ...

Source 16.6 Figes, *A People's Tragedy* (1996)



▲ Source 16.5 Stamp of Lenin issued in 1924

English newspaper article

RUSSIA HONORS DEAD DICTATOR

The Congress of the Union of the Soviet Republics ... adopted a resolution that the body should be preserved in a glass lidded coffin and be accessible to visitors as long as possible. Lenin's heart and brain will be placed in a special urn for preservation by the Lenin Institute.

Source 16.7 Extract from *The Times*, London, 28 January 1924

Trotsky's response

Death for him was merely a deliverance from physical and moral suffering ... Comrades came to demand that I write on Lenin's death at once. But I knew only one urgent desire – and that was to be alone. I could not stretch my hand to lift my pen. The text of the Moscow telegram [informing him of Lenin's death] was still resounding in my head ... I lay in bed with a temperature, and remained silent.

Source 16.8 Trotsky, *My Life*, p. 509

My son Vladimir

Many ordinary Russian parents named their newborn boys Vladimir after Lenin.

Embalmed for public viewings

Lenin's body was embalmed in a large tomb near the Kremlin shortly after his death, preserved by a steady 61 degree temperature and a strict process of mild bleachings and soaks in glycerol and potassium acetate. His body can still be visited today.

▼ Source 16.9 Soviet officials, including Felix Dzerzhinsky, visit Lenin's body in the mausoleum in Red Square.



▼ Source 16.10 Over the next three days, half a million people queued for many hours waiting to enter Lenin's mausoleum in Red Square, Moscow, merely to glimpse his embalmed corpse.



AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

There was such an overwhelming response from soldiers wanting to stand guard over Lenin's body that the number of guards had to be increased from eight to twenty-four and changed every three minutes.

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Lenin's father also died of a cerebral haemorrhage. Lenin's brain was removed before his body was embalmed so that neuroscientists could study it.

16.3 What were Lenin's final political concerns?

After his first series of strokes, Lenin dictated his *Political Will* in December 1922 against the wishes of his doctors. Despite being one of the last documents he produced, it was not openly published. Its contents were a summary of Lenin's reflections on the key leaders of the party and recommendations with regard to their appropriateness to succeed him.

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ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 16.1: LENIN'S POLITICAL WILL DOCUMENT

[25 December 1922]

By stability of the Central Committee ... I mean measures against a split. I have in mind stability as a guarantee against a split in the immediate future, and I intend to deal here with a few ideas concerning personal qualities. I think that from this standpoint the prime factors in the question of stability are such members of the C.C. as Stalin and Trotsky. I think relations between them make up the greater part of the danger of a split, which could be avoided, and this purpose, in my opinion, would be served, among other things, by increasing the numbers of the C.C. members to 50 or 100.

Comrade Stalin, having become Secretary General, has unlimited authority concentrated in his hands, and I am not sure whether he will always be capable of using that power with sufficient caution. Comrade Trotsky, on the other hand ... is distinguished not only by his outstanding ability. He is personally perhaps the most capable man in the present C.C., but he has displayed excessive self-assurance and shown excessive preoccupation with the purely administrative side of the work. These two qualities of the two outstanding leaders of the present C.C. can inadvertently lead to a split, and if our Party does not take steps to avert this, the split may come unexpectedly.

I shall not give any further appraisals of the personal qualities of other members of the C.C. [but] recall that the October episode with Zinoviev and Kamenev was no accident, but neither can the blame for it be laid upon them personally, any more than non-Bolshevism can upon Trotsky. Speaking of the young C.C. members, I wish to say a few words about Bukharin and Pyatakov. They are, in my opinion, the most outstanding figures (among the younger ones) and the following must be borne in mind about them: Bukharin is not only a most valuable and major theorist of the Party; he is also rightly considered the favourite of the whole Party, but his theoretical views can be classified as Marxist only with great reserve ... As for Pyatakov, he is unquestionably a man of outstanding will and outstanding ability, but shows too much zeal for administrating and the administrative side of the work to be relied upon in a serious political matter.

continued ...



... continued

Postscript:

Stalin is too rude and this defect, although quite tolerable in our midst and in dealings among us communists, becomes intolerable in a Secretary General. That is why I suggest that the comrades think about a way of removing Stalin from the post and appointing another man in his stead who in all other respects differ from Comrade Stalin in having only one advantage, namely that of being more tolerant, more loyal, more polite and more considerate to the comrades, less capricious, etc. This circumstance may appear to be a negligible detail. But I think that from a standpoint of safeguarding against a split and from the standpoint of what I wrote about the relationship between Stalin and Trotsky it is ... a detail which can assume decisive importance. [4 January 1923]

Source 16.11 Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 36, 1900–1923, (1966), pp. 594–6

- 1 Explain what Lenin considered to be the biggest danger facing the future of the Communist Party.
- 2 In your workbook, summarise Lenin’s key comments about each Central Committee member listed below. In the final column, choose one word that best summarises what Lenin may have thought about each person. For example, Lenin’s one-word summary of Stalin may have been ‘beware’.

Member	Praise	Criticisms	One-word summary
Stalin			Beware
Trotsky			
Bukharin			
Pyatakov			

- 3 What would the significance of this document have been to the party?
- 4 Why would it be considered a valuable source for historians?

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Lenin added the postscript to his ‘Political Will’ after Stalin had been rude to his wife, Krupskaya, on the telephone.

16.4 Problematic nature of understanding Lenin

Analysing Lenin's regime is historically problematic for several reasons. When reading the following problems, the least helpful response would be to conclude that no one can ever understand what really happened in the past. Interpreting the past is like understanding tricks of persuasion used by modern advertising and marketing, such as appeals to vanity or conformity. By understanding them, you defuse their power. By acknowledging the problematic nature of historical evidence, you become aware of the need to critically evaluate historians' arguments so that you can reach your own conclusions.

1 Problem of personal values and beliefs

If a historian likes, or at least is sympathetic to, the aims of Marxism and socialism, then it is easier to excuse Lenin's harsh methods as being a necessary response to crisis in order to achieve the worthwhile goal of socialism. Hill is a historian who fits into this category. If, however, a historian perceives the goal of socialism to be misguided in the first place, then it is likely that they will damn both the methods and outcomes as simply being a futile experiment. Pipes is one such historian.

KEY HISTORIAN



Christopher Hill (1912–2003)

At the age of 19, Hill spent a long holiday in Germany that directly radicalised his political outlook as he witnessed the rise of the Nazi Party. Upon his return to England, he became a committed Marxist and joined the Communist Party of Great Britain.

As a 23 year old, he travelled to Stalin's Russia to immerse himself in its culture, language and politics. In 1946, he helped form the Communist Party Historians Group. His interpretation, like Deutscher, was therefore favourable towards communism and the revolution. His major writing was completed during the height of communism when a Marxist perspective was the mainstream and traditional perspective of the Russian Revolution.

◀ Source 16.12 Christopher Hill

2 Problem of assessing motivation

Debates will rage eternally over whether Lenin's motivations behind his actions were pure or heartless. Consider this story. A little girl wanted to show her mother how much she loved her, so she cut some of her mum's prizewinning roses from the garden and proudly presented them to her in the kitchen. While the actual action was destroying a precious possession, the motivation was genuinely sincere. Should the girl's actions be forgiven? This is the dilemma facing historians when considering Lenin's motivations behind his actions.

3 Problem of hindsight

Lenin never lived under Stalin's regime. In fact, he warned of Stalin's potential abuse of power in his *Political Will*. However, it is difficult not to assess Lenin in the murky shadow of Stalin. Many Western historians saw Lenin as responsible for creating a structure of totalitarianism that Stalin simply exploited.

4 Problem of time

Lenin only ruled Russia for six years and three months. This was a very short period of time to transform an autocratic political system with a backward economy into a socialist utopia. But there are still further complications regarding this short period of Lenin's rule. For the first four years Lenin and Russia were involved World War One and then the Civil War, while during the last two years Lenin was under the physical restrictions of serious illness. Hence, Lenin's decisions must be analysed in the context that, of his 75 months in power, 59 per cent was spent in the emergency of war, 28 per cent was spent seriously ill, with only 13 per cent spent in peace and good health.



▲ Source 16.13 Lenin still has admirers around the world even today. Pictured is a statue of Lenin in Kolkata, India.

16.5 What were the key debates about Lenin?

Many aspects of Lenin's life and impact have provoked differing interpretations by historians. The following debates must be considered in the light of the previously mentioned problems of studying history.

- 1 Is it possible to change human nature?
- 2 Did Lenin really represent the welfare and interests of the proletariat?
- 3 Was Lenin a dictator?
- 4 Was Lenin's use of violence necessary and acceptable?

1 Is it possible to change human nature?

Communist philosophy was based on ideals of the Enlightenment thinkers who believed that human nature was a product of historical development and could therefore be transformed, renewed and refashioned to espouse a collective humanity. Core questions are whether this is indeed correct: can human nature be changed? And second, if it can, how successful was the new communist government in changing human nature in Russia?

YES

Lenin apparently said these words to great physiologist I.P. Pavlov in October 1919:

I want the masses of Russia to follow a Communistic pattern of thinking and reacting. There was too much individualism in the Russia of the past. Communism does not tolerate individualistic tendencies. They are harmful. They interfere with our plans. We must abolish individualism ... Man can be corrected. Man can be made what we want him to be.

