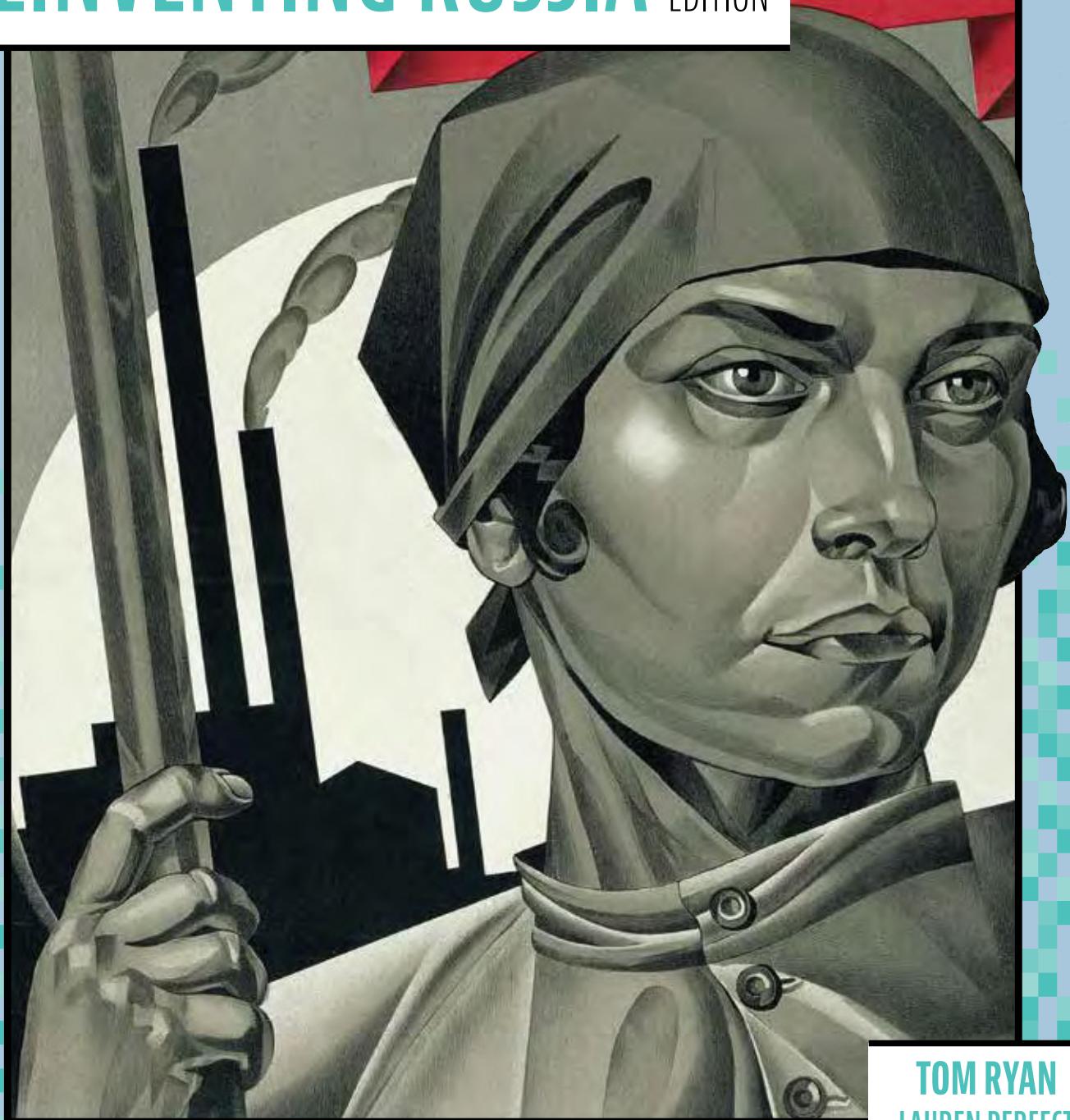


# REVOLUTIONS

## REINVENTING RUSSIA

3RD  
EDITION



TOM RYAN  
LAUREN PERFECT  
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First published 2021 by:



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***Reinventing Russia 3rd edition***

by Tom Ryan, Lauren Perfect and Scott Sweeney

978 1 922481 02 3 (print)

978 1 922481 03 0 (ebook)

Publisher: Georgina Argus

Typesetting and design: Sally Bond

Editor: Philip Bryan

Printed by: Southern Impact

[www.southernimpact.com.au](http://www.southernimpact.com.au)

Cover image: Shawshots / Alamy Stock Photo

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- tips for writing a high-scoring response
- annotated exemplars for different question types
- sample exam with sample responses



## REVISION TOOLS

- revision checklists
- timelines
- quizzes

## KEY KNOWLEDGE

- tables and diagrams summarising key information
- key quotes (primary sources and historical interpretations)
- key individuals, movements and ideas
- content mapped to the VCE Study Design



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HTΛV

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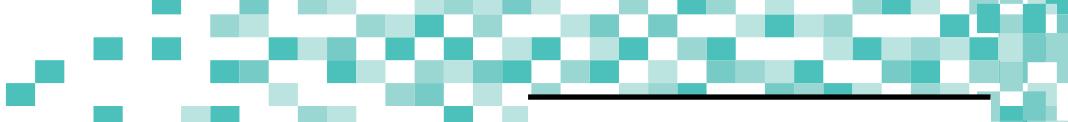
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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## IMAGE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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**Tom's acknowledgements:** This book, and this edition in particular, is special to me. It's now been a little over ten years since the first edition, and twenty years since I taught my first Revolutions class. Before I immersed myself in my studies of China, Russia was my first academic passion, and for a long time I've wanted to write a complete history of Russia's revolutionary period. The opportunity to do so with this edition of *Reinventing Russia* was challenging, but ultimately very rewarding. I've enjoyed using new texts and refamiliarising myself with studies that cover the period before October 1917 that I had read previously but hadn't had the chance to draw together in my writing. I hope that *Reinventing Russia* (3rd edition) provides a reasoned, clear and engaging account—with the story of the Revolution playing a central role in the book.

Thank you to Georgina Argus and Sally Bond at HTAV Publishing. Thank you, Sally, for making the layout and design of the book look so good! Thank you, Georgina, for having the vision to drive this project. You've known when to push to keep the deadlines on track, but also been so willing to listen and collaborate. I couldn't ask for a more supportive, patient and responsive publisher.

Thanks to Philip Bryan for your skill and nuance in polishing the text—I learnt a lot from the writing of this edition.

Thanks, Pearl (Nun of the Ninch), for your seriously awesome illustrations! I'm so glad you signed on to this project and hope this brings you further opportunities.

As always, nice work on the maps and diagrams, Ruben Hopmans. Love your work mate!

Thank you to all my past History: Revolutions students at Woodleigh School. Many of you trialled different drafts, activities and other resources that ended up shaping *Reinventing Russia*. I've loved your insightful questions and feedback, as well as your willingness to endure my humour in attempting to spark your interest in History.

The biggest and most important thank you is to my wife, Simmone, and daughters, Frankie and Agnes. This project took WAY longer than expected, and the commitment of writing two books at the same time—with two toddlers in the house—has often been really hard. Thank you so, so much for your love, patience and support through all the weekends, long nights and supposed 'holidays' that I've had to dedicate to writing.

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*Scott was an author on the first two editions of Reinventing Russia.*

## HTAV ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

HTAV would like to thank the authors of this edition, Tom Ryan and Lauren Perfect, for their enthusiasm and dedication to this project.

Thank you to Tom Ryan for his additional work across the series and constant ideas for improvement.

Our thanks also to the following people who contributed to this book: Philip Bryan, Pearl Baillieu @Nun of the Ninch, Ruben Hopmans, Guy Nolch, Ian Lyell, Dr Deb Hull, Giuliana Cincotta, Nikki Davis and Catherine Hart.

We would also like to thank the many HTAV members who have provided valuable feedback over the years.

# REVOLUTIONS—AN INTRODUCTION

*A study of revolutions is important because it allows us to look at how critical moments in history alter the function of nations and their societies, and the lives of generations of people. They allow us to examine issues of power—who has it and who doesn't—and to explore what happens when there is a radical shift in power.*

## STUDYING REVOLUTIONS

The study of Revolutions is based on the understanding that 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.'<sup>1</sup> Often revolutions involve a transfer of power from the oppressor to the oppressed, from the privileged to the less privileged. In some instances, a revolution is a response to hierarchical authority and its inequalities, while in others a revolution can be a response to colonial oppression.

Typically, revolutions are driven by strong ideological beliefs about how society should operate. Central to these beliefs are ideas about equality and control, and how a government should balance these. It is important to note that while revolutions are considered primarily political events, there are also significant economic, social and cultural factors that need to be considered. In the context of Revolutions, these are examined through the lens of key historical thinking concepts.

## WHAT IS A REVOLUTION?

The term 'revolution' is used widely and often loosely. Consider for example, how advertisers frequently refer to products as 'revolutionary' to generate a sense of something being special or beneficial or even necessary. Understanding what a revolution is—and what it is not—is crucial in a study of Revolutions. This is no easy feat as sometimes the term 'revolution' is used by different people to mean different things. This is evident when we consider the differences between a revolution and other forms of conflict such as a rebellion, a revolt or a coup, and the ways in which these terms are sometimes randomly assigned to different events.

## THE CAUSES OF REVOLUTION

The causes of revolution are often complex and overlapping. It can be useful to consider the long-term and short-term **causes**, and the **triggers**, of revolution. If you consider the metaphor of a revolution as a fire, the descriptions to the right outline the role of each of these.

The path towards revolution is never a smooth one. Rarely do you see revolutionary tension steadily rise; rather it ebbs and flows as those in power attempt to put an end to discontent (through a combination of repression and reform). This results in periods of escalation and de-escalation of revolutionary beliefs and action. Identifying a series of crisis points in the lead up to revolution can help you more clearly see this process.

Of course, one of the challenges in a study of Revolutions is to evaluate the various factors that cause revolution. How are these factors related? Are some factors more significant than others? To what extent? Does this change over time? Why?

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF REVOLUTION

Seizing power is only one of the hurdles a revolutionary party or movement faces. All too often, the threat of further revolution or counter-revolution drives the new government's decisions and actions. Revolutionary ideals may be compromised. Arguably, the consequences of revolution can be unintended—this study asks you to identify the intended and unintended effects of revolution and evaluate how these impacted different groups of people at the time. You should compare the perspectives of people within and between groups and evaluate the positive and negative consequences of living in the 'new society'.

<sup>1</sup> VCAA, VCE History Study Design 2022–2026.

# CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

Ultimately, the concepts of cause and consequence are used to understand not just the dynamics of a revolution but also to analyse the extent to which revolution resulted in change. The rhetoric of revolutionary leaders, parties and movements is often utopian—they promise a better life with greater freedom, less hierarchical control and more equality—but do they deliver? Sometimes the new regime ends up every bit (or even more) repressive than the regime it supplanted.

In comparing the political, economic and social dimensions of life in the 'old' and 'new' societies, this course of study invites an appraisal of the changes and continuities a revolution brought to society. What changes were evident? Were they positive or negative? What stayed the same (continued)? Why? Did life change for all groups in society or just for some? How do we know?

## LONG-TERM CAUSES

The sources of fuel needed to stage a revolution are long-held political, economic, social and cultural structures, often based on issues of equality and control. These act to interrupt the status quo—much like chopping down a tree interrupts the ecology of a forest system.



## SHORT-TERM CAUSES

Unresolved and growing over time, these structures generate grievances and resentments that metaphorically become the fuel for the revolutionary fire.



## TRIGGERS

The spark that ignites a revolution can be planned or unplanned; it can be an **event** or the actions, or inactions, of an **individual** or a group. Regardless, the trigger often galvanises revolutionary **movements** into action. Sometimes that action involves a mass-movement, whilst at others it offers an opportunity that smaller groups can utilise to seize power.



# SIGNIFICANCE

As you examine the causes and consequences of revolution, and the resultant changes and continuities, Revolutions also asks you to evaluate the relative significance of these. Were some movements, ideas, individuals and events more significant than others? Why/Why not? When assessing significance, consider:

Scale	How many people did it affect?
Duration	How long did it last?
Profundity (how profound something is)	What intensity of change did it produce? Deep impact or surface-level change?

# PERSPECTIVES AND INTERPRETATIONS

Significance is a relative term. One must always ask—significant to whom? In answering this, consideration must be given to:

- the **perspectives** and experiences of different groups of people at the time. Were certain movements, ideas, individuals and events seen as more significant by certain groups? Why/why not?
- the **interpretations** of others (often historians) after the time. Have views of significance changed? Why/why not?

*Ultimately, the complexities and moral dilemmas found in the study of revolutions makes for rewarding analysis and evaluation. As a student of Revolutions it is your job to grapple with these concepts and construct your own evidence-based historical arguments.*

written by Catherine Hart

# SECTION A

## CAUSES OF REVOLUTION

- What were the significant causes of revolution?
- How did the actions of popular movements and particular individuals contribute to triggering a revolution?
- To what extent did social tensions and ideological conflicts contribute to the outbreak of revolution?<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Extract from the VCE History Revolutions Study Design (2022–2026) © VCAA, reproduced by permission.

### A word about dates

Until February 1918 Russia used the Julian calendar, which was thirteen days behind the Gregorian calendar used by the rest of the world. The Gregorian calendar is still the international calendar used today.

In this book we have used the dates that applied in Russia at the time of each event. So we talk about the 'October Revolution', even though, according to the rest of the world, it took place in November. Where an event refers to two countries that used different calendars, we have used the abbreviation NS (New Style) to show dates that follow the Gregorian calendar.

All dates after February 1918 follow the Gregorian calendar.

'Is this stupidity?  
Or is this treason?'

PAVEL MILIUKOV,  
SPEECH TO THE DUMA,  
NOVEMBER 1916



Rasputin

300,000

WORKERS PROTEST  
ON THE STREETS  
OF PETROGRAD

26 February 1917

'Peace! Bread!  
Land!'

RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR



45  
MINUTES

Time taken by the  
Japanese Imperial  
Navy to sink Russia's  
Baltic Fleet



#### THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE

covered over **16%**  
of the world's surface

126 million people

**82%** peasants

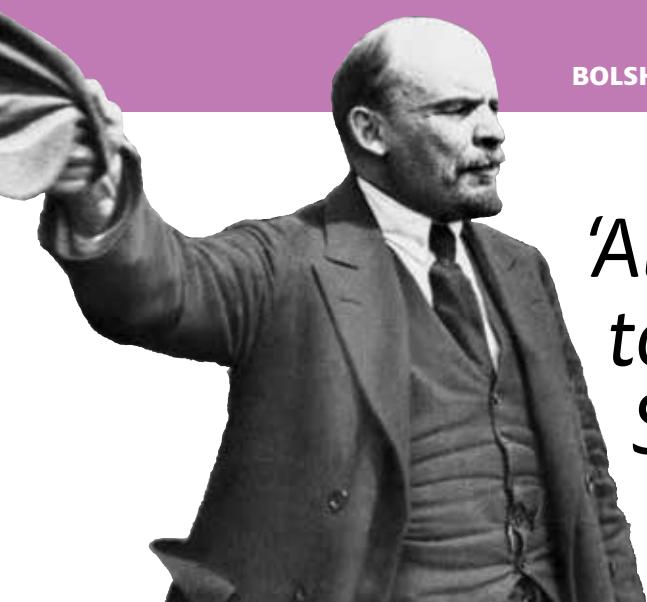


*'The most colossal state apparatus in the world making use of every achievement of modern technological progress in order to retard the historical progress of its own country.'*

LEON TROTSKY

#### BOLSHEVIK SLOGANS

**'All Power  
to the  
Soviets!'**



*'There is no God  
any longer.  
There is no tsar.'*

FATHER GAPON, BLOODY SUNDAY



#### WORLD WAR I

**6.5 MILLION**  
MEN MOBILISED

**4.6 MILLION**  
RIFLES AVAILABLE



*'This is not war,  
sir, it is slaughter.  
The Germans use  
up shells; we use up  
human lives.'*

RUSSIAN OFFICER, c. 1915

# TIMELINE

## PRE-1896



**1613**

The Romanov dynasty comes to power

**1848**

Marx and Engels publish the *Communist Manifesto*

**1853–1856**

Crimean War

**1855–1881**

Reign of Alexander II

**1861**

Emancipation of the serfs

**1881**

Terrorist group the 'People's Will' assassinates Tsar Alexander II

**1881–1894**

Reign of Alexander III

**1891–1892**

Severe famine

**1891**

Construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway begins

**1893–1903**

**KEY EVENT** Rapid industrialisation known as the 'Great Spurt' initiated under Sergei Witte

**1894**

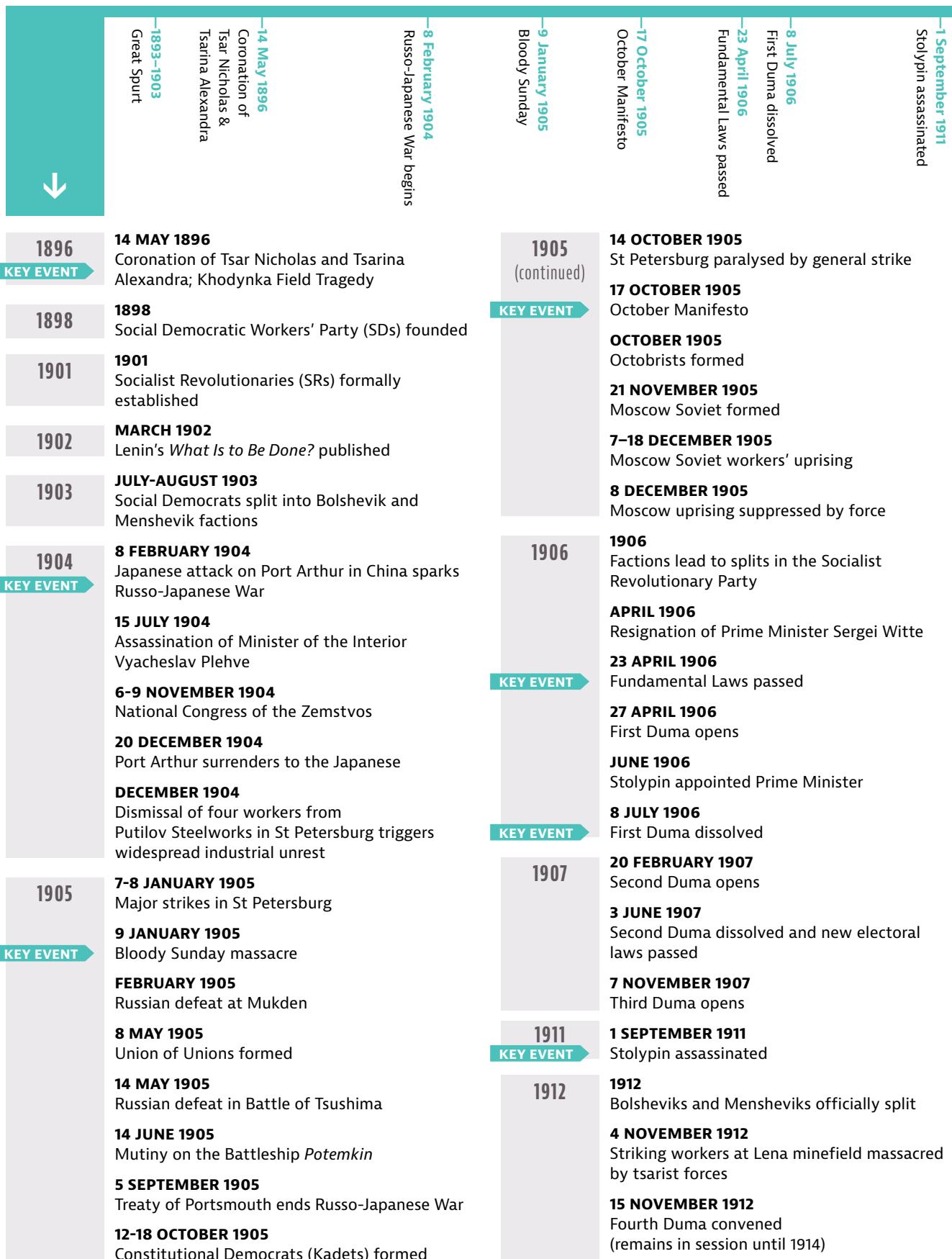
Death of Alexander III

Tsar Nicholas II comes to power



**1896-26 OCTOBER 1917**

## **TIMELINE**



**1896-26 OCTOBER 1917**

**-1 August 1914 NS**  
Germany declares war  
on Russia

**—22 August 1915**  
Tsar Nicholas takes charge  
of armed forces

**—16 December 1916**  
Rasputin murdered

	—	27 February 1917
International Women's Day	—	Petrograd garrison mutiny
marches	—	Petrograd Soviet formed
	—	Provisional Committee assumes authority
— 23 February 1917		

### —3-4 April 1917

#### Lenin returns and presents April Thesis

<b>1914</b>	<b>1 AUGUST 1914 NS</b> Germany declares war on Russia	
<b>KEY EVENT</b>		
<b>1915</b>	<b>28–31 AUGUST 1914</b> Battle of Tannenberg	
<b>KEY EVENT</b>		
<b>1915</b>	<b>15 SEPTEMBER 1914</b> Russian army defeated at Masurian Lakes	
<b>22 AUGUST 1915</b>	Tsar Nicholas takes charge of armed forces	
<b>25 AUGUST 1915</b>	Progressive bloc in Duma calls for reform of ministers	
<b>2 SEPTEMBER 1915</b>	Tsar dismisses Duma	
<b>1916</b>	<b>4 JUNE–20 SEPTEMBER 1916</b> Brusilov Offensive	
<b>KEY EVENT</b>		
<b>16 DECEMBER 1916</b>	Rasputin murdered	
<b>1917</b>	<b>9 JANUARY 1917</b> 150,000 demonstrate in memory of Bloody Sunday	
<b>KEY EVENT</b>		
<b>18 JANUARY 1917</b>	Putilov Steelworks strike	
<b>23 FEBRUARY 1917</b>	International Women's Day marches	
<b>KEY EVENT</b>		
<b>26 FEBRUARY 1917</b>	Duma defies Tsar's order to disband	
<b>27 FEBRUARY 1917</b>	Petrograd garrison mutiny	
<b>KEY EVENT</b>		
<b>KEY EVENT</b>	Petrograd Soviet formed	
<b>KEY EVENT</b>	Provisional Committee assumes authority	
<b>1 MARCH 1917</b>	Soviet Order No 1	
<b>2 MARCH 1917</b>	Abdication of the tsar	
	Provisional Government formed	
<b>20 MARCH 1917</b>	Tsereteli returns to Russia and develops Revolutionary Defencism	
<b>27 MARCH 1917</b>	Provisional Government releases its Declaration of War Aims	
<b>1917</b>	<b>KEY EVENT</b>	
	<b>1917</b>	
	(continued)	
	<b>3–4 APRIL 1917</b>	
	Lenin returns to Russia and presents his April Theses	
	<b>18 APRIL 1917</b>	
	Miliukov puts forward his Note	
	<b>20 APRIL 1917</b>	
	Riots in Petrograd against Provisional Government's handling of war	
	<b>4 MAY 1917</b>	
	Trotsky returns to Russia	
	<b>5 MAY 1917</b>	
	First Coalition Government	
	<b>18 JUNE–2 JULY 1917</b>	
	Kerensky's June Offensive	
	<b>3–6 JULY 1917</b>	
	July Days	
	<b>8 JULY 1917</b>	
	Kerensky becomes Prime Minister	
	<b>18 JULY 1917</b>	
	Kornilov appointed Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces	
	<b>25 JULY 1917</b>	
	Second Coalition Government	
	<b>12–15 AUGUST 1917</b>	
	Moscow State Conference	
	<b>19–30 AUGUST 1917</b>	
	Kornilov Affair	
	<b>KEY EVENT</b>	
	<b>2 SEPTEMBER 1917</b>	
	Bolsheviks achieve majority in Moscow Soviet	
	<b>13 SEPTEMBER 1917</b>	
	Bolsheviks gain majority in Petrograd Soviet	
	<b>14–19 SEPTEMBER 1917</b>	
	Democratic State Conference	
	<b>25 SEPTEMBER 1917</b>	
	Third Coalition Government	
	<b>7 OCTOBER 1917</b>	
	Trotsky becomes chairman of Petrograd Soviet	
	<b>7 OCTOBER 1917</b>	
	Lenin revives slogan 'All Power to the Soviets'	
	<b>7 OCTOBER 1917</b>	
	Pre-parliament opens	

<b>—18 June–2 July 1917</b>	Kerensky's June Offensive
<b>—3–6 July 1917</b>	July Days
<b>—10 October 1917</b>	Bolshevik Central Committee meets
<b>—19–30 August 1917</b>	Kornilov Affair
<b>—25–26 October 1917</b>	Storming of the Winter Palace

**KEY EVENT****1917**  
(continued)**10 OCTOBER 1917**

Bolshevik Central Committee meets to discuss whether to seize power from the Provisional Government

**16 OCTOBER 1917**

First full meeting of Military Revolutionary Committee (Milrevcom)

**23–24 OCTOBER 1917**

Kerensky orders arrest of leading Bolsheviks, closure of Bolshevik newspapers and raising the bridges of central Petrograd

**24 OCTOBER 1917**

Trotsky's Milrevcom troops and Red Guards begin to re-take city from Kerensky's forces

**25–26 OCTOBER 1917**

A Bolshevik-led insurrection seizes power in the 'storming' of the Winter Palace

Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets

**KEY EVENT****27 OCTOBER 1917**

Founding of the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom) declared

# IMPERIAL RUSSIA

(1855–1896)



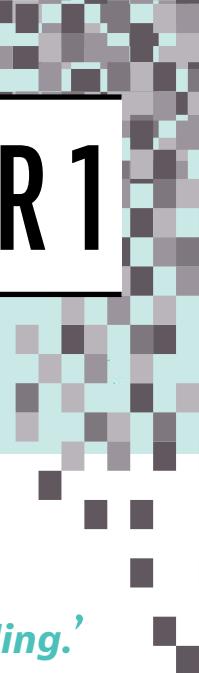
**Source 1.01** *The Coronation of Emperor Nicholas II at the Dormition Cathedral of the Moscow Kremlin on 14/26 May 1896* by Laurits Regner, 1898.

# CHAPTER 1



*'What is going to happen to me and all of Russia?  
I am not prepared to be a Tsar. I never wanted to  
become one. I know nothing of the business of ruling.'*

—Tsar Nicholas II



The Russian Empire was the largest state in Europe, both in geographical size and in population. This immense realm featured diverse geographical terrain, extreme variations in climate, and a population that included many different nationalities and language groups. It was believed that only an authoritarian government could hold power in a land of such size and social diversity. A tradition of autocratic rule emerged in which an emperor—the tsar—held all power. Tsarist Russia was a hereditary monarchy ruled by the Romanov dynasty. The tsars held enormous power and exercised their authority over the empire through a number of institutions, including:

- a large governmental bureaucracy
- provincial governors
- a large military and police force.

The Russian Orthodox Church also supported the ruling order. While it seemed to be powerful, the tsarist regime was troubled by institutional weaknesses and tensions. Russia was the most ‘backward’ of all the countries in Europe in terms of its economic development. There was a huge gulf between the empire’s privileged ruling and landowning classes, and its impoverished peasants and exploited urban workers. Such social and economic inequalities caused conflicts between the government and its people. The repression of minority groups was a further source of tensions.

Tsar Nicholas II came to power as Russia neared the end of the nineteenth century. In the coming years he would face challenges far greater than those faced by any tsar before him. However, Nicholas lacked the qualities of an effective leader. His efforts to preserve an autocratic regime in an era of modernisation lead radicals to believe that Russia was ripe for revolution.

## KEY QUESTIONS

- 
- What were the defining geographic, demographic and social features of the Russian Empire?
  - How did the size and environment of the Russian Empire create challenges for the tsarist regime?
  - How did economic and social inequalities contribute to tensions in tsarist Russia?
  - How was the Russian Empire governed?
  - To what extent did institutional weaknesses in tsarist Russia contribute to rising tensions?
  - How did the leadership and personality of Tsar Nicholas influence the authority of the existing order and contribute to rising tensions in Russia?

# THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE

Russian proverb: 'Russia is not a State, but a World.'

## GEOGRAPHY

### DID YOU KNOW?

Tsarist Russia was geographically the third-largest empire in history. By the 1880s, Imperial Russia covered over 20 million square kilometres. (In comparison, Australia is 7.69 million square kilometres in area.)

The Russian Empire covered one-sixth of the world's surface, and bridged the continents of Europe and Asia. At its widest, the empire stretched for approximately 8000 kilometres east–west and, at its longest, just over 3000 kilometres north–south.

Russia has a diverse range of physical features and vegetation. Forest covered much of the north and east, while desert and arid mountains featured in the south-east. Central and northern Russia had bitterly cold winters, with temperatures as low as  $-40^{\circ}$  for over six months of the year.

It is hard to grasp just how large Imperial Russia was. The empire stretched over 20 million square kilometres, had eleven different time zones and five different zones of vegetation—and when the sun was setting at the western end of the empire, it was rising in the east!

Communication and defence were extremely difficult. A journey across the empire could take weeks to complete—and even longer in winter. This was a problem for the central government, as tsarist Russia had no natural barriers it could use to help defend its borders. Its major rivers, which generally run north–south, were not much help for travelling the breadth of the empire. The two major cities were Moscow and St Petersburg—which was the capital. Most major cities and towns were found in European Russia, where the majority of the population lived.

The size of Imperial Russia and its geographical challenges meant that major projects could only be undertaken by the central government. Few other groups could raise the necessary funds or equipment. This led to the development of a strong and centralised ruling authority.

→ Windmills near Omsk, Siberia, 1885.



## POPULATION

The first census of Imperial Russia took place in 1897, and recorded a population of 126 million people. It was the largest population in Europe. Russia's population increased rapidly during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The estimated population growth was:

- 1815: 40 million people
- 1910: 161 million people
- 1914: 165 million people.

## NATIONALITIES AND RUSSIFICATION

The 1897 census showed that Russia had a diverse ethnic population, with sixty different nationalities recognised. Among them were Poles, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Jews, Tatars, Kazaks, *Cossacks*, Germans and Armenians, and many other ethnic minorities. A diverse array of languages, religious beliefs, customs and cultures was a feature of Russian society. The empire was therefore multilingual and multicultural.

However, the tsarist government administered the empire as though its subjects were ethnically the same. From the 1890s, the government carried out a deliberate policy of *Russification*, forcing Russian language and customs upon ethnic minorities and ignoring calls for national recognition and specific rights for minorities. The policy of Russification meant that *nationalism* became a potentially explosive cause of conflict between the government and its people.



