

Russian Revolution

When Russia entered World War I, it was completely unprepared for what was to come. Its military leaders were weak, and its factories could not make enough weapons and supplies. In the first years of the war, more than two million Russian soldiers were killed. Czar Nicholas II, the Russian monarch, went to the battlefield. Czar Nicholas II thought it would help his country if he went and personally led the troops. He left his wife, Alexandra, in charge of the government while he was gone.

February Revolution

World War One had a disastrous impact on the Russia economy. Food was in short supply and this led to rising prices. By January 1917, the price of commodities in Petrograd had increased six-fold (times six). In an attempt to increase their wages, industrial workers went on strike and in Petrograd people took to the streets demanding food. On February 11, 1917, a large crowd marched through the streets of Petrograd breaking shop windows and shouting anti-war slogans.

The situation deteriorated on February 22 when the owners of the Putilov Iron Works locked out its workforce after they demanded higher wages. Led by Bolshevik agitators, the 20,000 workers took to the streets. The army was ordered by Czar Nicholas II to stop the protesting, however, in some cases the soldiers joined the protestors in demanding an end to the war.

Other workers joined the demonstrations and by February 27, 1917, an estimated 200,000 workers were on strike. Czar Nicholas II, who was still off fighting WWI, ordered the commander of the Petrograd barracks to restrain "all the disorders on the streets or the capital." The following day troops fired on demonstrators in different parts of the city. Others refused to obey the order and the Pavlovsk division refused to obey orders. Other divisions followed and soldiers joined the striking workers in the streets.

On February 26, Czar Nicholas II ordered the Duma (Russian legislature) to close down. Members refused and they continued to meet and discuss what they should do. Michael Rodzianko, President of the Duma, sent a telegram to the Czar suggesting that he appoint a new government led by someone who had the confidence of the people. When the Czar did not reply, the Duma nominated a Provisional Government headed by Prince George Lvov.

The High Command of the Russian Army now feared a violent revolution and on February 28 suggested that Czar Nicholas II resign in favor of a more popular royal family. Attempts were not made to persuade Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovich to accept the throne. He refused on March 1st 1917, and Tzar Nicholas II resigned, leaving the Provisional Government in control of the country.

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October Revolution

On July 8, 1917, Alexander Kerensky became the new leader of the Provisional Government. Kerensky was still the most popular man in the government because of his political past. In the Duma, he had been leader of the moderate socialists and had been seen as the champion of the working-class. However, Kerensky was unwilling to take Russia out of WWI. In fact, soon after taking office, he announced a new summer offensive. His commitment to continue the war upset other groups in Russia that were adamantly against the war.

Soldiers on the Eastern Front were dismayed at the news and troops began to refuse to move to the front line. There was a rapid increase in the number of men deserting and by the fall of 1917 an estimated 2 million men had unofficially left the Russian army.

On July 19th, Kerensky gave orders for the arrest of leading Bolsheviks who were campaigning against the war. This included Vladimir Lenin, Gregory Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev, Anatoli Lunacharsky, and Alexandra Kollontai. The Bolshevik headquarters at the Kshesinsky Palace was also occupied by government troops. After the dissention in the military had taken place, disgruntled generals planned on revolting and asked the Bolsheviks for help. Lenin instructed the Bolshevik army and commanders that the revolting generals were to be stopped at Petrograd, instead of help.

Under pressure from the nobility and industrialists, Alexander Kerensky was persuaded to take decisive action. On October 22, 1917, he ordered the arrest of the Military Revolutionary Committee. The next day he closed down the Bolshevik newspapers and cut off the telephones to the Bolshevik headquarters.

Leon Trotsky, one of the leaders of the Bolsheviks now urged the overthrow of the Provisional Government. Lenin agreed and on the evening of October 24, orders were given for the Bolsheviks to begin to occupy the railway stations, the telephone exchange, and the State Bank. The following day the Red Guards surrounded the Winter Palace. Inside was most of the country's Cabinet, although Kerensky had managed to escape from the city.

At 9PM the Bolsheviks began to open fire on the palace. Little damage was done but the action persuaded most of those defending the building to surrender. The Red now entered the Winter Palace and arrested the Cabinet ministers.

On October 26, 1917, the All-Russian Congress of Soviets met and handed over power to the Soviet Council of People's Commissars. Vladimir Lenin was elected chairman.

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Lenin's Economic Policy

The Bolshevik revolutionary takeover in October 1917 was followed by over two years of civil war in Russia between the new Communist regime (with its Red Army) and its enemies- the conservative military officers commanding the so-called White armies. The struggle saw much brutality and excesses on both sides with the peasants suffering most from the overpriced demands of food supplies and recruits by both sides.