Source 16.14 Cited in Figes, *A People's Tragedy* (1996), p. 732

YES

What is man? He is by no means a finished or harmonious being. No, he is still a highly awkward creature. Man, as an animal, has not yet evolved, by plan but spontaneously, and has accumulated many contradictions. The question of how to educate and regulate, of how to improve and complete the physical and spiritual construction of man, is a colossal problem which can only be conceived on the basis of Socialism. We can construct a railway across the Sahara, we can build the Eiffel Tower and talk directly with New York, but we surely cannot improve man. No, we can! To produce a new, 'improved version' of man – that is the future task of Communism. And for that we first have to find out everything about man, his anatomy, his physiology and that part of his physiology which is called his psychology. Man must look at himself and see himself as a raw material, or at best as a semi-manufactured product, and say: 'At last, my dear homo sapiens, I will work on you.'

Source 16.15 Trotsky as cited in Figes, *A People's Tragedy* (1996), p. 734

YES

Trotsky wrote an article in *Pravda* on 16 May 1923 called 'The Struggle of Cultured Speech'. In it, he discussed the difficulty of the Bolshevik agenda, which was to change or shape human nature into a selfless classless utopia:

The revolution is in the first place an awakening of human personality in the masses – who were supposed to possess no personality. In spite of occasional cruelty, the revolution is, before and above all, the awakening of humanity, its onward march, and is marked with a growing respect for the personal dignity of every individual, with an ever-increasing concern for those who are weak ... Human psychology is very conservative by nature ... the correct formula for education and self-education in general, and above all for our party, beginning at the top, should be to straighten out the ideological front, that is, to rework all the areas of consciousness, using the Marxist method. But there again the problem is extremely complicated and could not be solved by school teaching and books alone; the roots of contradiction and muddle of psychological contradictions in which people live. Psychology after all, is determined by life.

Source 16.16 Trotsky, 'The Struggle of Cultured Speech', *Pravda*, 16 May 1923

NO

Figes views the revolution and communist era as a 'human event of complicated individual tragedies'. He summarised the collapse of communism as being a failure to understand human nature – it cannot be changed simply by altering the political system:

The attempt by the Bolsheviks to 'make the world and man anew' foundered on the rocks of reality. It was in many ways a utopian dream – one of the most ambitious in history – to believe that human nature could be changed by simply altering the social environment in which people lived. Man cannot be transformed quite so easily: human nature moves more slowly than ruling ideologies or society. This is perhaps the one enduring moral lesson of the Russian Revolution.

Source 16.17 Figes, *A People's Tragedy* (1996), p. 751

2 Did Lenin really represent the welfare and interests of the proletariat?

NO

Russian historian Dmitri Volkogonov recognises the synonymous nature of Lenin and the Bolshevik Party. They are inseparable. He argues that Lenin's party was characterised by power and privilege, not by representing the proletariat:

It is impossible to think of Lenin without contemplating his brain-child, his party. Perhaps the idea of the mighty revolutionary organization is central to Leninism, but his accomplishment was not merely that he created a party with a disciplined organization, but that he was rapidly able to erect it into a state system. The Party soon acquired a monopoly of power, of thought and of life itself. It became a Leninist order, in whose name its 'leaders' and their 'comrades-in-arms' were to rule the country for decades to come.

Source 16.18 Volkogonov, *Lenin: Life and Legacy* (1994), p. xxxii

NO

Pipes argues that Lenin's pragmatism meant that he acknowledged that his regime was not popular with the proletariat. Pipes argues that instead of a dictatorship of the proletariat, Lenin developed a dictatorship of privilege that even he couldn't control:

The main base of Bolshevik support came not from the people at large, the 'masses', but from the Communist Party apparatus, which grew by leaps and bounds during the Civil War: at its conclusion, the party numbered between 600 000 and 700 000 members ... They joined because membership offered privileges and security in a society in which extreme poverty and insecurity were the rule. Towards outsiders, people not belonging to his order of the elect, Lenin showed no human feeling whatsoever ...

Source 16.19 Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime 1919–1924* (1994)

3 Was Lenin a dictator?

YES

The Times newspaper argues that Lenin was a dictator:

Lenin was a real dictator. They obeyed him not for fear, but with pleasure. He was their leader. He gave instructions, they merely carried them out. Lenin decided there must be a Red Army. Trotsky carried out the idea. Lenin outlined the functions of the CHEKA; Dzerzhinsky put these instructions into practice.

Lenin put forward the watch-words of the economic policy, and the Commissars eagerly applied them.

Source 16.20 *The Times* (1923)

NO

Russian historian Volkogonov argues that Lenin was not a dictator:

If the chief feature of a dictator is unlimited personal power – and Lenin had such power – we ought to see him as a dictator. Yet he was not. Certainly he regarded dictatorship as a positive virtue contributing to the success of the revolution ... Power for Lenin was dictatorship, but he exercised it remotely, through a flexible mechanism of ideological and organisational structures.

Source 16.21 Volkogonov, *Lenin: Life and Legacy* (1994), p. xxxii



▲ Source 16.22 Lenin speaking to the workers of the Putilov factory, May 1917, by Isaak Brodsky (1929)

4 Was Lenin's use of violence necessary?

NO

Russian historian Volkogonov argues that Lenin's terror was not just unnecessary, but that he also made terror the norm rather than the exception. Volkogonov argues that Lenin founded a totalitarian ideology of intolerance, which he demonstrated through terror. The tragedy of Lenin was that he normalised terror and disguised it with revolutionary terminology. In essence, he twisted the amoral to become moral. Volkogonov argues: 'I do not doubt that Lenin wanted earthly happiness for the people, at least for those he called "the proletariat". But he regarded it as normal to build this "happiness" on blood, coercion and the denial of freedom' (Volkogonov, 1994).

He was willing to commit appallingly cruel acts in the name of the revolution. Although he was not personally vindictive, like Stalin, he did believe that the revolution would fail if the millstones of the dictatorship ceased to grind for a moment. While this Jacobin outlook was little better than Stalin's brutality, it seemed to give a noble purpose, a certain revolutionary aura, to force and cruelty.

Source 16.23 Volkogonov, *Lenin: Life and Legacy* (1994), p. 472

YES

Historian Hill argues that Lenin's cruelty was necessary to abolish the Tsar's regime of despair:

Lenin possessed a second quality, which symbolised the achievements of the Revolution as a whole. It is the quality, which on Maurice Baring's first visit most impressed him as typical of the ordinary Russian – humaneness. The attempt to overthrow the Bolsheviks after the Revolution produced cruelties indeed; but the revolutionary process abolished a regime of despair and created a new world of hope ... [Maxim Gorky, the famous Russian novelist and political activist] says of him: 'I never met anyone in Russia ... nor do I know anyone who hated, loathed and despised all unhappiness, grief and suffering as Lenin did.'

Source 16.24 Hill, *Lenin and the Russian Revolution* (1947)



ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 16.2: WAS LENIN'S FORCE NECESSARY?



Lenin and his government's use of force is an issue that divided Russians at the time and has led to debate among historians ever since. Never fall into the intellectual trap of criticising Lenin because he used force at all. Revolutions cannot be peaceful. There will always be force and violence during revolutions. Hence, the more problematic and thought-provoking questions are: When was Lenin's use of force acceptable and unacceptable? When was it justified and unjustified? Necessary and unnecessary? Do not fall into the second trap of thinking that there is a correct answer to these questions. The aim of this difficult activity is to promote debate with your peers and teacher. Consider the following events where force was used:

- 1 Dismissal of Constituent Assembly, January 1918
- 2 Losses due to Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, March 1918
- 3 Formation and use of the Cheka, from December 1917
- 4 Formation and use of the Red Army, 1918–21
- 5 Killing of rich peasant kulaks
- 6 Defeat of White and Green Armies
- 7 Banning of other revolutionary parties (for example, the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries)
- 8 Defeat of Kronstadt Revolt, March 1921.

Start by deciding whether you think that the defeat of the Kronstadt Revolt was necessary or unnecessary. Copy the graphic organiser below into your workbook and complete using the other events. Be prepared to explain your reasoning. Let the debates begin!

Lenin's use of force was necessary



List examples of events where force was acceptable

Lenin's use of force was unnecessary



List examples of events where force was unacceptable

THE STORY SO FAR



- After the crushing of the Kronstadt Revolt, Lenin imposed absolute authority over the nation. He abolished all other political parties, established concentration camps for political opponents, formed Russia into the USSR and revamped the Cheka. All of these measures ensured the unquestioned domination of the Communist Party.
- Lenin's rule was cut short by a series of strokes in 1922 and 1923 that left him paralysed and unable to speak. However, he maintained his presence within the party and continued to write policies and meet with other leaders.
- Analysing the impact of Lenin is difficult due to the problems of personal values and beliefs, determining his motivation (not just his actions), factoring out hindsight and the limited time in which Lenin ruled in peace and good health.
- Hence, key debates rage about the impact of Lenin's leadership: whether history should remember him favourably or not, given his willingness to employ violence to consolidate his socialist regime.



Use the QR code or visit the digital version of the book and watch the video summarising the chapter.