### ACTIVITY

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Note three or more significant geographical features of the Russian Empire.
- 2 What was the population of Russia in 1896? What happened to the Russian population between 1815 and 1914?
- 3 'The Russian Empire was multicultural.' Explain in your own words what this statement is getting at.
- 4 How did the policy of Russification affect the minorities of the Russian Empire?

**Cossack** a member of a people of Ukraine and southern Russia, noted for their horsemanship and military skill

**Russification** the imposition of Russian language, culture and religion on non-Russians, especially ethnic minorities in Imperial Russia

**nationalism** identifying with your country and national identity; showing loyalty and support towards your nation's interests

◀ Russian Cossacks on the march, unknown artist.

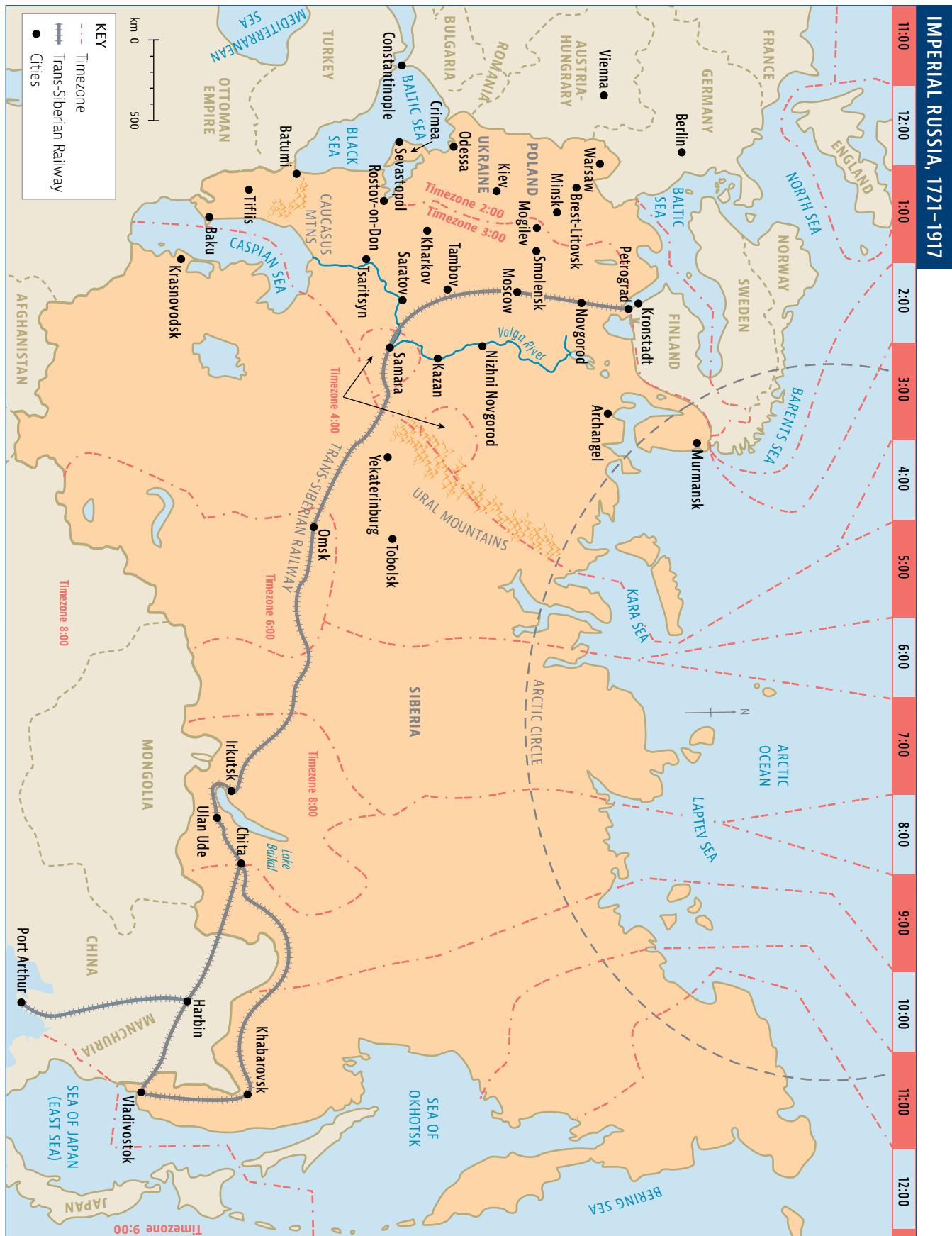
### ACTIVITY

#### MAPPING

Complete the tasks below using the map on page 10 and information provided on previous pages.

- 1 Identify four geographical features unique to Russia prior to 1904.
- 2 Identify four factors that would have made Imperial Russia a difficult place to govern. Explain why each factor would make governing difficult.
- 3 The majority of Russia's major cities and towns were located in the western part of the empire. Suggest possible reasons for this, using evidence from the map and other information.

## Source 1.02



# SOCIAL CLASSES

**Tsar Nicholas II:** 'I conceive Russia as a landed estate, of which the proprietor is the Tsar, the administrator is the nobility, and the workers are the peasantry.'

The 1897 census also categorised the Russian people into five general social classes.

From the top down, these classes were loosely defined as:

- ruling class
- upper class
- commercial class
- working class
- **peasants**.

The socio-economic conditions of Russia's social classes varied widely. There was a big difference between the living conditions and cultural views of the empire's rich people and poor people. The affluence of the ruling nobility was a sharp contrast with the lives of the peasants. Most peasants were subsistence farmers who basically ate what they produced and had nothing left over to sell. A similar situation existed in the cities, with vast differences in incomes and living conditions between workers and factory owners. This unequal distribution of wealth and privilege was a potential cause of revolutionary tensions. There were many contradictions in Russian society. Among them were that:

- great wealth existed alongside dire poverty
- modern industry was emerging, but authority was held by an outdated political system
- an educated elite, called the **intelligentsia**, contemplated high philosophy, while peasants followed customs that were hundreds of years old, and believed that spirits roamed the land.

**peasants** farm workers who rented land or worked for farm owners

**intelligentsia** the intellectual elite, usually professionals such as writers, artists, lawyers, doctors, educators and academics

## PEASANTS

Eighty-two per cent of the 1897 population of the empire were peasants, and farming dominated the economy. Most exports were produced by commercial farms that were owned by the wealthy nobility, which employed hired labour. Peasants mainly produced grain, such as wheat and rye. However, farming techniques were basic:

- grain was harvested by hand, using a curved blade called a sickle
- wooden ploughs were commonly used
- fertiliser was limited
- many peasants did not own livestock, and instead used family members to pull the plough.

Land was distributed by the village commune or **mir**. The mir ensured that decision-making was done on a collective basis by the village elders and the male head of each family household.

Decisions made by the mir were binding. The mir dictated what crops were to be sown, and was responsible for collecting taxes and resolving minor disputes. All peasant land belonged to the mir, and was given out according to the size of each family. Land was also periodically redistributed if there was a change in family circumstances, such as a birth or a death, or a son starting his own family.

The land was farmed in strips, rather than large fenced fields, and these strips could be quite a distance from each other. Not only was this inefficient, it discouraged peasants from planting different crops each year—known as crop rotation—or allowing a field

**mir** the village communal councils of Russian peasants. *Mir* means both 'village commune' and 'world'. This emphasises the extent to which the village was often the peasants' whole world

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
Many Russian peasants believed that to be poor was to be virtuous.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Less than half of Russian peasant babies reached the age of five. A major contributor to this tragedy was the tradition of leaving infants in the care of their older siblings while their mothers worked in the field. Babies were soothed with chewed bread covered by a rag. The bread and rag both festered and turned putrid in the summer months, which led to sickness.

→ **Source 1.03** Russian peasants.



→ **Source 1.04** A Russian mir, where the land was farmed in strips.



**emancipated** freed or released from control by another person

**serfdom** an agricultural system based on virtual slavery where peasants were owned by nobles or wealthy landowners

**redemption payments** annual taxes paid by peasants to the tsarist government in return for an allocation of land

→ **Source 1.05** Cited in Michael Bucklow and Glenn Russell, *Russia: Why Revolution?* (Melbourne: Longman, 1996), 37–38.

to rest for a year. As all mir land was owned collectively, the peasants had no incentive to improve the soil.

Most peasants grew just enough to feed their families—and hopefully enough to meet their payments to the government. By 1900, around half the peasant population produced enough to feed themselves, while only 16 per cent produced a surplus.<sup>1</sup> Life for most peasants was terribly hard—full of backbreaking work and unending toil. Many lived on the brink of starvation. The huts in a typical Russian village were simple timber dwellings with packed earth floors. Living in close quarters with a lack of ventilation meant that illnesses spread quickly throughout peasant families. Infant mortality was incredibly high.

Russia's peasantry was generally conservative, and most of them lacked formal education. Their daily lives were governed by the teachings of the church and by the customs and traditions of the mir. Village life, as Trotsky described it, was one of 'icons and cockroaches'.<sup>2</sup> Some peasants still wore shoes made from the bark of birch trees.

Russia's peasants were only **emancipated** (or released) from **serfdom** in 1861 under Tsar Alexander II. Before then the nobility literally 'owned' the peasants that worked

their farms. Although the peasants had been given their freedom, they still had to make annual taxes—called **redemption payments**—to the government to repay the cost of compensating the nobles for their land. The peasants resented these payments, as they forced many people into debt. The poorest of Russian society—those with the least ability to pay—were thus targeted for revenue by the government

A huge increase in the rural population during the mid-to-late nineteenth century led to a critical shortage of land for peasant farmers. This so-called 'land hunger' made the poverty of the countryside even worse, and many peasants sought employment in the cities when the opportunity came in the 1890s.

### The working and living conditions of peasants in 1894

It is difficult to conceive of more exhausting work ... When moving the hay ... the peasants do not allow themselves more than six hours rest out of the twenty-four ... They hardly ever taste meat ... The ordinary run of villagers, during eight months out of the twelve, eats bread mixed with husks, pounded straw or birch bark ... A whole third of our peasantry has become landless [rural workers] in modern Russia.

## WORKING CLASS

Because the development of Russia's heavy industry was limited, it meant that the industrial working class made up a relatively small percentage of the Russian population compared to other major European powers of the late nineteenth century. While Russian workers—or **proletariat**—made up just 4 per cent of the overall population, they were concentrated in specific areas in major cities. This placed them in the centres of political power, and meant that the workers had a much greater capacity to influence the authorities than the peasants did.

The conditions experienced by Russia's proletariat were appalling. Factory workers worked long hours, received low pay, had dangerous working conditions and lived in crowded living quarters. There were no trade unions to organise collective bargaining or to appeal to the authorities about the bad working conditions—the government considered such action to be illegal.

### Report on factory conditions by government inspector in the 1880s

Many of the workers in the steel mills are ... literally 'working with fire.' For when steel is smelted, the metal is heated white-hot for stamping and rolling rails ... The intensity of flaming light is undoubtedly harmful to the eyes ... Work at the mill never stops, day or night. There are two twelve-hour shifts a day ... Sanitary conditions in factories everywhere are as a rule completely unsatisfactory ... In cloth factory No. 48 which is typical of such establishments ... there was no ventilation at all ... Moving around these machines is extremely hazardous, and accidents could easily happen to the ... [most careful of] workers.

**proletariat** Marxist term for the industrial working class (factory workers)



↑ **Source 1.06** Imperial Lapidary Factory in Yekaterinburg, Imperial Russia.

← **Source 1.07** Cited in Michael Bucklow and Glenn Russell, *Russia: Why Revolution?* (Melbourne: Longman, 1996), 54.

## COMMERCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL MIDDLE CLASSES

The commercial class included businesspeople, traders and shop owners. The professional class included lawyers, clerks, engineers and teachers. People in the commercial and professional classes had a good standard of living, and they also had more opportunities for social advancement than the working class—especially successful businessmen. Like the working class, Russia's middle classes represented a small proportion of the overall population—at just 1.5 per cent. This low percentage reflected the empire's lack of development compared to the rest of Europe, and also limited the push towards democratic politics, which by then had emerged elsewhere in Europe.

However, it was from the ranks of the intelligentsia that the interest and organisation of reformist and revolutionary groups emerged.

## THE UPPER AND RULING CLASSES

The upper class enjoyed considerable wealth and privilege in Russian society. This group included:

- nobility and **hereditary landowners**
- industrialists
- church leaders
- high-ranking military officials.

At the very top of the **social hierarchy** was the tsar and the royal family, as well as high-ranking members of the government. The ruling class was the smallest—but wealthiest—group of people in Imperial Russia. The upper and ruling classes had all the political power and influence—and they saw no reason for political or social change.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Minister of Finance Sergei Witte once reported to Tsar Nicholas: 'Your Majesty has 130 million subjects. Of them, barely more than half live, the rest vegetate'.

**hereditary landowners** people who had inherited land upon the death of a family member

**social hierarchy** a system of people in graded order, according to their status or authority

## ACTIVITY

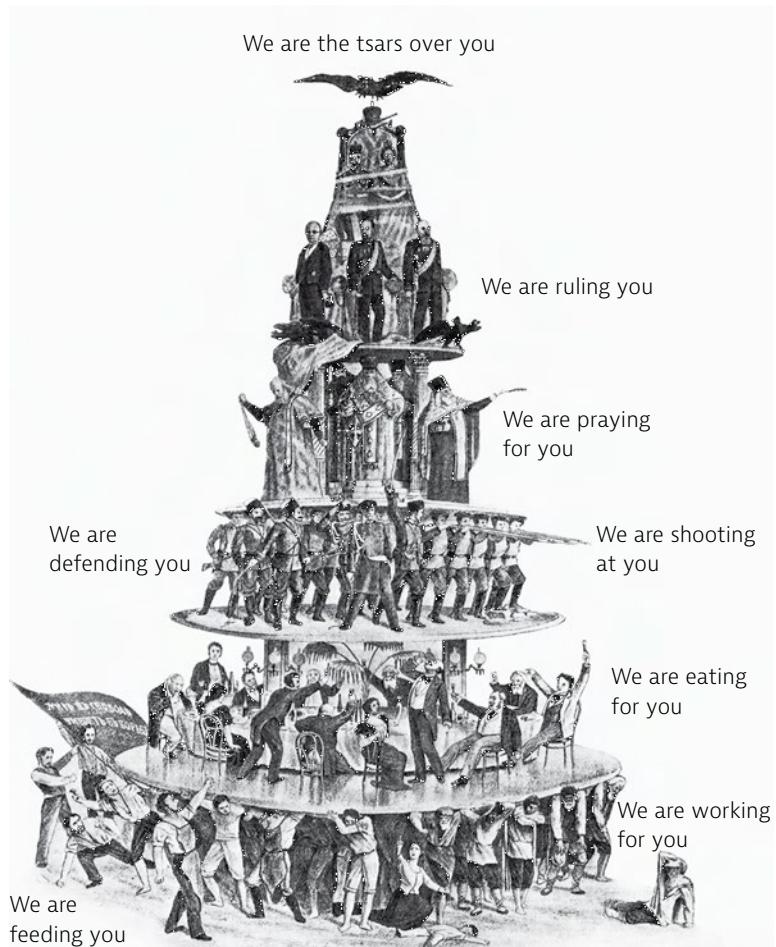
### EVALUATING SOURCES

Using Source 1.08 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Outline the significant features of society in the Russian Empire.
- 2 Explain how the living and working conditions of the peasants and proletariat created tensions in tsarist Russia.
- 3 Analyse how economic and social inequalities created challenges for the existing order. Use evidence to support your response.