The cruel and dictatorial methods of the Bolshevik government had so alienated the mass of peasants and industrial working class elements that the erstwhile most loyal supporters of the regime, the sailors at the Kronstadt naval base, rebelled in March 1921 to the great embarrassment of senior Bolsheviks. Though the rebellion was mercilessly crushed, the regime was forced to moderate its ruthless impulses.

The New Economic Policy (NEP) was the result, a small allowance to the capitalist and free market instincts of peasants. Moreover, victory in the civil war was assured by this stage, thus allowing a relaxation of the coercive methods symbolized by the War Communism of the previous two to three years.

The New Economic Policy (NEP) had specific goals for the country and for communism. They included, but were not limited to:

- Ease public resentment against the emergency measures of the civil war that took food forcefully from the peasants.
- To regularize supply and production through a limited reintroduction of the market system (capitalism)
- To increase the "grass-roots" economy (economy led by the work and production of peasant farmers and factory workers) and to generate more money to industrialize Russia.
- To lay the foundation for the transition to socialism at some unspecified amount of time in the future.

The New Economic Plan (NEP) was not to create the communism suggested by Marx in "The Communist Manifesto," but rather to strengthen the Russian economy to where it could be self-sufficient and strong enough to support the beginnings of a world wide communist revolution.

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Stalin's Rise to Power

After the October Revolution of 1917, Stalin, already a member of the central committee since 1912 entered the Soviet cabinet as people's commissar for nationalities and began to emerge as a leader of the new regime. During the civil war from 1918 to 1920, he played an important administrative role on the military fronts and in the capital. He was elected (1922) general secretary of the central committee of the party, enabling him to control the rank-and-file members and to build an apparatus loyal to him.

Joseph Stalin's significance in the revolutionary movement and his relation to Lenin have been subjects of great controversy. He was highly regarded by Lenin as an administrator but not as a theoretician or leader. Toward the end of his illness, which began in 1922, Lenin wrote a testament in which he strongly criticized Stalin's arbitrary (random) conduct as general secretary and recommended that he be removed. However, he died before any action could be taken, and the testament was suppressed.

On Lenin's death, Stalin, Kamenev, and Grigori Zinoviev formed a triumvirate of successors allied against Trotsky, who was a strong contender to replace Lenin. After Trotsky was ousted in 1925, as commissar of war, Stalin now allied with Nikolai Bukharin and turned on Kamenev and Zinoviev. In a desperate attempt to counter Stalin's power, Zinoviev and Kamenev joined forces with Trotsky. Their efforts failed and they were forced to resign from the central committee of the Communist party. Stalin subsequently broke with Bukharin and engineered his fall from power.

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February Revolution

- Russian Public: protested for “Land, Peace, and Bread”
- Russian Army: Ordered to stop protests, however joined protests instead
- Czar Nicholas II – Monarch of Russia during WWI
- Food shortages and price increase
- Strikes and marches in Petrograd
- Army joining the protestors
- Army ordered to suppress strikes (many soldiers mutiny)
- Tsar is asked to abdicate and does. Provisional government takes over Russia

October Revolution

- Alexander Kerensky: Leader of the Provisional Government in Russia
- Russian Army: Deserted during WWI; Red Guards took over Winter Palace
- Vladimir Lenin: Chairman of Soviet Council of People’s Commissars
- Leon Trotsky
- Kerensky’s commitment to war upset public
- Russian soldiers deserting the army
- Kerensky’s order to arrest Bolshevik’s campaigning against war
- Bolshevik army storming the Winter Palace and taking over the provisional government
- Appointment of Lenin as the head of the new government



Lenin’s New Economic Plan (NEP)

- Vladimir Lenin: First leader of the USSR
- People revolting from harsh treatment by Bolsheviks.
- Lenin realizing how oppressive the Bolsheviks were to the public masses through the strict taking of food and goods from them.
- Lenin creating the NEP and the provisions of the NEP. (NEP was to strengthen Russia to spread communism and give power to the peasants)
- Russia becomes the USSR in 1922.

Joseph Stalin’s Rise to Power

- Joseph Stalin: Leader after Vladimir Lenin; became dictator
- Vladimir Lenin: First leader of USSR
- Leon Trotsky
- Those opposed to Stalin
- Stalin being in a position to appoint people that would be loyal to him to other positions.
- Lenin, on his deathbed, saying that Stalin should be removed.
- Stalin’s alliance against Trotsky and Trotsky being forced out of the country.
- Stalin turning against his alliance and putting himself alone as the leader of the USSR