▼ Source 16.25 'Everywhere, always, with us completely - Lenin', Nikolay Nikolayevich Olshansky, c. 1924.



Develop your historical thinking skills

Establishing historical significance

Use information and key debates from this chapter to write short paragraph answers to these questions.

- 1 How did Lenin impose absolute control from 1921–24?
- 2 Is it possible to change human nature?
- 3 Did Lenin really represent the welfare and interests of the proletariat?
- 4 Was Lenin a dictator?
- 5 Was Lenin's use of violence necessary?

Using quotes as evidence

This is a list of interesting quotes by Lenin himself. How do these quotes help you to understand his leadership? Quotes can be used directly or paraphrased in your own words.

Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.

Revolutions are the locomotives [meaning trains] of history. Drive them at full speed and keep them on the rails.

When one makes a revolution, one cannot mark time; one must always go forward – or go back.

It is true that liberty is precious; so precious that it must be rationed carefully.

No amount of political freedom will satisfy the hungry masses.

Give us the child for eight years and it will be a Bolshevik forever.

There are no morals in politics.

One man with a gun can control 100 without one.

A lie told often enough becomes the truth.

Analysing historical sources as evidence

After his death, Russia became a visual memorial to its revolutionary leader through an outpouring of paintings, statues and posters. This poster was produced on the first anniversary of Lenin's death.

- 1 Lenin's body language is quite striking. What does this portray about his leadership and character?
- 2 Identify the images behind Lenin. What do these symbolise about Lenin's ideology?
- 3 To what extent do you agree with the message of this poster?

► **Source 16.26** The poster produced on the first anniversary of Lenin's death, 1925, artist unknown



Analysing historian's interpretations

Debate: Did Lenin's use of violence outweigh the benefits of his new society?

Dmitri Volkogonov (1928–1995)

Nationality: Russian historian who wrote an epic trilogy on Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin.

Helpful book: *Lenin: Life and Legacy* (1994)

Point of view

Lenin was not an evil dictator and had genuine aims for improving the lives of ordinary Russians, but the cost of maintaining power was too high. The end does not justify the means.

Reasons (evidence)

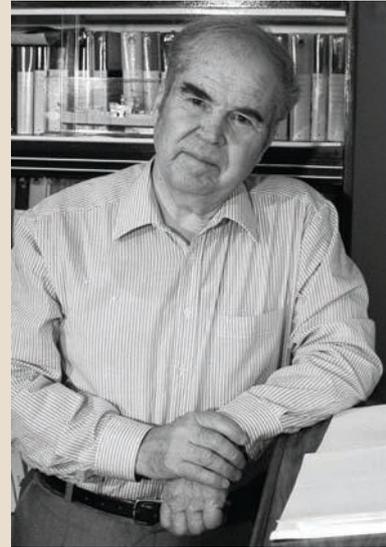
Brought up in Soviet Russia and taught the benefits of communism, Volkogonov's respect for Lenin remained intact until he accessed the secret archives after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. He reluctantly admitted that the documentation revealed Lenin's excessive use of terror to establish his communist utopia.

Quote

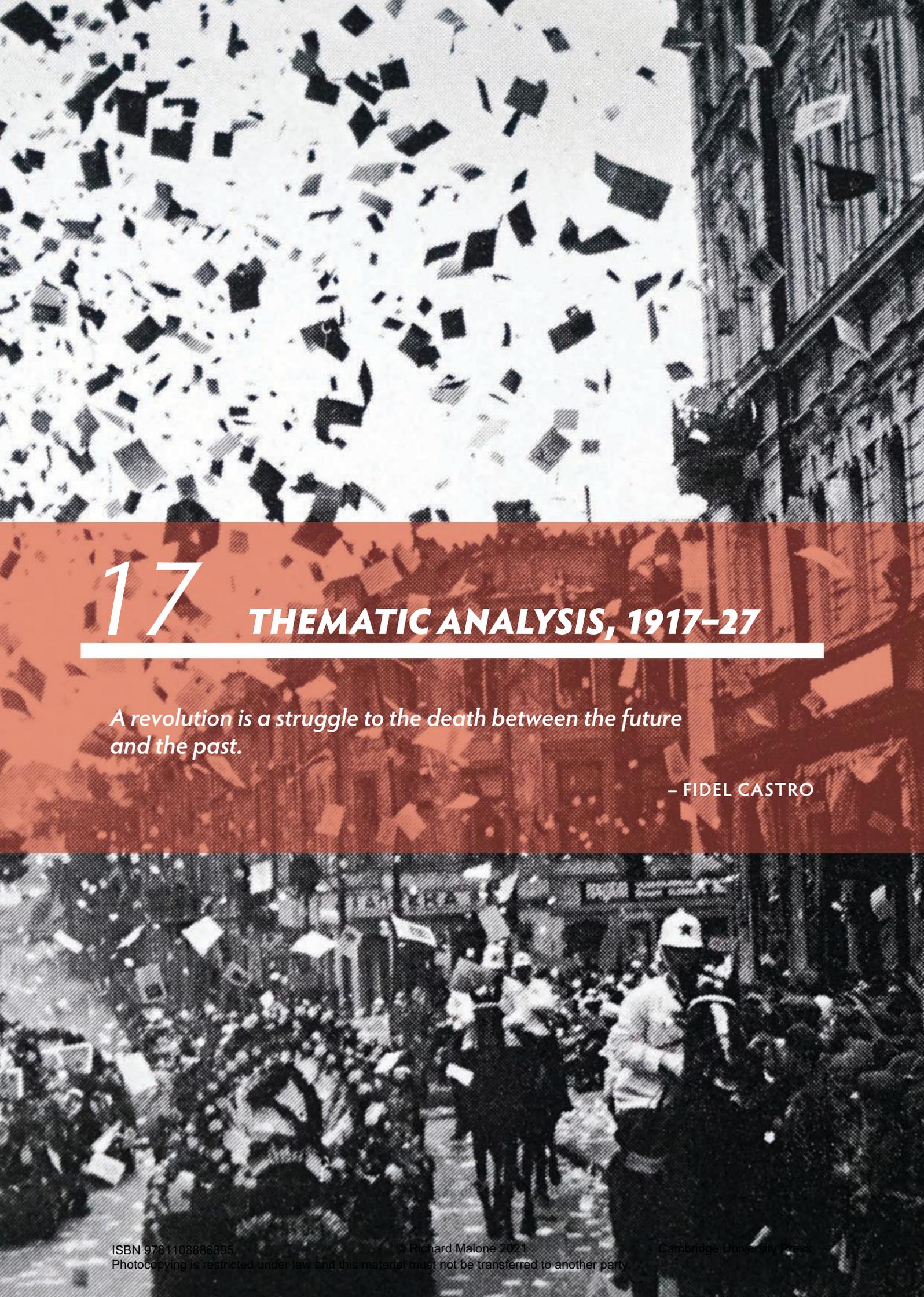
Lenin wanted earthly happiness for the people, at least those he called the 'proletariat'. But he regarded it as normal to build the 'happiness' on blood, coercion and the denial of freedom.

What's your point of view?

What's your point of view about Lenin's use of violence? Did it justify the benefits of his new society?



▲ Source 16.27 Dmitri Volkogonov



17

THEMATIC ANALYSIS, 1917–27

*A revolution is a struggle to the death between the future
and the past.*

– FIDEL CASTRO

Overview

The Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917 was the new beginning for a Russia with the same old problems. Just because Lenin – a fresh, adaptable, reforming leader – had replaced the Tsar did not mean that the new society was as utopian as Marx’s theory of communism predicted. In fact, Lenin inherited a nation under severe torment that also faced new problems restricting the success of the introduction of socialism. Certainly, the initial promise of social and political change by the Bolshevik Party was endangered by the democracy of socialism, civil war, economic breakdown and internal dissent. In these times of crisis, the new communist government’s responses were unsurprisingly authoritarian, involving the introduction of stringent policies of social control. Perhaps Lenin’s greatest ‘achievement’ was actually staying in power. This chapter aims to model how your writing can be converted from simply retelling the story of the revolution to a more thoughtful thematic style.

Key issues

After completing this chapter, you should be able to answer these questions.