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Identify three or more unique social or economic conditions that were significant for each of the following social classes in the Russian Empire:
  - ruling class
  - upper class
  - middle classes
  - working class
  - peasants.
- 2 Which was the largest social group in the Russian Empire?
- 3 Which class was numerically small, but had the potential to influence authorities because of its 'concentrated' and 'exploited' situation?
- 4 Why was there a relatively small middle class in tsarist Russia?
- 5 What professions were generally held by members of the intelligentsia?



Source 1.08 The Russian social structure is analysed and mocked in this 1900 cartoon published by the Union of Russian Socialists.

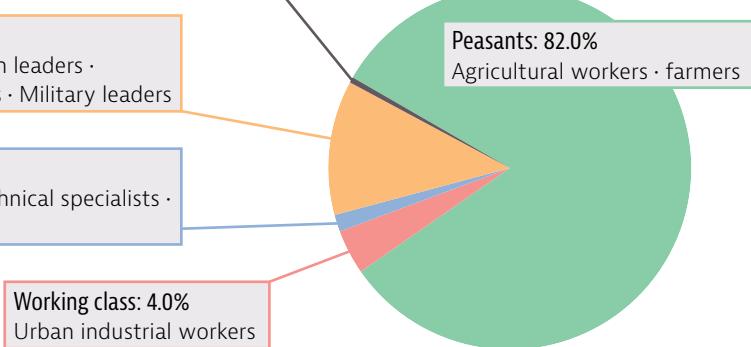
Ruling class: 0.5%  
The tsar · The royal family · High-ranking members of government

Upper class: 12.0%  
Nobility · Factory owners · Church leaders · Higher-level government officials · Military leaders

Commercial and professional middle classes: 1.5%  
Small-scale manufacturers · Factory managers · Technical specialists · Clerks · White-collar workers · Intelligentsia

Working class: 4.0%  
Urban industrial workers

Source 1.09 The class structure in Imperial Russia, according to the 1897 census.



# THE TSARIST REGIME

**Sergei Witte:** 'The outside world should not be surprised that we have an imperfect government, but that we have a government at all. With many nationalities, many languages, and a nation largely illiterate, the marvel is that the country can be held together even by autocratic means.'

The Russian Empire was an **autocracy** in which all political authority was held by the reigning monarchy. The absolute monarch was called the **tsar**, a title that has the same reverence as *emperor*. Succession to the throne was hereditary—that is, inherited from a family member—and was passed to the first-born male of the reigning tsar.

Since 1613, every tsar had come from the Romanov family. The Romanovs were the second imperial dynasty to rule Russia; they remained in power until the February Revolution of 1917. The tsar ruled by **divine right**, which meant that his authority came from God. It also meant that to question the authority of the tsar meant to question God, which was a sin.

The rule of the tsar was supreme, and every law and policy was developed from his direct wishes and instructions. As historian Alan Wood explains: '... a word from the Tsar was sufficient to alter, override or abolish any existing legislation or institution'.<sup>3</sup> The tsar possessed unlimited executive, legislative and judicial power.

There was also a strong **patrimonial** and **patriarchal** tradition to the tsarist regime. All land ultimately belonged to the tsar and, according to tradition, all subjects looked to the tsar for guidance and care, as they would a father. Many Russians referred to the tsar as their 'Little Father'.

Russia's tsars were generally thought to embody two fundamental characteristics. They were expected to be both:

- fearsome, awesome and mighty—to wield authority in a *groznyi* or powerful manner
- gentle, caring and pious—or *tishaishii*.<sup>4</sup>

**autocracy** absolute rule by a single person

**tsar** the Russian equivalent of 'emperor'; derived from the ancient Roman word *Caesar*

**divine right** political authority received directly from God

**patrimonial** land or wealth inherited from parents or ancestors

**patriarchal** society ruled by men

## STATE COUNCIL

Despite being an autocrat, the tsar did not govern his vast empire entirely on his own—that would have been an impossible task. The tsar was advised by the **State Council** which, by the 1890s, had around sixty members, all appointed by the tsar. The job of the Members of State Council was to review and discuss any matters put before them. They would also assist in drafting laws and proclamations. However, the tsar was under no obligation to follow the advice of the State Council. His advisers were unable to suggest laws, and could only discuss matters directed to them by the tsar.

**State Council** the tsar's advisory panel; many of its members were nobles or members of the Romanov family

## COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

The functions of government were administered by a **Committee of Ministers**. There were a number of different departments headed by each minister. These departments included:

- Finance
- Justice
- Commerce
- Army and Navy.
- Interior (security)
- Foreign Affairs
- Education

**Committee of Ministers** the heads of government ministries who managed the affairs of the Russian Empire

Significantly, there was no *cabinet* of ministers. Until late 1905, Imperial Russia did not have a Prime Minister to oversee or coordinate initiatives between government departments. The tsar could chair a *council* of his ministers—but only he had this authority. The idea that ministers would consult each other was discouraged. All ministers reported directly to the tsar, and held their positions by his approval. The tsar could overrule any of their actions, and appoint and dismiss officials whenever he wanted. This autocratic approach had some drawbacks, as it tended to:

- create inefficiencies
- make for confused policy
- create rivalry among ministers.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

At the turn of the twentieth century, this observation circulated among Russian government officials: 'The most powerful man in Russia is he who last spoke to the Tsar.'

Ministries functioned to put the tsar's commands into practice and policies. The tsar's word was final. Imperial Russia did not have a parliament or democratically elected officials. According to a popular criticism of the era, tsarist Russia had 'ministries but no government'.<sup>5</sup>

## INSTITUTIONAL WEAKNESSES

The way the State Council functioned meant that the tsar needed to choose an appropriate agenda for consideration. The Committee of Ministers was also clearly inefficient. However, the most significant weakness of the tsarist regime was that the direction of its policies and the confidence of its authority depended entirely on the individual character of the tsar. A decisive and intelligent tsar—or even one who understood his limitations and delegated responsibility to other people—would strengthen the autocracy and maintain its prestige. But a weak-willed and uncertain tsar could leave the autocracy vulnerable to challenges. According to historian Richard Pipes: 'It was as if the greatest empire in the world ... were an artificial construction without organic unity, held together by wires, all of which converged in the person of the monarch'.<sup>6</sup>

By the late nineteenth century, the tsarist regime was running against the political trends of the day. While much of Europe was shifting away from autocratic rule, Russia maintained a system of government that was more medieval than modern. In Europe, the emergence of representative and democratic government was the norm, rather than the exception. And although the Russian Empire was a major power in continental Europe, the tsarist autocracy was outdated, *reactionary* and out of step with the modern world.

As Russia entered the twentieth century, the pressures of modernisation would become a major cause of crises and change.

## CIVIL SERVICE

#### DID YOU KNOW?

The Russian word for civil servant, *chinovnik*, comes from the word 'rung', meaning the rungs of a ladder. This reflects the way that tsarist civil service was structured, with a distinct 'career-ladder' of fourteen ranks or 'rungs'.

Each minister of the Committee was the head of a department that employed thousands of officials. This vast civil service managed the day-to-day running of the empire. The civil service was a complex and highly bureaucratic administration. Its officials held different ranks, which were distinguished by specific uniforms and privileges. Like all government employees, including ministers, civil servants were required to swear an oath of loyalty to the tsar—rather than an oath of loyalty to the Russian state.<sup>7</sup>

The civil service was notorious for being inefficient and corrupt. Bribery was required in order to have enquiries or requests dealt with promptly. Because of the prestige and

incomes of middle-and-upper ranking civil servants, they were very resistant to change. The lower levels of the civil service were the common point of contact between everyday people and the tsarist regime. Such officials generally made a poor impression on working people. The **arbitrariness** of the civil service was a common cause of complaint.

**arbitrariness** decisions made at the whim of officials, particularly at the lower levels of government

## PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS AND ZEMSTVOS

For administrative purposes, the Russian Empire was divided into ninety-six provinces, or regions. Each region was ruled by a provincial governor, who was the head of a provincial authority. The governors reported directly to the tsar, and were subject only to his authority. The tsar could also transfer, dismiss and appoint provincial governors whenever he wanted.

Because they had a direct relationship with the tsar, governors could ignore the demands of the ministers in St Petersburg if it suited them. Provincial governors could also create their own laws at the local level, which meant that they had considerable power. This was especially true in provinces that were far from the major cities of European Russia.

Provincial authorities worked closely with rural councils, called **zemstvos**. The zemstvos were the only elected bodies in Imperial Russia. Most were staffed by progressive and civic-minded men of noble background who wanted to contribute to their communities. Because zemstvos officials were wealthy landowners, they were understandably committed to maintaining the established order that served them so well.

### DID YOU KNOW?

According to a Russian proverb, 'Any stick will do to beat a thief, but only a rouble will help you with an official'.

Provincial governments and the zemstvos were responsible for everyday services, such as local police, public works, education and health. These authorities provided the central government with its connection to people living outside the main cities.

**zemstvos** elected local assemblies, largely made up of landed gentry. Established by Tsar Alexander II in the mid-nineteenth century and abolished after the October Revolution

Just as they were treated poorly by the civil service, common people were subject to the arbitrary decisions made by the regional authorities. This often resulted in inconsistent and self-interested decision-making on behalf of provincial governments. According to historian Orlando Figes: 'To lovers of liberty the provincial governor was the very personification of tsarist oppression and despotism'.<sup>8</sup> The way that the provincial governors ruled on behalf of the tsar as his personal representatives was one of the many contradictions and institutional weaknesses of the tsarist regime. Ultimate authority was invested in the tsar, the supreme autocrat—but day-to-day power was fragmented and regionalised. As Orlando Figes explains, 'the under-government of the localities was in fact the system's main weakness'.<sup>9</sup>

### DID YOU KNOW?

Some provincial governors acted very much like 'mini-tsars'. One ordered that any local performances, such as plays or concerts, were not allowed to begin until he had arrived and was seated. Another governor declared that the local police needed to stop traffic whenever he was travelling through town.

## RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

The autocracy was closely tied to the Russian Orthodox Church—and Orthodox Christianity was the official religion of the Russian Empire. The administration of the Orthodox Church had been under state control since the 1700s, and the government even had a minister of religious affairs, called the Procurator of the Holy Synod, who was appointed by the tsar.

The church promoted a distinctly Russian expression of the Christian faith. Its teachings stressed loyalty and devotion to the tsar, and emphasised his rule by divine right. One of the most popular hymns was 'God Save the Tsar'. Once members of the



↑ **Source 1.10** Religious representatives waiting for the Imperial Family at the Iveron Chapel, Moscow, 15 August 1898.

**conservative** opposed to change and supportive of tradition

clergy had been ordained, they took a vow 'to defend, unsparingly all the powers, rights and prerogatives belonging to the High autocracy of his Majesty'.<sup>10</sup> Priests also pledged to report to authorities any information that was of interest to the security of the state, even if they heard it in confession.

The tsar did not have authority over spiritual matters, but the autocracy held considerable influence in the church through its ministry of religion—the Holy Synod. The Orthodox Church was the state-sponsored religion, and played a central role in the lives of most Russians—especially in the lives of the peasants, who were traditionally devoted Christians. The local priest was usually one of the few people in a village who could read and write. The church reinforced **conservative** values and promoted obedience to the existing order.

## MILITARY

The tsarist regime maintained a massive military force—the largest permanent army in Europe. Because the empire had the ability to bring so many fighting men to the battlefield, it led to the expression 'the Russian steamroller'. Russia also had a sizeable navy. A large part of the annual Russian budget went on military expenditure, as the armed forces of Imperial Russia were necessary to defend the tsar's vast empire.

However, the military was also used to enforce domestic security. In times of unrest, the tsar might unleash his troops against his own people. Once such fighting group was the Cossacks. The Cossacks were from the Don region in the Ukraine, and were employed as an elite cavalry unit; their whips and sabres were greatly feared by ordinary people. The Cossacks prided themselves on their horsemanship, military skill and devotion to the tsar. They were rewarded for their service with grants of land and other privileges.

## POLICE AND OKHRANA

The tsarist regime had two distinct police forces:

- the regular police, who investigated crimes and dealt with law and order
- the **Okhrana**, who dealt with agitators and political crimes.

The regular police were chronically understaffed, and had to be supplemented by soldiers during periods of social disorder. Significantly, this was seen as a routine procedure, rather than an emergency measure.

The Okhrana was used to expose and arrest anyone suspected of political agitation or revolutionary activities. This meant that anyone who was involved in harmless political activism—such as liberal journalism or trade unionism—was considered an enemy of the state. The Okhrana had a vast network of informers and secret agents, and it provided enormous challenges for groups and individuals with reformist or revolutionary agendas. Anyone who came to the attention of the Okhrana could face imprisonment or **exile**—and even execution.

Under the tsarist regime, all political parties and unions were illegal. The state maintained a system of strict **censorship** over the printed word. However, the system of censorship backfired. Rather than stopping subversive activity, the lack of liberty led some Russians to seek out organised opposition to the state—such as radical or reformist groups. In this way, the authoritarian nature of the tsarist regime was actually a cause of revolutionary tensions.

**Okhrana** tsarist secret police, charged with protecting the tsar and Imperial family, investigating revolutionaries and combating terrorism

### DID YOU KNOW?

*Okhrana* means 'protection'. Modern-day Russian security guards have this word displayed on their uniforms.

**exile** being sent to live in the more remote regions of the Russian Empire, such as Siberia

**censorship** the restriction or removal of information from the public domain

## ACTIVITY



### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Write a brief definition of the following concepts or institutions that were features of the tsarist regime. Where applicable, explain how these contributed to maintaining the power of the existing order:
 

• Autocracy	• State Council	• Zemstvos
• Tsar	• Committee of Ministers	• Orthodox Church
• Divine right	• Civil Service	• Military
• Romanov dynasty	• Provincial Governors	• Police and Okhrana
  
- 2 The tsarist regime was an authoritarian government and, in theory, a strong one. However, there were many institutional weaknesses in the regime. Create a concept map that shows these flaws.

# FAMINE CRISIS

**Sergei Witte:** 'The minister of finance recognises that the customs duties fall as a particularly heavy burden upon the impoverished landowners and peasants, particularly in a year of crop failure. These imposts are a heavy sacrifice made by the entire population, and not from surplus but out of current necessity.'

In the late nineteenth century, famines in the Russian Empire revealed the limitations of the tsarist regime and the severity of its poverty.

In 1891, seventeen provinces were hit by famine. Poor weather had destroyed successive harvests. This was followed by an outbreak of cholera and typhus that had killed up to 400,000 people by the end of 1892.<sup>11</sup>

However, the famine was not just a human tragedy. It created tension between the government and the people because the regime's response to the famine was slow and ineffective. It was rumoured that the authorities withheld food deliveries from villages until they received 'statistical proof' that famine-stricken villages were unable to feed themselves. At the same time, the government was allowing grain exports to continue—and only changed its policy when the famine could no longer be ignored. Then, to make the situation worse, efforts towards famine relief revealed a lack of coordination between government departments.

### Historian David Lilly

The Russian famine of 1891–92 was an incredible disaster, not only for the misery it caused, but due to the fact that it could either have been prevented entirely or at least its impact lessened. One of the major impediments to efficient relief was the lack of cooperation between various ministries. The famine brought into view the corruption and inefficiency of the government, and showed how St. Petersburg was out of touch with the vast portion of the country. It also exposed the dire poverty of the peasants, which could be traced back to emancipation ... This famine, which pointed out the weakness of their social structure, should have been a huge warning to the government. The tsarist regimes, however, failed to address adequately Russia's massive agricultural problems that ultimately helped lead to the government's downfall.