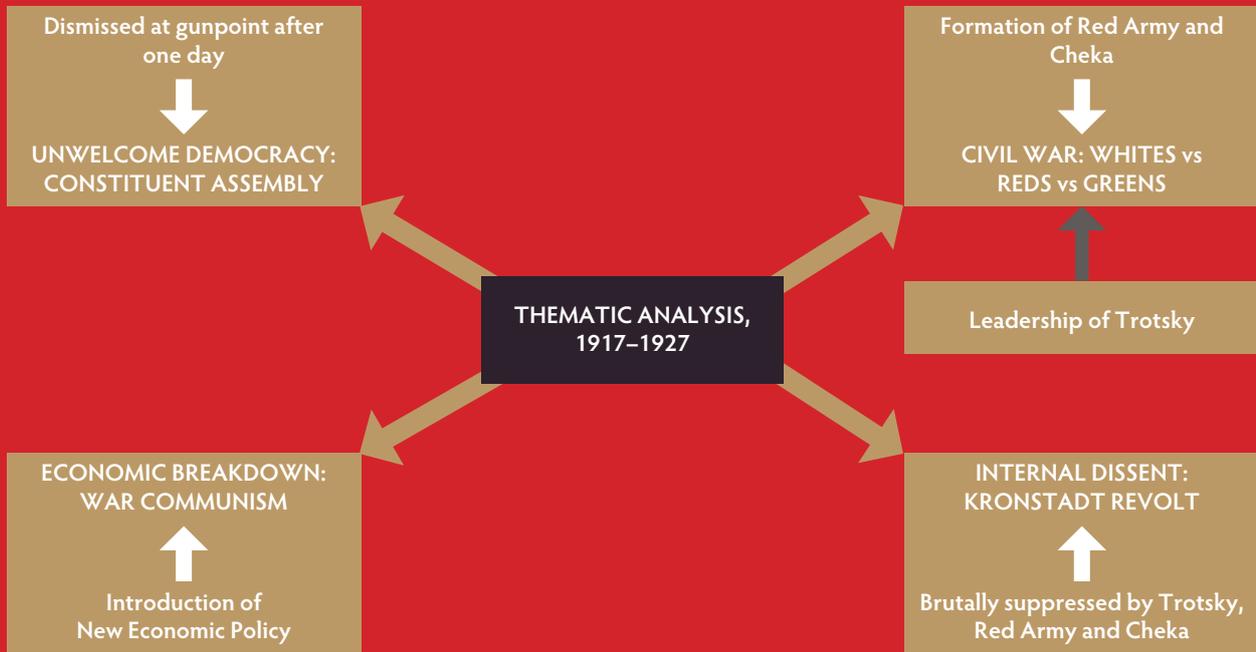
- What were the challenges faced by the new regime?
- What were the experiences of social groups and their responses?
- Who’s who in the Russian Revolution, 1917–1927?
- What was the extent of continuity and change brought to Russian society, 1896–1927?

Digital resources for this chapter

In the *Interactive Textbook*:

-  Video and audio sources and questions
-  Digital activities

Flow of chapter



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Chapter timeline

What are the key events of the Russian Revolution covered in this chapter?

1917 – EARLY 1918
Sovnarkom reforms



1921
Crises of War Communism and Kronstadt Revolt
Response of New Economic Policy at Tenth Party Congress



1922–1927
Communist Government consolidated



1918–1920
Civil War and foreign intervention



1924
Lenin dies

17.1 What were the challenges faced by the new regime?

Crisis and response 1: Unwelcome democracy

Crisis	Response	Continuity
Constituent Assembly: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> voting November 1917 opening day 18 January 1918 	Constituent Assembly dismissed at gunpoint after only its first day. In 1922, Lenin abolished all other political parties.	Lenin's actions the same as the Tsar's in dismissing the first two Dumas for promoting radical ideas that differed from his own.

Cause of crisis

The understandable expectation of the revolutionary parties and groups was that the October Revolution had secured control of the government on behalf of them all. In this mindset, the wide distribution of deputies from the Socialist Revolutionary Party with 370 seats, down to the Mensheviks with 16 seats, should have signalled a victory to the people as every political persuasion now had representation. A multi-party government based on a coalition of socialist parties now existed. Rather than being considered positively, however, in Lenin's mind this simply exposed the political ignorance of the proletariat and their need for strong leadership. The dismissal of the Constituent Assembly the next morning marked the last day of democratic government in Russia for the next 74 years. Democracy was dead.



▲ Source 17.1 Were the Russian people better off under tsardom or communism?

Analysis of response

Lenin's deep objections to the Constituent Assembly reveal that his understanding of true democracy was the rule of the Bolshevik Party, which he considered to be the purest representation of the proletariat. This concept is described as **democratic centralism**, which meant that the Bolsheviks believed that they were the only vehicle to lead the voiceless masses in fulfilling their revolutionary potential. Such an interpretation of 'democracy' allowed for Lenin to disregard the election results as being secondary to the urgent needs of the revolution.

democratic centralism
the Leninist principle in which policy is decided at high levels and binding on all members of society



Continuity or change?

To what extent were such forceful actions new and radical? Only by referring to Chapter 6 onwards are we able to place Lenin's actions into a wider context. Despite promising fundamental reform in his *October Manifesto* of 1905, the Tsar published the Fundamental Laws. These reasserted his autocratic power and resulted in both the First and Second Dumas being dismissed within months of their opening. The key continuities between the Tsar's and Lenin's actions were their core beliefs that they held the answers to the future of Russia. The dismissal of both the Dumas and the Constituent Assembly demonstrated their respective determination to block any erosion of their absolute power and desire to maintain an authoritarian centralised political system. Yet it is incorrect to consider that Lenin was simply another Tsar by a different title. While Tsar Nicholas II was attempting to maintain Russia the way it had always been, Lenin's vision was of an improved Russia that released the potential of its people rather than stifled it.



▲ Source 17.2 *Lenin and Demonstration*, by Isaak Brodsky, 1919. Was Lenin essentially Russia's new Tsar?

Crisis and response 2: Civil War

Crisis	Response	Continuities and changes
Civil War: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> internal counter-revolutionary threat external foreign threat 	Political/Military response: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> formation of Red Army under Trotsky Economic response: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> introduction of War Communism Social response: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> formation of the Cheka 	Both the Tsar and Lenin wanted war to rally support behind their leadership and to eliminate opposition. Yet Lenin's reforms and visions were brutally supported by the Red Army and the Cheka, unlike the Tsar who was unable to maintain military support.

Cause of crisis

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk merely exchanged one war for another. While World War One was extremely damaging, the ensuing Russian Civil War was devastating. The new Bolshevik government encountered two significant threats. The first was from the former tsarist generals supported by angry political party members, such as the Socialist Revolutionaries, and disenchanted peasant groups in the European provinces. The second was from Russia's World War One allies – Britain, France and the United States – which were frustrated that Russia's withdrawal had left them more vulnerable on the Western Front. The Civil War raged for three years, which stalled the formation of a successful socialist society.

Analysis of response

1 Political/military response

Lenin's key role was as ideological master. His propaganda expertise represented the Civil War as a class war between capitalist bourgeoisie and the revolutionary proletariat. However, this was too simplistic a perspective. While anti-Bolshevik opposition did indeed come from supporters of tsarism and middle-class landowners and nobles, significant counter-revolution came from the workers, peasants and national minority Greens movement. Trotsky's role, however, was more crucial as his military strategies and presence in the battle zones provided dominant leadership and cohesion that the White forces lacked. The reasons for Red victory were obvious and more a result of White weakness than Red strength.

2 Economic response

The series of policies implemented to service the economic requirements demanded by the Civil War were called War Communism. Aimed at ensuring military success through industrial production and army strength, War Communism came at the expense of rural communities. Many local battles in the Civil War were fought over food rather than for ideology, as Lenin claimed.



▲ Source 17.3 'Hungry workmen in Petrograd robbing a military lorry of bread', 1920



3 Social response

The early creation of the Cheka in December 1917, before Lenin encountered substantial opposition, clearly signalled Lenin’s core belief that strict social control was a vital aspect of dominant political control. He had experienced this first-hand for the past two decades through the Tsar’s *Okhrana*, as had most of the leading Bolshevik revolutionaries. The Tsar taught Lenin that force was not only necessary but also justifiable.

Continuity or change?

A key question beckons. Did Lenin cause the Civil War? The weight of historical opinion suggests that he was indeed responsible. Lenin not only wanted war, but his dismissal of the Constituent Assembly also made it unavoidable. Revolutionary allegiance was split between the two main socialist parties, the Bolsheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries, and civil war was Lenin’s brutal game that allowed only one winner. All wars provide a cover for old scores to be settled. Humankind is capable of as much atrocity as it has imagination. Lenin’s attitude provides a continuity with the Tsar, who entered World War One in an attempt to reunify the nation behind his personal authority and eliminate anti-tsarist opposition. Both wars exacerbated the pre-existing economic breakdown. Both wars deepened social discontent. Both wars highlighted the political vulnerability of the governing body.

However, despite both the tsarist and communist governments being involved in devastating wars, there were more changes than continuities. The Tsar was fighting an external enemy on mainly foreign soil for the protection of his nation. Lenin was fighting on home soil for the very existence of his new regime. The desperation of the fledgling regime was demonstrated by the establishment of the Red Army and Cheka, and a willingness to use extreme methods in order to heighten their odds of survival. In fact, the only point of continuity between the *Okhrana* and the Cheka is their function as secret police. In every other way the Cheka was more organised, brutal and effective. For example, the Tsar could not contain the influence of Rasputin and eventually succumbed to mass opposition in February 1917. Lenin’s ability to overcome threats to his government was not just a reflection of his superior leadership abilities but also the strength of his military and police base.

Crisis and response 3: Economic breakdown

Crisis	Response	Change
Economic devastation: severe famine in 1920 and 1921	Introduction of New Economic Policy (NEP)	Economic devastation and famine was worse under Lenin than the Tsar, yet things improved drastically under the NEP. Lenin’s willingness to reform was very different from the Tsar’s apathy to the plight of his people.

Cause of crisis

Although the communist government was successful in defending its new regime, the resulting wounds cut deeply. Famine was widespread. Starvation was commonplace. The nation was drained of both its economic and psychological resources. This crisis was far worse than the 1891 famine under Tsar Nicholas II, given the cumulative effect of constant war since 1914. It is interesting that the 1891 famine was caused by a short winter followed by a hot, dry summer, whereas the 1920–21 famine was caused by a civil war and economic policies of Lenin’s own making.