### DID YOU KNOW?

The writer Leo Tolstoy did his best to organise relief for famine victims. He angrily blamed the government and the Orthodox Church for the disaster. In return, the church excommunicated him and banned its followers from receiving aid from Tolstoy's relief organisation.

◀ **Source 1.11** David Lilly, 'The Russian Famine of 1891–92,' *Student Historical Journal Vol XXVI* (Chicago: Loyola University History Department, 1994).

## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 How many people died from hunger and disease during the famine of 1891–1892?
- 2 Note two or more ways that the Famine Crisis created tensions between the tsarist government and the Russian people, particularly the intelligentsia.
- 3 What social changes of the mid-to-late 1890s did the famine contribute to?

The intelligentsia grew disillusioned with the regime following the so-called Famine Crisis of the 1890s. Many of them were deeply angered by the government's flawed response to the emergency—and as a result, interest in opposition ideologies and organisations grew considerably in the 1890s. Many of the intelligentsia came to believe that the Russian people deserved a better government than the tsarist regime.

One of the intelligentsia, Vladimir Lenin, took a pragmatic view of the Famine Crisis: he claimed that the famine was a good thing, because it heightened tensions between the government and the people. Lenin would rise to prominence in the twentieth century as the leader of Russia's most radical Marxist group—the Bolsheviks.

The countryside recovered from the great famine of the 1890s, but the crisis set in motion significant economic and social trends. In desperation, millions of peasants left their farms and came to the cities in search of work. As Trotsky put it, they were 'snatched from the plough and hurled straight into the factory furnace'.<sup>12</sup> The emergence of Russia's proletariat was partly a symptom of the famine and the desperate poverty of the villages. The conditions of the peasantry did not improve significantly in the twentieth century—in 1903, Finance Minister Sergei Witte received a report on rural conditions: 'When the harvest is normal the peasant obtains thirty per cent less nutriment than is physiologically required'.<sup>13</sup>

## TSAR ALEXANDER II, 1818–1881

Tsar Alexander II was known as the Tsar-Liberator. He was responsible for a number of significant reforms before his reign was cut tragically short.

Alexander II ruled from 1855 to 1881, which was a period of profound change in Russia. As a young man, he had travelled extensively through the Russian Empire and Western Europe, and his education was given by an enlightened and liberal-thinking tutor.

Alexander II began his reign during the Crimean War (1853–1856), in which Russia was defeated and had its military and economic failings exposed. This led Alexander to pursue a rigorous program of reform. He established local elected bodies, called *zemstvos*, to improve the conditions in the countryside and respond to local issues. The *zemstvos* led some people to hope that a national elected Duma (or parliament) might follow. He made reforms to the education system and improved access to schooling. Alexander also reformed the legal system, relaxed censorship, and reorganised and modernised the military. His most significant reform came in 1861, with the emancipation of the serfs—which meant that peasants were freed from bonded servitude, which was effectively slavery.

Prior to his death Alexander II was even considering constitutional reforms. But on 1 March 1881, members of the populist revolutionary group The People's Will attacked the tsar's coach as it travelled through St Petersburg. They threw two bombs: the first injured some of the tsar's guards. As Alexander inspected the damage, a second bomb was thrown. It detonated at his feet and blew his legs off. Alexander died shortly after.



↑ Tsar Alexander II.

## TSAR ALEXANDER III, 1845–1894



↑ Tsar Alexander III.

After the assassination of Alexander II, his son Tsar Alexander III came to power. (Alexander III was the father of Tsar Nicholas II.)

Alexander III abandoned his father's reformist agenda. Instead, he presided over a period known as 'The Reaction'. Alexander III strengthened the autocratic and authoritarian nature of the tsarist regime. He founded its political police, the Okhrana, and increased the repression of the government's critics. Civil liberties were suppressed. Alexander III was strongly opposed to representative government and any consideration of a constitution. In his opposition to representative government, Alexander III was influenced by his adviser, Konstantin Pobedonostev.

In the 1890s, Alexander III pursued the 'Russification' of national minority groups, which involved persecuting minorities and religious groups that were not followers of the Orthodox faith. The Russian language was imposed throughout the Russian Empire, as Alexander III hoped to turn all the people of the empire into 'Great Russians'. He believed that that shared language and culture would be a force for unity.

However, Russification did not have the expected response. Rather than bringing about unity, it agitated many nationalist groups into taking revolutionary action in this period.

Alexander III had a gruff manner, and was known to speak abruptly and without refinement. He understood the limits of his knowledge, and readily sought advice on matters such as the economy and foreign affairs. He was a large, tall man—around 193 cm—and immensely strong. He liked to impress people with feats of strength, such as twisting steel cutlery together, tearing decks of cards in half and lifting heavy objects. Alexander embodied all that a *groznyi* tsar should be: he was awesome, fearsome and mighty. His strength became a matter of legend after the royal train was derailed in 1888. The royal family was in the dining car at the time of the accident, and the carriage was severely damaged. However, Alexander held up the roof on his shoulders while his family crawled to safety. It is likely that during this accident he received an injury that eventually contributed to his death. In 1894 Alexander III developed chronic kidney failure. He died in October 1894, aged 49.

## THE CORONATION OF TSAR NICHOLAS II

**Tsar Nicholas II:** 'Those who believe they can share in government dream senseless dreams.'

On hearing that his father Tsar Alexander III had died, Nicholas Romanov burst into tears. He cried out in despair, 'What is going to happen to me and to all of Russia? I am not prepared to be a tsar. I never wanted to become one. I know nothing of the business of ruling. I have no idea of even how to talk to the ministers'.

To some extent Nicholas II's statement was true. Tsar Alexander III was in his forties when he died. Because he had expected to rule for many more years, he had not spent much time or energy in readying Nicholas to be the autocrat of All-Russia.

## DID YOU KNOW?

During one family dinner, Tsar Alexander III held a brief audience with his Minister of Foreign Affairs. During the discussion, the young Tsarevich Nicholas spoke up and offered his thoughts about the matter. Tsar Alexander was not impressed, and pelted his son with bread rolls.

Tsar Nicholas assumed the throne in 1894 following the death of his father. This would be just one of many tragedies that cursed his reign. Soon after his father's death, Nicholas married Princess Alix of Hesse, who became known as Tsarina Alexandra. Nicholas and Alexandra were in love, and delighted to be married.

However, the royal wedding was held a week after the funeral of Alexander III. As the empire was still in mourning, it was said that Alexandra was the 'bride in black' who came to Russia 'behind a coffin'. Tsarina Alexandra was of German heritage, and this was a point of ridicule that would later have significant consequences. The official coronation of Tsar Nicholas and Tsarina Alexandra was held on 14 May 1896—but this too was marred by tragedy.

## KHODYNKA FIELD

The coronation celebrations included a huge, open-air banquet for common people held at Khodynka Field on the outskirts of Moscow. More than a hundred buffets were set up to provide free food and beer. Those attending were promised a meal and a commemorative cup.



Source 1.12 An artist's impression of the Khodynka Field festival.

Tens of thousands of people came to the celebration—but rumours of shortages of gifts and gold coins in the commemorative cups created a mass panic. The police failed to keep order, and thousands of people rushed forward to where they thought the gifts were being distributed. Over 1300 people were killed in the crush, and thousands were injured. However, the coronation celebration continued—many people across the field were unaware that anything had happened.

That night, the tsar and tsarina were scheduled to attend a celebratory ball hosted by the French Embassy. When he heard news of the tragedy at Khodynka Field, Nicholas questioned whether or not he should attend. He was advised that the presence of the royal couple was necessary for diplomatic reasons. So Nicholas stuck to his schedule. The following day Nicholas and Alexandra visited the victims of the crush in hospital.

Nicholas had not intended to appear uncaring, but his decision to attend a celebratory ball on the day of a national tragedy gave a poor impression. Years later he would look back on the day as a bad omen for his rule. There was no official commemoration of the Khodynka Field disaster.

## TSAR OF ALL-RUSSIA

The tsarist coronation ceremony was a deeply religious undertaking that formally invested the new emperor with divine authority. Like all tsars before him, Nicholas was required to take an oath in which he swore to preserve the principles of the autocracy, and to care for his subjects. Some people hoped that the new tsar might continue the reformist approach of his grandfather, Alexander II.

However, Nicholas chose to continue the policy initiatives of his father, Alexander III. Soon after becoming emperor, Tsar Nicholas received a delegation of zemstvo officials. By the 1890s, the zemstvos were becoming a forum where the need for economic and political reform was discussed. Nicholas welcomed the delegation and their 'sentiments of loyalty'. However, he also made it clear that he had no interest in political reform:

... it has come to my knowledge that voices have been heard of late in some zemstvo assemblies of persons carried away by senseless dreams about representatives participating in the internal affairs of the state ... Let every man know that, while devoting all my strength to the well-being of my people, I shall uphold the principle of autocracy as firmly and undeviatingly as did my late father.<sup>14</sup>

A strong commitment to autocracy would be the feature of the reign of Tsar Nicholas. It was his God-given duty to do so—and no other manner of rule suited the Russian Empire.<sup>15</sup> However, Nicholas was profoundly unsuited for the role of absolute emperor. He did not have the required intelligence wisdom or strength of character. As historian Orlando Figes argues, Tsar Nicholas 'clearly lacked the necessary qualities'.<sup>16</sup>

Even more significantly, Nicholas ruled in a period of conflict and profound change. The pressures of modernisation were immense, and it was inevitable that vast challenges and crises would arise. Any ruler would have found the task of governing Russia extremely difficult, and Nicholas was definitely the wrong man for the times. The extent of the challenges he faced would ultimately lead to revolution.



↑ **Source 1.13** Tsar Nicholas II leaves Uspensky Cathedral following his coronation

## ACTIVITY

### HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

#### Leon Trotsky

Nicholas II inherited from his ancestors not only a giant empire, but also a revolution. And they did not bequeath him one quality which would have made him capable of governing an empire or even a province or a county.

◀ **Source 1.14** Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1934), 73.

#### Orlando Figes

Nicholas was the source of all the problems. If there was a vacuum of power at the centre of the ruling system, then he was the empty space. In a sense, Russia gained in him the worst of both worlds: a tsar determined to rule from the throne yet quite incapable of exercising power.

◀ **Source 1.15** Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891–1924* (London: Pimlico, 1996), 23.

Using Sources 1.14 and 1.15 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Explain how the leadership of Tsar Nicholas contributed to problems in the Russian Empire.
- 2 Evaluate the role of Tsar Nicholas as a cause of revolutionary tensions in Russia. Use evidence to support your response.

# TSAR NICHOLAS II, 1868–1918

## KEY INDIVIDUAL



↑ Tsar Nicholas II.

**anti-Semitism** dislike of Jews, or discrimination against Jews

## DID YOU KNOW?

Many of the photographs of the Romanov family were taken and developed by Tsar Nicholas himself.

Nicholas II was eighteenth Romanov tsar—and the last emperor of Russia. He came to power in 1894 and his formal coronation was held in 1896. Nicholas believed that he was unlucky, and often spoke of being born under a bad star. Throughout his life—but especially in the face of tragedy—Nicholas believed that everything was the result of 'God's Will'. He often showed little emotion when he reacted to difficulties: some people saw this lack of emotion as indifference, but it could also have been because he was bewildered and had no idea what to do.

Nicholas II's father, Alexander III, was a physically imposing man who thought little of his first-born son—despite Nicholas being heir to the Russian Empire. Nicholas was shorter than his father and softly spoken. Alexander ridiculed him because of this, calling him 'girly'. Alexander believed his eldest son lacked maturity and confidence—because of this, he was never seriously trained to run the empire.

Nicholas was educated by his tutor Konstantin Pobedonostev. Pobedonostev had been an influential minister under Alexander III—and he was also well known for his reactionary and bigoted views. He instilled in Nicholas a strong suspicion of constitutional and representative government. According to Pobedonostev, democracy was the 'great falsehood of our time'. Nicholas readily absorbed this lesson, and he also took on Pobedonostev's *anti-Semitism*.

Nicholas was less interested in classes on matters of the state. According to his tutor, Nicholas became 'actively absorbed in picking his nose' when such things were discussed. Nicholas had a passion for hunting and sailing, and was also a talented photographer.

While he was not unintelligent, Nicholas was far from brilliant. He had a decidedly stubborn streak. He was also easily influenced by others and 'a wretchedly bad judge of people'.<sup>17</sup> According to his contemporaries, Nicholas was personable and good at making polite conversation, but not warm or charismatic. He disliked assertive personalities. Ministers found him agreeable but were often dismayed to find that the tsar made decisions that undermined their initiatives.

Nicholas applied himself diligently to administrative matters and had an excellent memory. His critics claim that trivial details and unnecessary paperwork distracted him from paying attention to more pressing matters. Tsar Nicholas married German princess Alix of Hesse, who became known as Tsarina Alexandra. Alexandra was Nicholas' closest adviser. The couple adored each other and expressed their love for each other in letters throughout their lives, such as this 1894 note from Nicholas to Alexandra:

Naughty, naughty, little girly-dear, I am again reading line by line your letter and what do I see you have put in the end, what do you mean by it! Sweet one, it is me who is not worthy of your love and such sacrifice ... No! The thought of possessing such an affection is really too heavenly a thing, which no word in no language could ever express!<sup>18</sup>

Nicholas and Alexandra had five children: four daughters and a son. Tragically, Nicholas' son and heir, the Tsarevitch Alexei, suffered from a genetic condition that left him chronically ill and vulnerable to injury. Nicholas was devoted to his family and was by all accounts a caring and attentive father.

The reign of Tsar Nicholas II was profoundly troubled by social unrest, military conflicts and many other challenges. Nicholas' inability to address these challenges—particularly his unwillingness to institute effective reforms—contributed significantly to the revolutions of 1905 and 1917. When reform was granted by the tsar, such as the *October Manifesto*, it was conceded with much reluctance.

In most cases, the reforms of Tsar Nicholas were too little, and came too late. Such reforms created pressure for further change—which Nicholas was loath to grant. From the Khodynka Field incident of 1896, Bloody Sunday in 1905, assuming command of Russia's armed forces in 1915, the Rasputin scandal and finally the February Revolution, poor leadership was a distinguishing feature of Nicholas II's reign.

As tsar, Nicholas struggled to find right balance of *tishaishii* (fatherly care) and *groznyi* (power). He was neither the strong leader that his father was, nor a responsive reformer like his grandfather. In March 1917 Tsar Nicholas II abdicated the throne, following massive popular demonstrations and the withdrawal of support from key supporters.

After the February Revolution, Nicholas Romanov and his family were placed under house arrest and exiled to Siberia. Despite family connections, the British royal family refused to grant asylum to the former Russian royals. Their situation became more precarious once the *Bolsheviks* came to power and Russia was caught up in Civil War. In July 1918, Nicholas and his family were executed by their Bolshevik guards.

## KEY POINTS

- Tsar Nicholas assumed the throne in 1894 following the early death of his father, Alexander III.
- Nicholas was not suited to ruling as autocrat of the Russian Empire.
- He married Tsarina Alexandra, his closest adviser, and was dedicated to his family.
- The reign of Tsar Nicholas was marked by tragedy. Nicholas seemed to react to his misfortunes with indifference, accepting the tragedies as God's Will.
- Nicholas was committed to the preservation of autocratic rule and opposed to reform.
- His unwillingness to make reforms contributed to growing popular discontent with the tsarist regime.
- Tsar Nicholas ruled Russia in a period of profound challenges. These included significant social and economic change, the Russo-Japanese War and World War I, the rise of radical revolutionary groups, and calls for changes in the nature of the government.
- He was forced to abdicate in March 1917 following the February Revolution.
- Nicholas and his family lived in Siberian exile under house arrest, until they were executed by the Bolsheviks in July 1918.

**October Manifesto** issued by Tsar Nicholas II on 17 October 1905 in response to revolutionary pressures. Granted limited civil liberties and allowed for the creation of State Duma (national parliament)

**Bolsheviks** radical faction of the Social Democratic Workers' Party (SDs) that emerged after the Second Party Congress of 1903

## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Briefly describe the circumstances in which Tsar Nicholas came to power.
- 2 In what ways was Nicholas different from and similar to his father, Alexander III? In what ways was Nicholas different from and similar to his grandfather, Alexander II?
- 3 What tragedy coincided with Tsar Nicholas' coronation celebrations?
- 4 Note three or more significant features of Nicholas' personality that influenced the nature of his rule.
- 5 Who was Nicholas' tutor? What values did he impart to Nicholas?
- 6 Briefly describe Tsar Nicholas' attitude towards the principles of the autocracy and the idea of reform.

## ACTIVITY

### CREATIVE RESPONSE

Collate a gallery of ten or more images that illustrate the diversity of society in the Russian Empire. Try to find images that show different people's experiences, economic activity, significant people, geographical features or emerging challenges. The work of Sergei Prokudin-Gorskii is highly recommended, as he took stunning colour photographs of tsarist Russia. Display your images and, as a class, discuss the depicted elements of life under the tsarist regime.

### GROUP WORK

As a class, compile a list of significant individuals in the Russian Revolution. Divide the people on the list among the class and create a collection of mini-posters. These should feature the name and an iconic photograph or portrait of each person. Your class might like to have these posters laminated and displayed around your classroom. As you learn more about the Russian Revolution, begin to consider the significance and role of key individuals.

### ESSAY

Write a 600–800-word essay on the topic below. Your essay should include an introduction, paragraphs supported by relevant evidence from primary sources and historical interpretations, and a conclusion.

- 'Contradictions, inequality, institutional weakness and flawed leadership created the preconditions for revolution in the Russian Empire by the turn of the twentieth century.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?

### HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

#### Leon Trotsky

A population of 150 million people, 5.4 million square kilometres of land in Europe, 17.5 in Asia. Within this vast space every epoch of human culture is to be found: from the primeval [primitive] barbarism of the northern forests, where people worship blocks of wood, to the modern social relations of the capitalist city, where socialist workers consciously recognize themselves as participants in world politics and keep a watchful eye on the Balkans and on debates in the German Reichstag [parliament]. The most concentrated industry in Europe based on the most backward agriculture in Europe. The most colossal state apparatus in the world making use of every achievement of modern technological progress in order to retard the historical progress of its own country.

◀ **Source 1.16** Leon Trotsky, cited in Tariq Ali and Phil Evans, *Trotsky For Beginners* (London: Writers and Readers Publishing, 1980), 31.

#### Robert Service

... the Russian Empire was deeply fissured [divided] between the government and the tsar's subjects; between the capital and the provinces; between the educated and the uneducated; between Western and Russian ideas; between rich and poor; between privilege and oppression; between contemporary fashion and centuries-old custom.

◀ **Source 1.17** Robert Service, *A History of Twentieth-Century Russia* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 9.

Using Sources 1.16 and 1.17 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Using details from these interpretations, summarise some of the tensions and challenges that were found in the Russian Empire.
- 2 Explain how the 'backwardness' of the tsarist state created political, social and economic inequalities.
- 3 Evaluate the extent to which revolutionary tensions were emerging in Russian society by the 1890s.

# CHAPTER 1 REVIEW

## KEY SUMMARY POINTS

- Imperial Russia was a vast empire that covered a huge territory. A number of geographic features created challenges for Russia's government.
- There were profound social and economic inequalities in the empire. A small minority held power and privilege, while peasants and workers lived very difficult—and generally impoverished—lives.
- Tsarist Russia was an autocracy ruled by the tsars of the Romanov dynasty. The tsars held authority by divine right.
- The tsarist regime governed through ministerial departments, a bureaucratic civil service, provincial governments and governors, the Russian Orthodox Church, a large military and the police forces (including a political police called the Okhrana).
- Ministers of the government were appointed and dismissed on the orders of the tsar. All high officials reported directly to the tsar.
- The tsarist regime was prone to inefficiency and corruption.
- The autocracy struggled to respond effectively to pressures of modernisation and crises, such as the 1890s famine.
- By the 1890s there was rising discontent with the tsarist regime. Revolutionary tensions and movements were developing.
- From 1894, Tsar Nicholas ruled the Russian Empire.
- The personality and decisions of Tsar Nicholas contributed to the challenges facing the tsarist regime. His reign was noted for its misfortunes.
- A committed reactionary, Tsar Nicholas sought to preserve the principles of autocratic rule and was generally opposed to reform.

## ACTIVITY

### EXTENDED RESPONSES

Write an extended response to one or more of the topics below. Use evidence to support your response.

- Explain how institutional weaknesses in the tsarist regime contributed to rising tensions in the empire by 1896.
- Explain how economic and social inequalities created discontent in the Russian Empire at the turn of the twentieth century.
- Explain how the personality of Tsar Nicholas created challenges for those seeking to reform the tsarist regime.

### CREATIVE RESPONSE

Imagine you are Tsar Nicholas II. Write a diary entry or letter to express your views on the state of your empire at the time of your coronation in 1896. Your response should reflect the values and approach to leadership taken by Tsar Nicholas, as well as his perspective of the people of your empire.



# OPPOSITION TO THE TSARIST REGIME



**ДА ЗДРАВСТВУЕТ МАРКСИЗМ-ЛЕНІНІЗМ!**

Source 2.01 Marx, Engels and Lenin on a Soviet poster, with the words 'Long Live Marxism-Leninism', 1980.

# CHAPTER 2

*'Revolutions are the locomotives of history.  
Drive them at full speed and keep them on the rails.'*

— Vladimir Lenin



Despite rigorous censorship and the diligent work of the Okhrana, new and more organised opposition movements emerged in tsarist Russia in the late nineteenth century. The intelligentsia played a central role in these initiatives.

The revolutionary ideas of Karl Marx provided a radical and increasingly attractive framework for change. In the 1890s, a Russian Marxist movement developed, with the founding of the Social Democrats (SDs). This group would later split into two distinct factions: the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks. The leader of the Bolsheviks, Vladimir Lenin, emerged as a central figure in the Russian revolutionary movement. Lenin and the Bolsheviks were responsible for a Soviet government coming to power in the October Revolution.

Not all Russian revolutionary ideas and movements were Marxist. Drawing on the traditions of peasant-based socialism and revolutionary terrorism, the Socialist Revolutionary (SR) Party also challenged the established tsarist order. The SRs were one of the most popular opposition groups and played a key role in the revolutions of 1905 and 1917.

However not all opposition to the tsarist regime wanted a revolution. The Octobrists and Constitution Democrats (Kadets) were not opposed to monarchical government, they just despised its repressive nature and lack of constitutional rights. These liberal groups wanted to reform the established order—not overthrow it.

Ultimately, charismatic leaders and important ideas came from both the revolutionary and reformist oppositions to play significant roles in the revolutionary era of Russian politics.

## KEY QUESTIONS

- What ideas played a significant role in challenging the existing order?
- What political parties developed in opposition to the tsarist regime?
- Who were the key leaders of the groups that challenged the existing order?
- How did these individuals and popular movements mobilise society?
- How did parties and movements challenge the tsarist government?

## IDEAS AND POLITICAL PARTIES

- Marxism and Marxism-Leninism
- Bolsheviks and Mensheviks
- Socialist Revolutionaries
- Octobrists and Kadets (Liberals)

НИНИЗМ!

# MARXISM

◀ KEY IDEA

**Karl Marx:** 'The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!'



↑ **Source 2.02** Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 1865.

One of the most significant influences in the Russian Revolution was Marxism and the belief in the emergence of a new communist society.

Marxism is the revolutionary philosophy of German thinkers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. In 1848, Marx and Engels wrote one of the most influential texts of modern times: *The Communist Manifesto*. The Manifesto was a call to revolutionary action by the workers of the world. In 1867 Marx produced the first volume of his monumental work *Capital*. Engels wrote two further volumes, which were published after Marx's death.

Marx and Engels used a detailed study of the lives of British industrial workers to write a framework for understanding the modern world. This was supported by a thorough and original synthesis of many economic, philosophical and historical studies.

For Marx, the primary forces that shaped society and history were economic forces and class struggle. Marx famously declared that all history was the history of class struggle, and that it was the ongoing conflict between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' that drove development and change in human societies. Many of the Russian intelligentsia were drawn to Marxist ideas—not only as a way to explain the inequalities of their own society, but also as a theory for how to change it.

## HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

Marx's theory of *historical materialism* was an attempt to demonstrate that history is made by people, not by 'the hand of God' or 'destiny'.<sup>1</sup> Past history and the predicted future progress of human development could be seen in definable stages. These stages are measured by differing *modes of production*—or how work was done. The modes of production identify:

- who owned the *means of production*—or the ability to create wealth
- who was exploited for their labour—who did the work, but received little for it.

According to Marx, the dominant values and ideologies of every period are those of the ruling classes. Society therefore accepts the social structure that the values of this group adhere to.<sup>2</sup>

## DIialectical MATERIALISM

The force that led to each stage in social development (except the step from socialism to communism) was revolution.

For Marx, revolution was inevitable. The scientific manner for understanding the conflict that brought revolutionary change was called *dialectical materialism*. *Dialectic* means 'an argument'. Marx believed the world was inherently full of clashing and opposing forces, such as the conflict between:

- workers and industrialists
- labour and capital.

*Dialectical materialism* refers to a *thesis*, or given state of things, and an opposing force, the *antithesis*. Marx believed the clash of opposing forces would become so great that

a resolution or *synthesis* will come about. He argued that this idea could be applied to social development.

For example, in feudal times the thesis—or given state of things—was the situation where land was owned by the nobility and farmed by peasant labour. The antithesis—or opposing force—was the emergence of new urban classes who had become wealthy from commerce and trade, and who opposed the feudal order. The synthesis—or resolution—was the bourgeois revolution that brought about parliamentarianism—or elected political representation.

Under capitalism, the thesis—or given state of things—was the bourgeois ownership of capital (industry) and the exploitation of the worker (the proletariat). Marx believed an antithesis—or opposing force—would emerge with the growth of revolutionary consciousness among industrial workers. This would lead to socialist revolution—which would be the synthesis (or resolution) of the inevitable conflict.

Significantly, Marxism challenged the notion that capitalism was everlasting and the best that man could achieve. People who followed Marx were called Marxists—they believed that history could be understood as essentially a series of contradictions and their resolution, and that this manner of thinking could also be applied to the contemporary world and the desired future.

## KEY TERMS

**Proletariat** The Marxist term for the industrial working class (or factory workers).

**Bourgeois (adj.)** The attitudes, possessions and behaviours of those that owned the means of production.

**Bourgeoisie (n.)** The wealthy middle class and upper class of capitalists who own factories, industrial enterprises and other large-scale businesses.

**Communism** A political and economic doctrine that aims to replace all private property and a profit-based economy with public ownership and collective control of the means of production. Communism is based on the theories and work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Theoretically, in a communist system the state (or government) controls the means of production—which is the ability to create wealth—and works towards empowering the proletariat (or working class). The middle class and upper class (or bourgeoisie) are deprived of their power and privilege. According to Marx, communism was the idealised state and represented the highest stage of human development. The term *communism* has also been used to describe political groups and regimes that claim to work towards this end.

**Capitalism** Economic system based on free-market principles, in which individuals are encouraged to seek prosperity and private capital (or wealth). In theory, the government plays a limited role in the economy in a capitalist system, and allows the marketplace to decide on prices, salaries and conditions. Individuals and corporations are encouraged to trade goods, services, labour and land.

**Socialism** The ideology (or belief) that calls for the state to distribute wealth equally. The basis of socialism is a society built on fair and equitable political, social and economic structures. There are two types of socialism. They are:

- revolutionary socialism—an equal society can only be achieved by the overthrow of capitalism
- reformist socialism—changes needed for an equal society can come gradually and without conflict.

**Radical** To be committed to extensive political, social and economic change. By their nature, revolutionaries are radicals.

**Reactionary** Someone who cannot be persuaded to change. Reactionaries want to maintain the existing order as much as possible. In tsarist Russia, the supporters of the autocracy were reactionary.

**Conservative** Conservatives might be willing to see some change, but generally want to see gradual and cautious progress. They are not as opposed to change as reactionaries, but still support the established order.

**Reform** The process of slow and gradual change. Reformists aim to amend the established order and improve its flaws—but they do not want widespread or disruptive changes in society.

# BASE AND SUPERSTRUCTURE

## DID YOU KNOW?

Lenin once described Marxism as a combination of German philosophy, British political economics and French socialism.

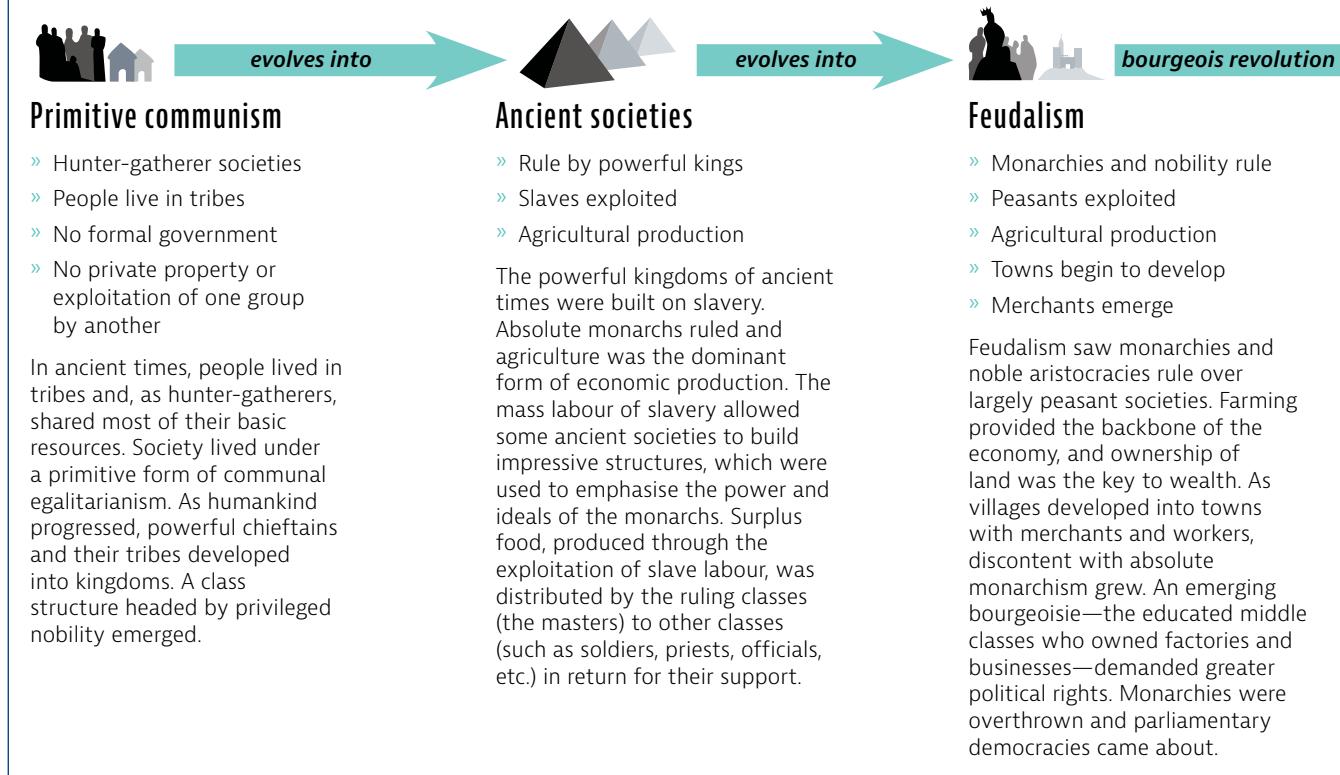
According to Marxism, a society's economic *base*—meaning those who own the means of production and the ways in which work is done (or the *mode of production*)—ultimately determines its *superstructure*.<sup>3</sup> The superstructure includes such things as politics, values, morals and culture.