Analysis of response

The failure of War Communism was a lot more serious than simply ill-chosen economic decisions. This policy was embedded in the ideological mindset of the party and was considered to be the beginning of pure socialism. The long-term aims of the party were the abolition of private property and the free market, so that products could be distributed more fairly according to need. The failure of War Communism, therefore, injected the party with self-doubt over the legitimacy of its socialist ideals, and set back the introduction of socialism in Russia. Socialism was far easier to discuss and write about from exile than to implement as a government.

What is the link between ideas, leaders and movements? The introduction of the NEP revealed the wide gap between revolutionary theory and economic reality. The introduction of the NEP is a prime example of how ideology is simply a useful tool that can be modified or dispensed with in order to follow changing circumstances. The example of the change to the NEP suggests that ideas are manipulated by leaders to justify their decisions to gain the support of popular movements and retain control.

Continuity or change?

Did conditions of everyday life improve under the new society? Who benefited economically?

1 Industrial workers

It is often difficult to gain authoritative evidence about the day-to-day life of men and women workers. Workers' lives were worse off under War Communism than during the old regime, but relatively better off under the NEP, although production levels did not reach those of 1913 until after Lenin's death. Under War Communism, unemployment had risen by 100 000, bread rations had declined, the black market was thriving, and fuel shortages left people with no heating or lighting. Under the NEP, rationing was gradually phased out and wages stabilised through government control of banking. Shops and restaurants reopened and goods became more readily available. The emergence of the NEPman entrepreneurs with their money-making schemes, fancy clothes and extravagant living, was an indication of better times.

2 Peasants

The lives of peasant families were worse off under War Communism than during the old regime, yet relatively better off after the NEP was introduced in 1921. Under War Communism, while the peasants did receive land through the Land Decree, the government requisitioned grain with minimal compensation, resulting in severe famine and starvation. Under the NEP, rebellion ceased as open markets were established and peasants could begin small-scale enterprises that attracted profit. Surpluses could be kept and traded. Agriculture expanded. The psychological benefit of owning land made life significantly better, even if economic circumstances did not change for some families.



◀ Source 17.4 A market in Smolensk after the introduction of the NEP

Crisis and response 4: Internal dissent

Crisis	Response	Change
Workers' Opposition and Kronstadt Revolt in March 1921	Brutal suppression of uprising by Trotsky and Red Army	The suppression of Bloody Sunday protesters by Nicholas was very similar, yet Lenin allowed greater debate between party members.



Cause of crisis

Lenin's leadership was filled with internal dissent from both party leaders and devout party supporters even before the October Revolution. Some of these key debates were:

- 1917 – Zinoviev and Kamenev published their criticisms of the proposed Bolshevik takeover.
- 1918 – Leftist party members and Bukharin opposed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.
- 1920 – Democratic Centralists opposed the lack of openness and democracy within the party.
- 1920 – The Workers' Opposition faction led by Kollontai opposed the political elitism of the party.

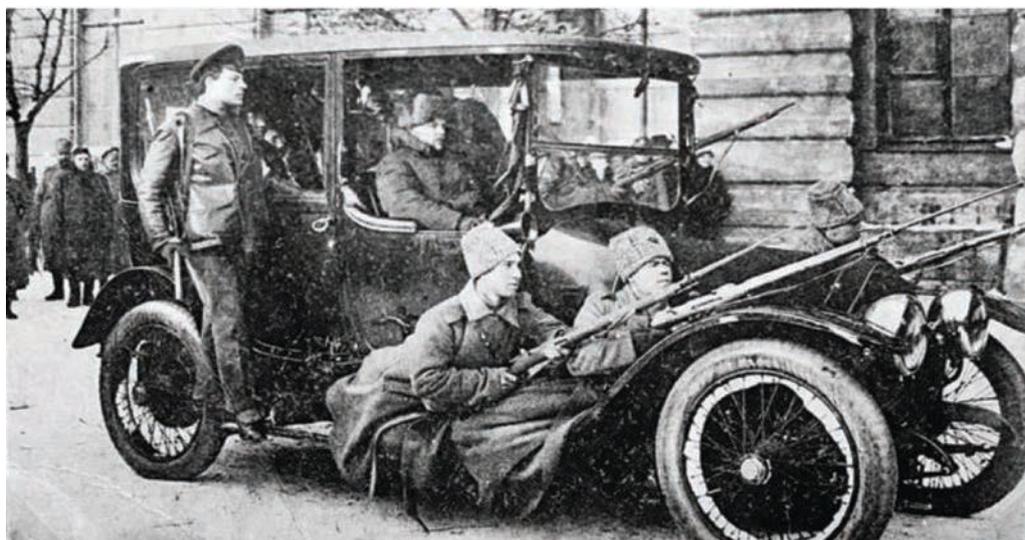
The final straw came in 1921 with the Kronstadt sailors' petition and revolt against the strict restrictions on personal and political freedoms. Lenin's response was the brutal deployment of the same forces used to win the Civil War – the Red Army and the Cheka – all under the control of Trotsky. Outnumbered and overpowered, the once 'reddest of the red' sailors, who had helped defeat the Winter Palace in 1917, were decimated. Lenin's concern about this depth of division was aptly demonstrated by his imposition of a Decree on Party Unity at the Tenth Party Congress, which coincided with the uprising in March.

Analysis of response

Lenin's attempts to end the divisions within the party were not successful. Factions, such as Kollontai's Workers' Opposition, were banned in 1921. The introduction of the NEP met with fierce debate between leftist party idealists like Trotsky and rightist party pragmatists like Rykov and Tomsky. Despite its success, in 1923 Trotsky criticised the NEP for creating a scissors crisis, whereby the gap between the prices of agricultural and processed goods widened. So what impact does this constant internal dissent have on our understanding of Lenin's leadership? Italian historian Valentino Gerratana provided this reflection:

When he was still alive, Lenin was not regarded as a source of authority ... nor was his authority even considered indisputable. On the contrary, he always encountered disagreement, resistance or opposition even within the ruling group of the Bolshevik Party. He was the recognized 'head' of the Party, but it was permissible to disagree with him and, when it was thought necessary, other comrades were allowed and even expected to oppose his will. He was 'head' because he managed to convince and draw into struggle even wavering and reluctant people, not because he had the right to reject or silence opponents. Convinced of the need for firm Party discipline, he never tried to place his opponents under a discipline to which he was not himself subject.

Source 17.5 Cited in Appignanesi & Zarate, *Introducing Lenin* (1994), p. 169



▲ Source 17.6 A Bolshevik patrol

Continuity or change?

Lenin was never able to wipe out internal dissent. If Lenin failed in this regard, so did the Tsar. Revolutionary writers and parties bubbled underneath the seeming tranquility of the old regime, and the prison camps in Siberia were full. Lenin's ultimate response at the Tenth Party Congress in 1921 was to demand party unity, ban factions and all other political parties.

The closest continuity with the Tsar, however, was the brutal suppression of alternative ideas. On the surface, the crushing of Bloody Sunday in the old regime and Kronstadt in the new provide a simple continuity. Both sets of protesters were trying to fine-tune a system they supported. Both recognised the ultimate authority of their government. Both wanted reform not revolution. Yet both received death not democracy. Bullets not ballots. Slaughter not sympathy.

On deeper examination, the core of the Bloody Sunday petition was a demand for better working conditions, while the Kronstadt petition was demanding more representative democracy and greater civil liberties. The new society had bred a greater political awareness and desire within the proletariat to be part of the political system.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 17.1: CREATIVE THINKING



A distinct disadvantage of studying history is that the outcome is already known. But imagine if it were happening right now! SCAMPER is a creative activity that allows the significance of each event to be freshly analysed.

S	Substitute	Consider the impact of Lenin's leadership during this period. How would the shape of the revolution have been altered if Trotsky, not Lenin, had been the leader of the new government?
C	Combine	Reflect on the impact of the Bolsheviks's introduction of a one-party state. How would the shape of the new society have changed if the Constituent Assembly, made up of a coalition of socialist parties, had been allowed to continue?
A	Adapt	Think about the role of economic policies. What would have been the impact on society and the government if the New Economic Policy had not been introduced and War Communism had continued?
M	Modify or magnify	Imagine the impact of the Kronstadt sailors. What if Lenin had implemented their complaints in their petition rather than destroying them?
P	Put to use	Think about the role of armed forces. What would have happened if the Bolsheviks did not have the loyal support of the Red Army and the Cheka?
E	Eliminate	Reflect on the murder of the royal family. What difference would it have made if they had been rescued rather than murdered?
R	Rearrange or reverse	Consider the impact of World War One. What would have happened to Russia's new government if Germany had won World War One?



17.2 What were the experiences of social groups and their responses?

Nobles

emigrate an émigré is a person who has emigrated, which means to voluntarily leave your own country, often because of political or social problems

Making up 12 per cent of the population, the nobles were the former upper class which included hereditary landowning nobles, wealthy merchants, Church leaders, leaders in the bureaucracy and higher ranks within the army. Sovnarkom's early decrees demonstrated that this privileged class would be eliminated from the new society. Decrees removed the right to private ownership meaning that large houses, estates and land were redistributed. Former tsarist officials and nobles **emigrated** during the Civil War. For example, Prince Lvov, the first Prime Minister of the Provisional Government, fled to Paris where he raised funds for the 1921 Famine. Overall, there was no ideological or practical place for wealthy nobles in a proletarian dictatorship. No matter who won the revolution, the nobles lost.

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

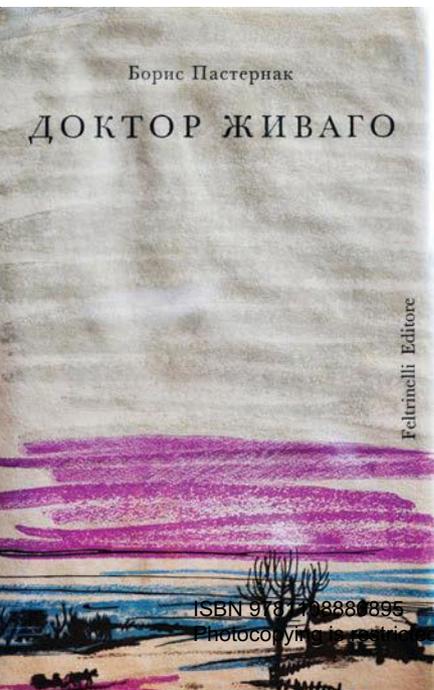
Noble émigrés in Paris optimistically proclaimed Grand Duke Cyril Vladimirovich – Nicholas's cousin – as Tsar Cyril !!

Bourgeoisie

The bourgeoisie were the middle and upper middle classes who had financial and cultural influence. These included financial roles such as smaller landowners, businessmen, traders, small-scale manufacturers, factory managers and bankers, and cultural roles such as politicians, lawyers, doctors, artists and teachers. Under Marxist theory, the bourgeoisie were the class enemy because they owned the means of production and aimed at preserving their economic supremacy by exploiting the proletariat. In January 1918, Sovnarkom passed a decree declaring that middle classes were 'former people' and removed their right to vote. From 1918, many of these bourgeoisie became 'ideological emigrants', leaving Russia because they disagreed with the new order. Estimates are that 900 000 to 2 million Russians emigrated between 1917 and 1920 with France, Germany, China and Finland the most common destinations. Overall, historian R.N. Westwood argues that 'Emigration and Red Terror were partly responsible for that chronic problem of the Soviet economy, shortage of managerial talent. Many of Russia's most useful scholars and scientists were among the emigres'.

AMAZING BUT TRUE ...

Boris Pasternak wrote a classic but critical novel called *Doctor Zhivago* about a wealthy doctor and poet who rejects the new Bolshevik regime. He stayed in Russia but escaped to hide in the Ural Mountains before being captured by the Reds during the Civil War and forced to work with the Red Army.



◀ Source 17.7 The first edition cover for *Doctor Zhivago*

Peasants

Peasants' experiences were mixed – good in 1917, poor in 1918–21, and good from 1921. Initially, the Land Decree gave peasant communities control over land distribution. Lack of support for the Bolshevik government was demonstrated immediately with overwhelming rural votes for the Socialist Revolutionaries in the Constituent Assembly elections (November 1917). During the Civil War, peasants were conscripted into the Red Army but also formed their own Green armies who fought effectively for local independence from both Red and White invasion. Most crucially was the hated grain requisitioning under War Communism which directly resulted in lower production, hiding their harvests, and ultimately, the devastating 1921 famine. An alarming 95 per cent of deaths during the Civil War were from malnutrition and disease. Bolsheviks created class warfare by scapegoating wealthy peasants as kulaks. The Civil War period alienated the peasantry. In contrast, the introduction of the NEP (March 1921) provided immediate incentive for peasants to grow and sell their produce. Overall, Lenin's focus on the urban proletariat meant that he struggled to control the countryside and failed to overcome peasant opposition.

Urban workers

Marxist theory was based on advantaging the urban proletariat but the involvement in war meant it was difficult to do so. The economy continued declining after October 1917. For example, after the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (March 1918), any war-related industries were closed which caused major unemployment. During the Civil War, workers faced the hardships of food rationing, unemployment and low production but also joined the Red Army or requisitioning squads to force peasants to give up their grain to feed the cities. Despite many still supporting the Bolsheviks' regime, by 1920, workers were under-nourished and sick. Politically, the Bolshevik-dominated soviets no longer truly represented the workers and were not addressing the core concerns of food supply and unemployment, which was publicly confronted by the Kronstadt Revolt and Kollontai's Workers' Opposition. While the NEP immediately benefited peasants, it was slow to improve the urban economy. Overall, resistance from the urban workers was embarrassing for a government who claimed to represent the proletariat but not powerful enough to force major changes. Historian Steve Smith argued that the revolution could only be saved 'if the party exercised a dictatorship on behalf of the idealised proletariat, and over the actual one.'

Women

From the beginning of the regime, Bolsheviks reformed traditional patriarchy in favour of a socialist society where women had equal rights. Sovnarkom passed New Decrees from 1917 which provided equal rights in marriage, legalised divorce, made abortion available on demand, gave ability to own land, and head a household. Women were also granted equal rights in the workplace which promised the right to work, equal pay for equal work, eight-hour day, no underground work, and child-minding services. The Bolsheviks tried to free women from domestic duties by providing creches, laundries and cooking halls to permit space to join the workforce. Alexandra Kollontai and Inessa Armand were the main Bolsheviks who led the government Zhenotdel to promote female equality. Overall, a revolution attempts to transform every aspect of society which the new Bolshevik regime did proudly with women's rights. Its implementation, however, was not fully successful throughout Russia due to the economic and social problems from 1918 to 1921.

► Source 17.8 'Women, Go into Cooperatives'



17.3 Who's who in the Russian Revolution, 1917–27?

Apsit, Alexander: along with Deni and Vladimirov, was a popular artist who created lots of poster art propaganda to promote the new Bolshevik society.

Armand, Inessa: a member of the Bolsheviks who actively promoted and led the campaign for women's rights. Along with Alexandra Kollontai, Armand was the Director of Zhenotdel, an organisation that represented female equality in the Communist Party and chaired the First International Conference for Communist Women in 1920. Her death by cholera in 1920 devastated Lenin.

Commissars: individual ministerial roles in the government were called Commissars, e.g. Trotsky was Commissar of War.

Denikin, General: military general in the Civil War who opposed the Bolshevik government from the south and attempted to attack the capital Moscow.

Dzerzhinsky, Felix: ruthless commander of the secret police Cheka, whose role was crucial in the Civil War and Kronstadt to eliminate counter-revolutionaries and opposition.

Greens: name given to local peasant groups who fought for independence against the Bolshevik Reds during the Civil War.

Kaplan, Fanny: committed an unsuccessful assassination attempt on Lenin in 1918. Her actions provided proof to the new government that counter-revolutionaries were active and directly resulted in the government implementing an aggressive policy of Red Terror.

Kolchak, Alexander: an admiral who led a White Army against the Bolshevik Government in the Civil War. He was initially very successful and controlled the eastern side of Russia.

Kollontai, Alexandra: as Commissar for Social Welfare and director of Zhenotdel, was crucial in activating women's roles and social reforms. Her opposition to War Communism led her to establish the Workers' Opposition from 1921 which publicly opposed the government.

kulaks: wealthy peasants who were targeted for resisting the grain requisitioning policy under War Communism. Scapegoated and killed as class enemies.

Kronstadt sailors: popular sailors based on the Kronstadt island naval base in the bay off Petrograd. Despite being long-term Bolshevik supporters, they published a petition criticising the exclusive nature of the government but were overthrown by the Red Army and Cheka in a bitter struggle.

Lenin, Vladimir: leader of the new Bolshevik Government who attempted to introduce a socialist society in the face of significant difficulties. His degree of success in achieving this transformed society and fulfilling his initial ideals is debated.

Lunacharsky, Anatoly: the first Bolshevik Propaganda Minister, appointed immediately on the very day that the Bolsheviks officially became the new government, 26 October 1917.

Romanov, Nicholas: the former tsar and his family were murdered in a cellar during the first year of the Civil War by a local Bolshevik group.

Sovnarkom: the powerful 15-member cabinet of ministers in the new government. All ministers were Bolsheviks, which helped create a one-party dictatorship.

Trotsky, Leon: most influential Bolshevik leader along with Lenin. Negotiated the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk as Commissar for Foreign Affairs and then successfully coordinated the Red Army in the Civil War as Commissar of War from his famous armoured train.

Whites: name given to the multiple anti-Bolshevik groups who fought Reds during the Civil War.

Wrangel, General: military General in the Civil War who attacked the Bolshevik government from the north.