According to this theory, substantial social change cannot be achieved by law reform or by electing a new government. The economic base must be changed—and this can only be done by revolution.

Marx argued that capitalism, with its profit-driven and individualistic society, had alienated the working class, who were unable to see the rewards of their labour. Whatever workers produced was of no value to them—but instead was the property of their bosses. A worker's labour was nothing more than a commodity—something that could be bought and sold. As production is driven by and for profit and exchange, the worker's value is measured only by their capacity to work.

Marx believed that capitalism had alienated human beings from each other, as social relations were about competing against other people, rather than cooperating with them. This left people unable to 'appreciate anything except by possessing it, or using it as a means'.<sup>4</sup> Socialist revolution would help humans evolve beyond this, by shaping an entirely new superstructure with fair values and social relationships.

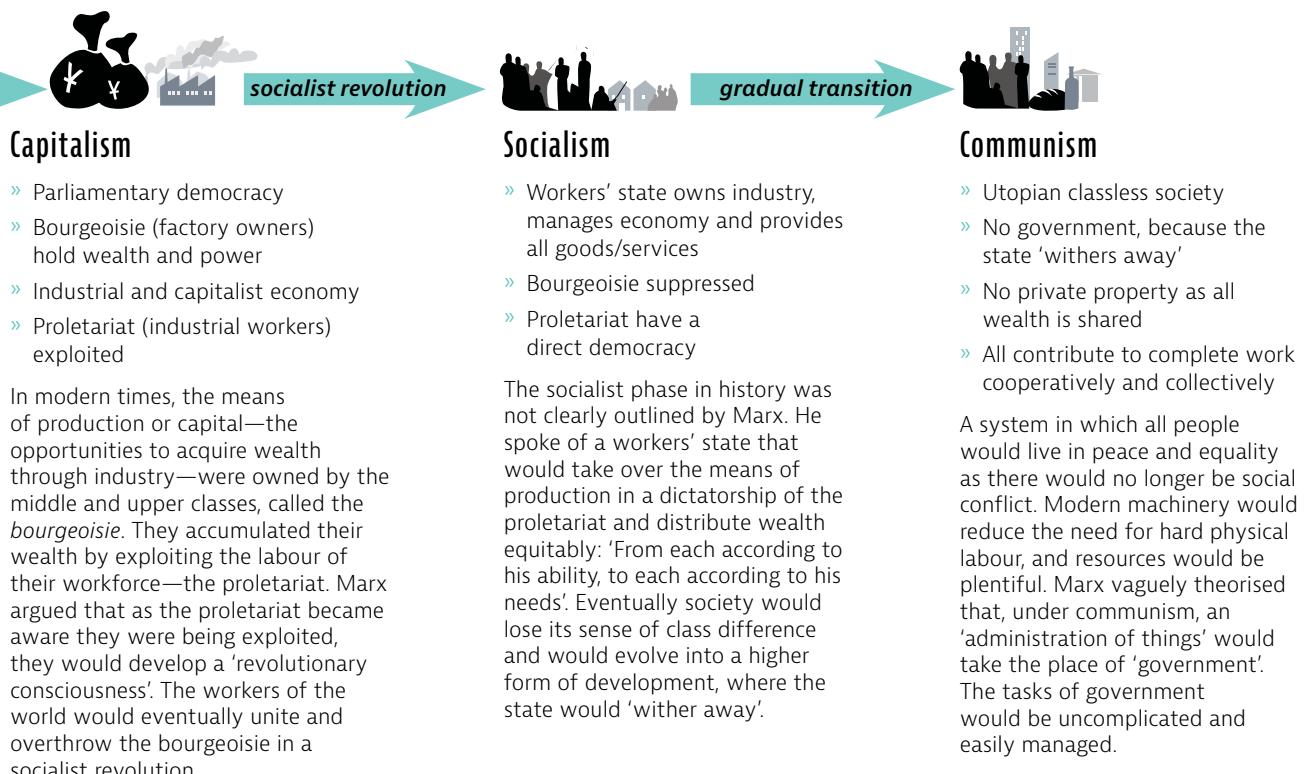
## HISTORICAL MATERIALISM: MARXIST STAGES OF HISTORY



## MARXIST BASICS

The following concepts are the foundations of Marxist theory.

- **Class conflict:** All history is the history of *class struggle*. Human societies—both past and present—and the forces for change that shape them, are fundamentally an outcome of conflict between the wealthy and powerful, and the poor and powerless.
- **Historical materialism:** History and the development of human civilisation is a *linear progression*. This progression can be seen in *definable stages*. The measures for defining these stages are: who owns wealth; how is the wealth accumulated; and who is exploited to produce this wealth.
- **Dialectical materialism:** The build-up of opposing forces—social, economic and political—and their resolution, usually through revolution, explains how society develops from one stage to another. This is the dialectical concepts of *thesis, antithesis and synthesis*.
- The importance **economic relations:** The foundation of a society's economic activity—essentially who owns what, and why—shapes a society's political institutions and social values. These are the principles of **base** and **superstructure**.
- In the modern world, the central conflict was between the middle and upper classes who owned factories and businesses (called the **bourgeoisie**), and the industrial working class (called the **proletariat**). Socialist revolution would come when the proletariat developed and acted upon their **revolutionary consciousness**—the awareness that they are exploited and should no longer accept it.



→ **Source 2.03** Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore, Marxist Internet Archive, [www.marxists.org/archive Marx/works/1848/comunist-manifesto/ch01.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive Marx/works/1848/comunist-manifesto/ch01.htm)

### Extract from Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848

The bourgeoisie [middle and upper class] is unfit any longer to be the ruling class in society ... The essential conditions for the existence ... of the bourgeois class is the formation and augmentation [increase] of capital [profit]; the condition for capital is wage-labour. Wage-labour rests exclusively on competition between the labourers. The advance of industry ... replaces the isolation of the labourers, due to competition ... What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable [unavoidable].

→ **Source 2.04** Cited in Rius, *Marx For Beginners* (London: Writers and Reader Publishing Cooperative, 1977), 141.

### Extract from Vladimir Lenin, *The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism*, 1913

The teaching of Marx is all-powerful because it is true. It is complete and harmonious, providing men with a consistent view of the universe, which cannot be reconciled with any superstition, any reaction, any defence of bourgeois oppression. It is the lawful successor of the best that has been created by humanity in the 19th century ...

#### DID YOU KNOW?

The pseudonym 'Lenin' was derived from the River Lena in Siberia. Among his comrades, Lenin was sometimes referred to as 'the Old Man', because of his premature baldness.

#### ACTIVITY

##### HISTORICAL SOURCES

Using Sources 2.03 and 2.04 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 According to Marx and Engels, what was morally wrong or unfair in societies where the bourgeoisie are the ruling class? Use details from the sources to support your response.
- 2 Using the extract from the *Communist Manifesto* and your own knowledge, explain how Marxists would describe the economic and social inequalities of Imperial Russia.
- 3 Using Lenin's perspective and your own knowledge, discuss the ways in which Marxism provided an appealing ideology for Russia's radical intelligentsia during the 1890s and early 1900s.

##### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 According to Marx, all history is the history of ... ?
- 2 The Marxist theory that history can be measured in definable stages is called what?
- 3 As best you can, draw an annotated diagram that explains the concept of dialectical materialism. Using an example will help (i.e. feudal or modern society).
- 4 What is the Marxist term for the industrial working class?
- 5 What is the Marxist term for the middle and upper classes that own the industries?
- 6 For Marxists, the economic foundations of a society (its base) are important as these shape its ... ?

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Many of Marx's works were cleared for distribution by the Russian censors. Tsarist authorities thought the dense economic and philosophical texts were far too complex and would not be of interest to Russians.



# RUSSIAN MARXISM: SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC LABOUR PARTY

**Vladimir Lenin:** 'Give us an organisation of revolutionaries, and we will overturn Russia!'

The first Russian Marxist group was formed in 1893 by Georgi Plekhanov. Plekhanov was one of the first to translate Marx's teachings into Russian, and he was known in revolutionary circles as the 'father of Russian Marxism'.

In 1898 Plekhanov's followers joined with other smaller Marxist groups to form the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party—known variously as the SDs or the RSDLP. Plekhanov had an excellent grasp of Marxist theory, but was not so successful in party politics. He soon lost his influence to more ambitious comrades.

Among the rising stars of the Russian Marxist movement was Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, better known by his revolutionary name: Lenin. Lenin developed a reputation as a brilliant revolutionary thinker. He played a key role as the editor of the party's newspaper *Iskra* (The Spark). Lenin developed a theory on the nature of revolutionary leadership, and how it should be applied to the membership of the party. He outlined these ideas in his influential 1902 pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?* As historian Orlando Figes explains, Lenin's pamphlet would later become 'the founding text of international Leninism'.<sup>5</sup>

## A VANGUARD PARTY

Central to Lenin's ideas was the belief that membership of the SDs should be 'confined' to people who had been 'trained in the art of combating the political police' and were 'professionally engaged in revolutionary activity'.<sup>6</sup> The party could only achieve success if it developed as an organisation of dedicated, disciplined and full-time revolutionary activists.

One of Lenin's most important theories was that of a *vanguard party*—that revolutionary success would only come if professional revolutionaries provided leadership to the exploited masses.

Lenin believed that on their own, the proletariat might protest against economic conditions or certain political issues—but they would not develop revolutionary consciousness. Lenin called this limited commitment to change 'economism'. Marx and Lenin disagreed on this point:

- Marx believed that revolutionary consciousness would develop spontaneously among the proletariat
- Lenin argued that workers needed to be guided to revolution.

Lenin believed that Marx and Engels provided the theory by which the contemporary world could be understood—and, more importantly, a framework for revolutionary action. The real challenge was putting this theory into action. Once Lenin established his revolutionary credentials, his followers were fond of saying: 'Marx is theory, Lenin is practice'.

**Iskra** Social Democrat newspaper, translates as 'spark'

### DID YOU KNOW?

The SD newspaper *Iskra* had as its motto: 'Out of this spark shall spring the flame'. The motto was a historical reference—it had also been the slogan of the Decembrist revolutionaries who had attempted an unsuccessful uprising in 1825.

**vanguard party** a political organisation that would lead the workers to socialist revolution; without leadership, the proletariat could never develop 'revolutionary consciousness'

### ACTIVITY

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Who was known as the 'father of Russian Marxism'?
- 2 When was the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party founded?
- 3 According to Lenin, what role did Marxist revolutionaries have to play in acting as a vanguard?

→ **Source 2.05** V.I. Lenin, *What Is to Be Done?* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978), 121.

### Vladimir Lenin: *What Is to Be Done?*, 1902

I assert:

- 1) that no revolutionary movement can endure without a stable organization of leaders maintaining continuity;
- 2) that the broader the popular mass drawn spontaneously ... into the struggle, forming the basis of the movement and participating in it, the more urgent the need for such an organization, and the more solid this organization must be (for it is much easier for demagogues to side-track the more backward sections of the masses);
- 3) that such an organization must consist chiefly of people professionally engaged in revolutionary activity;
- 4) that in an autocratic state, the more we confine the membership of such an organization to people who are professionally engaged in revolutionary activity and to have been professionally trained in the art of combating the political police, the more difficult will it be to wipe out such an organization; and
- 5) the greater will be the number of people of the working class and of the other classes of society who will be able to join the movement and perform active work in it ...

### ACTIVITY

#### EVALUATING SOURCES

Using Source 2.05 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Outline the actions that Lenin asserts the Social Democrats must take.
- 2 Explain why the ideas outlined in *What Is to Be Done?* were seen as essential for revolutionary success, according to Lenin.
- 3 Evaluate the extent to which Lenin's ideas created divisions within the Russian Marxist movement. Use evidence to support your response.



## BOLSHEVIKS AND MENSHEVIKS

◀ KEY GROUPS

**Vladimir Lenin:** 'It is necessary to prepare men who devote to the Revolution, not only their free evenings, but their entire lives.'

### DID YOU KNOW?

All eight delegates to the First Party Congress of the RSDLP of 1898 were arrested by the Okhrana. Many were taken into custody by tsarist authorities before the Congress had even ended.

The SDs held their Second Party Congress in August 1903, meeting first in Brussels and then in London. Throughout the congress, Lenin provoked confrontation among the party leadership. Plekhanov was unable to contain the conflict, which showed the limits of his authority. This ultimately led to a split in the party.

The chief dispute was over who had a right to be a party member. Tensions developed between Lenin and another leading figure in the party, Yuri Martov. Consistent with his theory of a vanguard party, Lenin argued: 'It is better that ten real workers should not call themselves party members than that one chatterbox should have the right and opportunity to be a member'.

Martov disagreed, and urged the party to seek the widest possible popular support. Membership should be less restrictive and the party structure more democratic.

According to Martov: 'The more widely the title of "member of the party" is spread, the better. We can only rejoice if every striker, every demonstrator, is able to declare himself a party member.'<sup>7</sup>

The difference of opinion was so great that the Congress was forced to vote on the matter. But they could not come to a position they all agreed on—and the party split into two *factions*:

- Lenin and his supporters became known as the Bolsheviks—Bolshinstvo means 'majority'
- Martov and his supporters became known as the Mensheviks—Menshinstvo means 'minority'.

These names of the factions are misleading, as the votes were almost even. But a subsequent vote on a related matter returned a favourable result for Lenin, who then proclaimed that he and his supporters should be known as 'the majority'.

This would prove to be one of Lenin's many cunning political ploys. Numerically, the Mensheviks were a larger group, but Lenin held on to the title. The Mensheviks were thereafter branded a 'minority' party—which would become a disadvantage in later years.<sup>8</sup>

The two factions of the SDs continued to argue and move in opposing directions, both ideologically and in their approach to practical agitation. By 1912 they had officially separated into distinct parties.

One particular point of difference was the question of historical stages of development. The Mensheviks continued to assume that the bourgeois stage of development must come before the socialist revolution. Lenin and his more radical followers disagreed. The Mensheviks and Bolsheviks became bitter rivals as the years progressed—as did Lenin and Martov.