Yudenich, General: military general in the Civil War who attacked the Bolshevik government from the north-west and reached the outskirts of Petrograd.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 17.2: YOUR INTERPRETATION



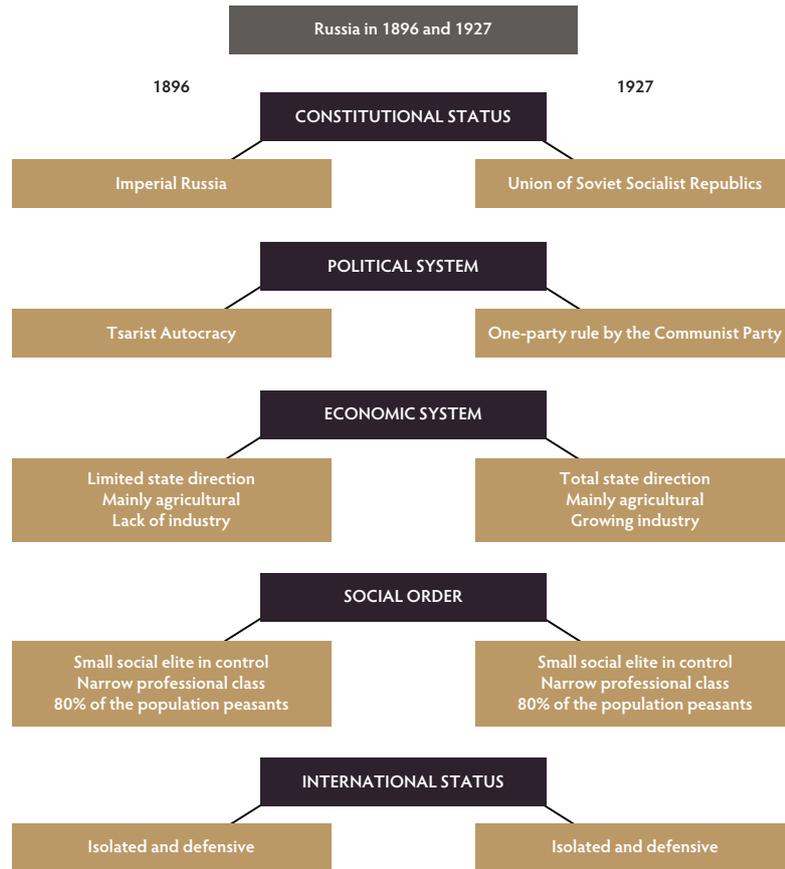
Like the writing of all historians, this book is not an objective source. The author has selected the topics, edited documents, chosen the language, added captions to visual sources, selected statistics, and has directed thinking through focus questions and activities. This all means that your thinking has been influenced by the author's point of view. But the aim of this book has been to provide you with the historical thinking skills to critically analyse sources and form your own arguments. So it's now time to analyse *Analysing the Russian Revolution!* Provide a summary of Malone's answers to these key questions about the Russian Revolution. But to what extent do you agree? What's your response?

- 1 What were the significant causes of the Russian Revolution?
- 2 How did the actions of popular movements and particular individuals contribute to triggering a revolution?
- 3 What were the consequences of the Russian Revolution?
- 4 To what extent was society changed and revolutionary ideas achieved or compromised?



17.4 What was the extent of continuity and change brought to Russian society, 1896–1927?

Summary diagram



► Source 17.9 Based on Michael Lynch, *Reaction & Revolutions: Russia 1881–1924*, Hodder & Stoughton, 2000, pp. 150

THE END OF THE STORY

- The easiest aspect of the new society was taking power in October 1917. The first six months in power witnessed significant opposition: the much-anticipated Constituent Assembly was dismissed, a costly peace treaty was signed to withdraw from the war, and the inherited problems of land and bread proved difficult to solve. However, many significant social and cultural reforms were introduced.
- Foreign invasion from former international allies exacerbated the already raging counterrevolutions from several groups, including former tsarist generals who were advancing on Moscow and Petrograd from every point of the compass. The Red Army's discipline combined with the Cheka's brutality eventually defeated the White forces and consolidated the revolution for the new government.
- The Civil War victory came at a deep cost. By 1921 the country was characterised by economic ruin and internal disunity. To remain in power, Lenin and Trotsky crushed the Kronstadt Revolt and replaced the failed War Communism (based on socialism) with the New Economic Policy (based on capitalism).
- Lenin now assumed full autocratic control. The Communist Party led a one-party government. Given that the country was no longer at war for the first time since 1914, Lenin could govern in peace. This was interrupted by a series of paralysing strokes that resulted in his death in 1924 at the age of 54.

Use the QR code or visit the digital version of the book and watch the video summarising the chapter.



Develop your historical thinking skills

Using quotes as evidence

Write a sentence using a short phrase from one of the quotes below or contrast the views from a few quotes. You can also use any of the quotes in this chapter. Quotes can be used directly or paraphrased in your own words.

The leadership given by Lenin and the Bolshevik Party ... ensured the success of one of the greatest events in world history – the overthrow of the power of the landowners and capitalists. **G.D. Obichkin, historian**

Lenin wanted earthly happiness for the people, at least those he called 'the proletariat'.
Dmitri Volkogonov, historian

Besieged fortresses are hardly ever ruled in a democratic manner. **Isaac Deutscher, historian**

While Lenin was cunning and untrustworthy, he was also dedicated to the ultimate goal of communism. He enjoyed power, he lusted after it. He yearned to keep his party in power. But he wanted power for a purpose. He was determined that the Bolsheviks should initiate the achievement of a world without exploitation and oppression. **Robert Service, historian**

If there was one lesson to be drawn from the Russian Revolution it was that the people had failed to emancipate themselves. They had failed to become their own political masters, to free themselves from emperors and become citizens. **Orlando Figes, historian**

To impose such immense sacrifices in the name of so naïve and flawed a vision makes Lenin one of the greatest criminals of the 20th Century. **Dominic Lieven, historian**

The Bolsheviks were forced to turn increasingly to terror to silence their political critics and subjugate a society they could not control by any other means. **Figes**

Judged in terms of its own aspirations: the Communist regime was a monumental failure.
Richard Pipes, historian

Constructing historical arguments

Write an essay using evidence from this chapter to develop your own argument.

- 1 'Lenin's strength as a leader was knowing when to be ideological and when to be pragmatic.' To what extent do you agree with this statement? Use evidence to support your response.
- 2 Evaluate the experiences of different social groups and their responses to the challenges and changes to the conditions of everyday life in Russia between 1917 and 1927. Use evidence to support your response.
- 3 Historian Orlando Figes stated that 'The deepest legacy of the revolution was its failure to eliminate the social inequalities that had brought it about in the first place'. To what extent do you agree with this statement? Use evidence to support your response.

Analysing historical sources as evidence

The powerful painting, *Fantasy*, by a non-communist artist living in the USSR in the 1920s, depicts a red horse symbolising communism leaping boldly forward into Russia's future. The rider is dressed like an industrial worker and his horse is leaping over the traditional Russian agrarian village with its conservative church, suggesting that Russia's future is both industrial and secular. However, the rider is looking back nervously, as if hesitant to leave the past behind, and the horse is rearing, perhaps symbolising a reluctance to trample on the peasant community.



▲ Source 17.10 *Fantasy*, Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, 1925

- 1 Describe the main features and message of this painting.
- 2 After exploring the analysis of the causes, conflicts and consequences of the Russian Revolution contained in this book, do you think the attempt to introduce communism in Russia was a worthwhile project or an impossible fantasy? Discuss.

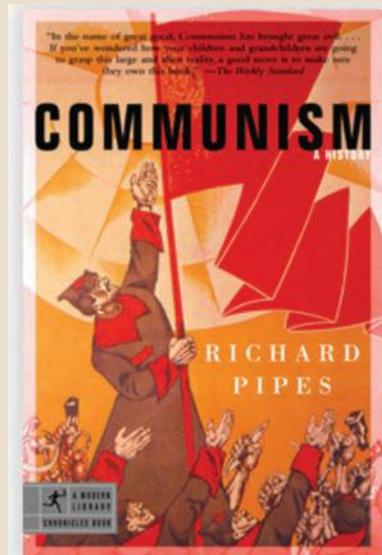
Analysing historian's interpretations

Debate: Did Lenin and the Bolshevik Government achieve their revolutionary ideals?

Richard Pipes (1923–2018)

Nationality: American historian and political adviser

Helpful books: *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime 1919–1924* (1997); *Communism: A History* (2001)



Source 17.11 Left: Richard Pipes; Right: cover of *Communism: A History* (2001)

Point of view

Growing up in Communist Poland shaped historian Pipes's conservative political approach: he is suspicious of any ideology that rejects previous traditions and values. Pipes's most fundamental argument was that the whole ideology of communism was flawed. Marxism is based on the notion that interest in private property would pass, whereas Pipes regards this as a permanent feature of human society.

Reasons (evidence)

Pipes is incredibly critical towards the Bolshevik regime's attempted implementation of Marxism – the government's one-party dictatorship, use of force, suppression of opposition, poor economic decisions, famine and, ultimately, the mistreatment of those he proclaimed to represent (workers/soldiers/sailors/peasants).

Quotes

Failure was inevitable and rested on a faulty philosophy of history as well as an unrealistic psychological doctrine.

The tragic and sordid history of the Russian Revolution ... teaches us that political authority must never be employed for ideological ends. It is best to let people be.

The excesses of the Bolsheviks, their readiness to sacrifice countless lives for their own purposes, were a monstrous violation of both ethics and common sense.

What's your point of view?

What's your point of view about whether Marxism and Lenin's government benefited Russia overall?

Glossary



abdication the resignation of a monarch from their political role

agrarian relating to the production of foodstuffs in the countryside

Allies the group of countries who united to fight the Central Powers group of countries in World War One

archive a central location where written material, often secret, is stored by an organisation

Armand Inessa Armand, a passionate revolutionary who met Lenin in Paris in 1910 and became his mistress

autocracy absolute rule by one person; in Russia also called Tsarist Autocracy

Bolsheviks a revolutionary political party begun by Lenin after splitting with the Mensheviks in 1903

bourgeoisie the upper middle class, including factory owners. To Marx and Engels (and then later, Lenin) the bourgeoisie was the natural class enemy of the proletariat

bureaucracy a system of officials and administrators that manages a country

capitalism an economic system in which investment in and ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange of wealth is in the hands of private individuals and corporations

Central Committee the main decision-making group of the Bolshevik Party

Cheka a Russian acronym meaning the 'All Russian Extraordinary Commission to Fight Counter-Revolution, Sabotage and Speculation'

class consciousness the necessary process of the workers developing such a deep discontent with their exploitation that they are willing to unite to create a revolution

class struggle the inevitable conflict between the working and ruling classes due to the exploitation of the former by the latter

Commissars while the new Bolshevik government was officially called the Government of People's Commissars, the individual ministerial roles were renamed Commissar

communism a system of economic and social organisation in which industry, capital, land and other means of production are owned and controlled by the community as a whole

Communist Manifesto, The published by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848, it promoted the end of capitalism and the inevitable rise of communism

constitution the set of rules by which a country is governed

coronation a formal ceremony where a monarch is crowned

Cossacks a fiercely independent people from the region on the Don River near the Black Sea

coup d'état the forced replacement of a government from one privileged group to another

democratic centralism the Leninist principle in which policy is decided at high levels and binding on all members of society

dictatorship a system where a single leader has dominant control over the government and country

Dual Authority the term given to the eight-month period between February and October 1917

Duma Russian word for elected parliament

Durnovo Pyotr Durnovo; a member of the upper class, minister of the interior under Prime Minister Witte

Dzerzhinsky Felix Dzerzhinsky was the leader of the powerful secret police organisation called the Cheka

economic relating to issues to do with money, such as taxation, inflation, unemployment, wages and prices of goods

emigrate an émigré is a person who has emigrated, which means to voluntarily leave your own country, often because of political or social problems

Engels Friedrich Engels was a German theorist who, along with Karl Marx, wrote *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848

- exile** many revolutionaries were imprisoned by Tsar Nicholas in the isolated region of central and eastern Russia called Siberia, or banished from Russia altogether
- factionalism** disputes between two or more groups acting in self-interest within a larger group
- famine** a desperate situation where food is scarce, resulting in severe malnutrition and often death
- feudal** the medieval social system whereby the privileged nobles controlled the hard-working peasants
- Gapon** Father Gapon was an active revolutionary who led the peaceful march to petition the Tsar for political representation and better working conditions
- Gorky** Maxim Gorky was a famous revolutionary whose writings inspired and mentored many aspiring revolutionaries
- government** the official political body that runs a country
- harvest** the collection of mature grain for eating, storage or market
- historian** a person who attempts to make sense of the past and usually specialises in one country or period of history
- ideas** abstract concepts and beliefs that provide hope and solutions to problems
- ideology** the set of ideas or beliefs that characterise a particular revolutionary movement
- illiteracy** the inability to read or write
- industrialisation** the process of making a country more modern through the development of machines and factories
- Iskra** revolutionary newspaper started by Lenin in 1900; meaning 'Spark'
- Kadets** a conservative revolutionary group that played an important role in the First Duma in 1906 and in the Provisional Government in 1917
- Kaplan** Fanny Kaplan was a radical anarchist who shot Lenin twice in a failed assassination attempt in August 1918
- Khabalov** General Khabalov was the Chief of the Petrograd Military District during the February Revolution
- Kolchak** Alexander Kolchak was an admiral who led a White Army against the Bolshevik government during the Civil War
- Kollontai** Alexandra Kollontai; a feminist socialist who was instrumental in improving women's rights; the only female Commissar in the Bolshevik Government Sovnarkom
- Kornilov** a tsarist military general who marched his troops on Petrograd in August 1917
- Kronstadt** a major naval base situated on an island near Petrograd
- Krupskaya** Nadezhka Krupskaya, Lenin's wife; they met in Siberia after she had also been exiled there for her own revolutionary activity
- kulaks** the derogatory name given by Lenin's government to peasants who were deemed to be selfishly hoarding grain for their own benefit rather than that of the nation
- leaders** significant individuals (women and men) who influence ordinary people
- Lenin** the most recognised Marxist revolutionary who led the Bolshevik Party and eventually overthrew the government in October 1917
- Leninism** Lenin's interpretation of how Marxism could be achieved in Russia
- liberal movement** argued that the dire need for change did not require an overthrow of the tsarist system
- Martov** Julius Martov. A serious disagreement with Lenin led to the establishment of the Mensheviks in 1903 and Martov was elected their first leader
- Marx** Karl Marx was a German theorist who, along with Friedrich Engels, wrote *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848
- Marxism** the devotion to and practice of the communist ideology of Karl Marx
- masses** the general name given to the anonymous crowds of ordinary workers and peasants
- Mensheviks** a Marxist revolutionary party that was formed, along with the Bolsheviks, when the Social Democratic Workers' Party split in 1903
- Military Revolutionary Committee** an influential body established by the Bolsheviks in 1917 and coordinated by Trotsky to effect the October Revolution
- Moscow and St Petersburg** the two major cities in Russia located in the west near Europe
- movements** popular outbreaks of mass action by ordinary people
- NEPmen** a new class who became wealthy from capitalist practices now allowed by the NEP
- Neva River** the majestic river that flows through St Petersburg directly behind the Tsar's Winter Palace
- October Manifesto** the document produced by Tsar Nicholas II in 1905 promising to grant an elected Duma in return for an end to the general strikes that had paralysed the economy
- Okhrana** the name given to the Tsar's secret police service to deal with opposition to the royal government
- Orthodox Church** the traditional Russian Church that had both supported and benefited from the rule of the tsars
- peasants** the lowest class in the social system who were dependent on working the land, which they either owned or rented; also called serfs

petition a written document signed by large numbers of people recommending a specific plan of action be undertaken by the government

Petrograd Soviet a powerful political body first formed by Trotsky during the 1905 Revolution and re-formed on 28 February 1917

Plekhanov George Plekhanov is considered to be the father of Russian Marxism

Pravda Lenin's daily newspaper, meaning 'Truth', begun in 1912

privileges economic and social benefits given to the upper social classes due to birth rather than on talent or merit

proletariat the name Karl Marx gave to industrial workers

propaganda the creation of powerful visual or verbal material that presents an issue from only one dominant point of view

Putilov Steel Works one of the largest factories in St Petersburg, employing more than 8000 men

Red Army the army of the Soviet Union

Red Guard a group of workers that was hastily formed into a fighting group to defend Petrograd against the advancing Kornilov

Reed John Reed was an American journalist who was in Petrograd during the October Revolution

reforms the healthy process of making political, economic or social changes to make a country operate more effectively

requisitioning the confiscation of goods (often foodstuffs such as grain), frequently with a high degree of force

revolution a process of massive political upheaval that changes the way in which a country is governed; a vertical shift in power from an absolute monarch to a popular government ruling on behalf of the people

Rodzianko Mikhail Rodzianko was the head of the Fourth Duma (1912–17), which formed the Provisional Government after the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II

Romanov Dynasty the series of rulers from the Romanov family that beginning with Michael Romanov in 1613

rouble Russian currency

Russo-Japanese War a war that began in 1904 and ended disastrously for the Russian navy in 1905 with a comprehensive defeat in the Tsushima Strait

Siberia the vast and remote location in central and eastern Russia where many revolutionaries were exiled

Smolny Institute the headquarters of the new Bolshevik government as well as the Petrograd Soviet in 1917

Social Democratic Workers' Party a revolutionary party founded by Plekhanov in 1898 on Marxist principles

Socialist Revolutionary Party the most popular Marxist revolutionary party in Russia because it represented the interests of the peasants

sovereign supreme ruler

soviet a local revolutionary group formed to listen to ordinary people's debates

Soviet Order No. 1 the order given by the Petrograd Soviet one day after its formation that no military orders from the Provisional Government were to be obeyed unless also approved by the Soviet

Soviet Union Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)

Sovnarkom the powerful all-Bolshevik cabinet of ministers in the new government in 1917

St Petersburg Soviet a powerful political body to represent the workers

Trans-Siberian Railway completed by Witte and opened in 1905; travelled across the length of Russia from Moscow to Vladivostok and therefore had major benefits for trade, the transport of goods and troop movements

Trotsky Leon Trotsky; a radical Marxist revolutionary

tsar Russian word for ruler or monarch. Often called the Emperor

urban of the city

utopia a perfect society without social problems

War Communism a series of economic policies instituted between 1918 and 1920 to attempt to win the Civil War

Winter Palace the Tsar's main palace in the heart of St Petersburg

Witte the influential Finance Minister and later Prime Minister, who rapidly increased Russian industry and completed the Trans-Siberian Railway

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