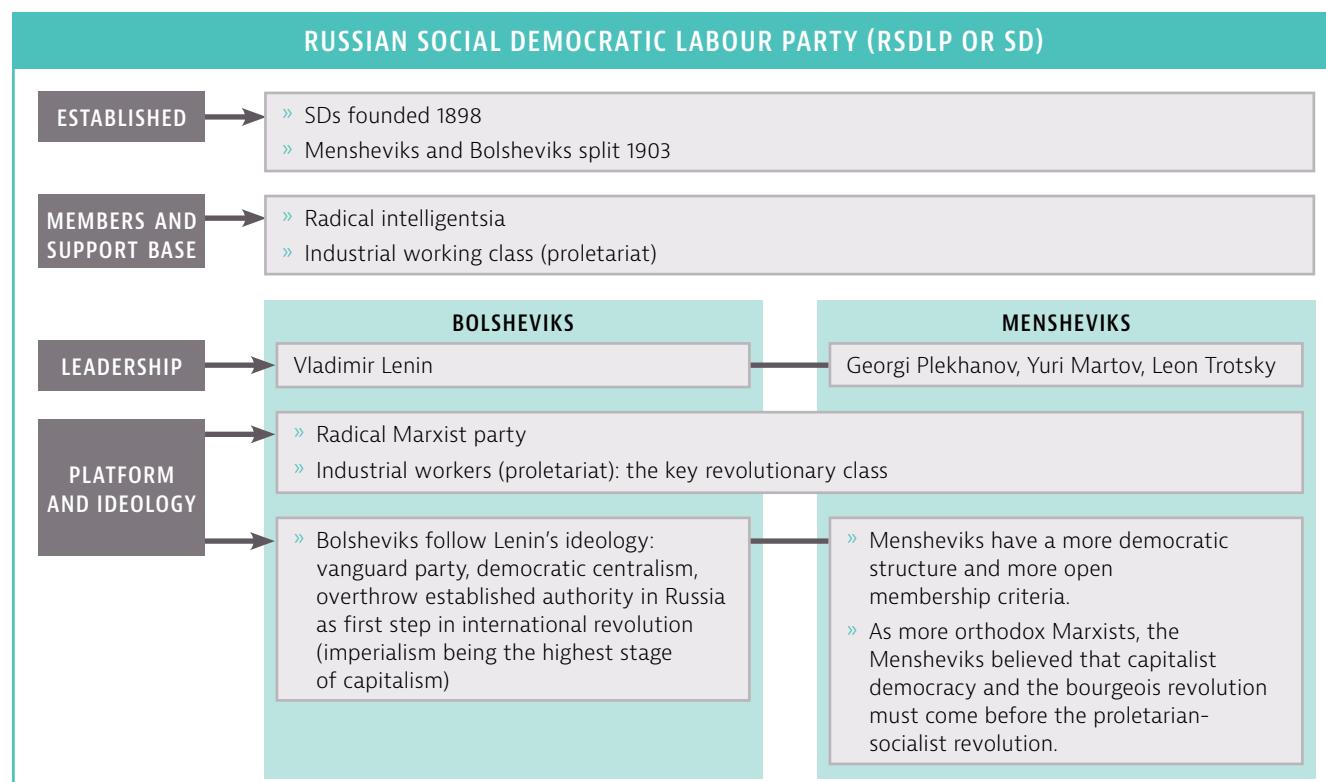
**faction** small group within a large group that opposes the majority position, or splits because of differences of opinion

#### DID YOU KNOW?

During the revolution Russian peasants were sometimes confused by the names of the two revolutionary Marxist groups. Some assumed the Bolsheviks were literally 'big people', while the Mensheviks must be 'short people'.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

In his attacks on his opponents in the RSDLP, Lenin claimed that the Bolsheviks were 'hard' while the Mensheviks were 'soft' and 'flabby'. Many Bolsheviks adopted this as a literal call to action and embraced a passion for weightlifting.



## THE WHO'S WHO OF RUSSIAN MARXISM

The following people were significant in the Social Democratic Labour Party.

### Bolsheviks

- Vladimir Lenin
- Leon Trotsky (after July 1917)
- Alexandra Kollontai
- Felix Dzerzhinsky
- Nikolai Bukharin
- Yakov Sverdlov
- Josef Stalin
- Lev Kamenev
- Grigory Zinoviev
- Anatoli Lunacharsky (after July 1917)
- Nadezhda Krupskaya
- Inessa Armand
- Karl Radek

### Mensheviks

- Georgi Plekhanov
- Yuri Martov
- Leon Trotsky (before July 1917)
- Irakli Tsereteli
- Nikolai Chkheidze
- Nikolai Sukhanov
- Anatoli Lunacharsky (before July 1917)
- Matvey Skobelev

### ACTIVITY

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Who did Lenin clash with at the Second Congress of the SDs?
- 2 What was the main issue of contention?
- 3 Define two or more of the differences between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks.

#### HISTORICAL INQUIRY

Choose one of the people from the Who's Who of Russian Marxism. Find out three or more interesting things about their lives, then complete a short research response that addresses the following inquiry: What contribution did your chosen person make to the Russian Marxist revolutionary movement?

## MARXISM-LENINISM

### KEY IDEA

**Vladimir Lenin:** 'Without a revolutionary theory there cannot be a revolutionary movement.'

After his death, Vladimir Lenin's development and application of Marxist theories were recognised as a distinct ideology—known as Marxism-Leninism. But while he was alive, Lenin's theories were referred to as Bolshevism or Leninism.

Lenin provided a framework for using Marxism in the modern world, as well as adapting and applying its theories to Russia. Lenin was both a Marxist theoretician and tactician. His approach was focused on building a revolutionary movement that could topple the established authority from power.

↓ Lenin, 1918.

KEY INDIVIDUAL  
(see pp.275–277)



## DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM

As well as needing a vanguard party to provide leadership for the socialist revolution, Lenin argued that the Bolsheviks needed to operate like a military organisation. The organisation needed to be a hierarchy—in structured ranks—and needed strict discipline to stay focused on its goals and strategies. The rank-and-file members—those members who were not part of the leadership—could suggest ideas and offer feedback on policies, but the decisions made by the top-level leadership were binding. This concept was known as *democratic centralism*.

Lenin captured the principle of democratic centralism in the saying, 'freedom in discussion, unity in action'.<sup>9</sup> Although this principle was difficult to carry out in practice, and sometimes problematic, it did influence the structure of the Bolshevik

Party. At the top was a Central Committee, which provided a collective leadership drawn from the party's elite members. Beneath this was a number of regional and district party committees. The leadership of the party was elected by its lower ranks. This structure became more complex over time, but stayed hierarchical.

## FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

Leon Trotsky analysed the challenges of applying Marxist theory to tsarist Russia, and highlighted Russia's uneven and combined development.<sup>10</sup>

- The Russian political system was feudal, and most of the population were impoverished peasants.
- The economy was dominated by agriculture.
- A new proletariat class had emerged with the rapid growth of industry.
- Russia lacked a middle class committed to achieving a democratic state.
- Industry had developed only through investment of foreign capital.

Russia was therefore uniquely and simultaneously backward and modern. This called for an adaption of Marxist theory—and both Lenin and Trotsky came to similar conclusions. Russia's bourgeois revolution could be combined (or 'telescoped') with its socialist revolution. The revolutionary proletariat would be tasked with this goal.

And although Russia was backward, it could still provide the essential first stage of the international socialist revolution: a successful socialist revolution in Russia would inspire the workers and peasants elsewhere in the world to rise up against their governments.

## IMPERIALISM: THE HIGHEST STAGE OF CAPITALISM

The reasons for Russia's suitability for revolution—and the conditions that would accelerate its socialist revolutionary movement—were outlined in Lenin's

*Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916).

In this text, Lenin argued that the ongoing development of global capitalism would lead the major powers of the world to compete for natural resources and territory. Imperialist empires were the result of this exploitation of world resources, he argued. They used the wealth generated by exploiting the labour and resources of their colonies so they could supply the working class at home with an acceptable standard of living.

However, the resources of the world are limited, and this would lead to conflict as world powers competed for colonial territories. Lenin theorised that the inevitable outcome of this conflict would be worldwide war. The scale of this conflict, as witnessed in World War I, would have catastrophic consequences for all powers involved.

Class conflict would become acute, as economies and societies strained under the pressures of total war. This created the perfect conditions for Marxist revolutionaries to rise up against exploitation. Lenin argued that Russia was the 'weakest link' in the 'imperialist-capitalist chain'. The Russian proletariat were terribly exploited, he reasoned—but they were also the most militant and strike-prone of the world's workers. This meant that the Russian Empire was the most likely of the imperialist powers to yield to revolution. So, despite its 'backwardness', the role of Russia was vital in the international socialist revolution.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Leon Trotsky was one of the most gifted speakers and brilliant theoreticians of the Russian Marxist movement. He was also an engaging and meticulous historian. Trotsky was loosely aligned with the Mensheviks in the early years of the SD movement. He went on to lead a small but influential faction that stood between the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, called the Mezhraiontsy. Trotsky joined the Bolsheviks in July 1917.

**imperialism** to extend a country's power and influence by conquering and ruling over foreign territories

### ACTIVITY

#### CREATIVE RESPONSE

Choose one of the revolutionaries or reformers discussed in this chapter. Compose a short speech, no longer than two minutes, that responds to the following topic: 'In regard to the tsarist regime at the turn of the twentieth century: What is to be done?'

## ACTIVITY



### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Lenin's theory of a vanguard party was outlined in his book entitled ... ?
- 2 Lenin's theory on party discipline was called ... ?
- 3 According to Lenin, why was the emergence of global capitalism and imperialist empires significant?
- 4 What was the name of the book that outlined Lenin's vision of the socialist new society?

## THE STATE AND REVOLUTION

Russia's revolution would involve seizing power and establishing a socialist workers' state. Lenin described this regime as a 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. This authoritarian stage in the socialist revolution would make sure that wealth was shared fairly (or 'redistributed'), and would act as a transition towards a truly socialist society.

During this authoritarian stage, the inevitable resistance of the capitalist bourgeoisie would also be crushed. Lenin outlined this idealised new society in his book *The State and Revolution*, but the finer details were lacking. Lenin offered a vague and utopian account of the post-revolutionary state. On coming to power, many of the idealistic elements of the Bolshevik program would have to be adapted or abandoned.



## MARXISM-LENINISM BASICS

- The **Bolsheviks** were Lenin's faction of the SDs. The faction later became a separate party, distinguished by their observance of Lenin's ideas.
- **Vanguard** party: The proletariat required leadership in order to carry out the socialist revolution. Only the Bolsheviks were capable of such leadership.
- To accomplish their agenda, the Bolsheviks needed to be an organisation of **professional** and **full-time revolutionaries**. This was the essence of Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?*
- Internal **discipline** and a hierarchical structure were features of the Bolshevik organisation. This was the basis of **democratic centralism**.

- Russia could and should be the first stage in the worldwide socialist revolution. The development of capitalist imperialism would lead to war, and Russia was the country most susceptible to the challenges that would come from a war. **Imperialism** was the end-stage of **capitalism**.
- Led by the Bolsheviks, the workers should be organised to seize power and establish a workers' state. This would be a 'dictatorship of the proletariat'.

**READ MORE ABOUT LENIN IN CHAPTER 13 (pp.273–277).**



## THE POPULIST TRADITION

**Aleksandr Pushkin, *The Captain's Daughter*:** 'God defend you from the sight of a Russian rebellion in all its ruthless stupidity. Those who meditate in our country impossible revolutions, are either young and do not know our people, or are hard-hearted folk, who rate the lives of others cheap, and care nothing for their own necks.'

Russia's first revolutionary socialists were the Narodniks, or Populists. Their name—and the focus of their movement—comes from the Russian word for common folk or peasants: *narod*. The Narodniks celebrated the peasant commune (or *mir*) as a uniquely Russian tradition upon which a socialist society could be established.

Populism was different from Marxism. To Marx, capitalism inevitably led to socialism. To Narodniks, capitalism was bad for Russia, full stop—and they wanted to avoid it altogether. And where Marxists saw the proletariat as the primary revolutionary class,

### DID YOU KNOW?

Russia has had a long history of revolutionary movements, starting with a peasant uprising against Catherine the Great in the 1770s. In 1825 the Decembrist Revolt saw disaffected army officers conspire to lead the military against Tsar Nicholas I. While these uprisings challenged the tsarist regime, the Romanov dynasty remained in power.

populism looked to the peasantry as the drivers of Russia's revolution. Significant theorists and writers of the populist tradition include Alexander Herzen, Nikolai Chernyshevsky and Sergei Nechayev.

In the 'mad summer' of 1874, thousands of the intelligentsia were inspired by populism to 'go to the people'. Students left their university studies and headed to the countryside to share their revolutionary enthusiasm with the peasants. However, the villagers did not take to these well-spoken and intense young people. Their clothing and customs were worlds apart, and the Narodnik call to revolution caused distress and confusion. The peasants reported the Narodnik activists to the police, who promptly arrested them.

Terrorism was a further tradition of the populist movement—the so-called '*propaganda by the deed*'.<sup>11</sup> One such populist group, the People's Will, was responsible for the assassination of Tsar Alexander II. Lenin's brother, Alexander, was arrested and executed for his role in a plot by the People's Will to kill Alexander III. The Narodnik movement only ever made limited gains, and it received such a reactionary response from tsarist authorities that it led people to question just what the populists stood for.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Nikolai Chernyshevsky's novel *What Is to Be Done?* inspired countless Russian revolutionaries in the years to come. Lenin paid tribute to this by borrowing the title for one of his own works.

## SOCIALIST REVOLUTIONARIES

### KEY GROUP



While many radically inclined intelligentsia looked to Marxism as a more 'scientific' approach, the Narodnik-populist tradition continued to inspire many people well into the twentieth century. The most significant of these groups was the Socialist Revolutionary Party (SRs), which was formed in 1902.

By 1917, the SRs were the largest and most popular of Russia's political parties. Their leaders included Viktor Chernov, Maria Spiridonova, Boris Savinkov and Alexander Kerensky. Chernov was the party's leading theoretician. The SRs differed from their Narodnik forebears, as they believed that both the peasants and the workers were genuine revolutionary classes. Capitalist *industrialisation* was an inescapable fact by the turn of the century.

The First SR Congress of 1905 formalised the party's program, which included a commitment to 'return the land to those who work it'.<sup>12</sup> Their focus on land redistribution led the SRs to gain support among the peasantry. The SRs also appealed to urban workers, with demands such as:

- an eight-hour working day
- universal voting rights for men
- the introduction of minimum wages
- trade union rights.

The SRs also continued the idea of terrorism as a means to bring about political change. In the period 1901–1905 over 2000 tsarist officials were assassinated by the SR Combat Organisation.<sup>13</sup> This became a significant crisis for the tsarist regime during the 1905 Revolution, when hated, high-profile government figures were assassinated by the SRs. This boosted the reputation of the SRs among the workers. However, Lenin dismissed the SRs' enthusiasm for terrorism as 'revolutionary pyrotechnics'.<sup>14</sup>

◀ Viktor Chernov.

**industrialisation** creating large-scale factories that will be more efficient and produce goods more cheaply

### DID YOU KNOW?

Pushkin's short story *The Captain's Daughter* recounts the drama and tragedy of Emelyn Pugachev's peasant rebellion, which swept across Russia in the mid-1770s.

## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 The term Narodnik derives from what Russian word?
- 2 Unlike Marxists, the Populists focused their efforts on what class?
- 3 Like Marxists, what broad aim did the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs) hope to achieve?
- 4 Who was the leading figure and theoretician in the SR movement?
- 5 What traditions of the populist movement did the SRs continue?
- 6 What internal challenge undermined the effectiveness of the SRs?



Unfortunately, the SRs were prone to factionalism. Among the groups that split from the SRs were:

- the Maximalists—who wanted the ‘maximum’ redistribution of wealth and resources
- the Popular Socialists—who wanted reform more than revolution
- the Trudoviks or ‘Labour Group’—who wanted to gain seats in the Duma (or parliament).

There was another factional split in the SRs in 1917, with a break in the party between:

- the radical Left SRs—who adopted a platform that aligned with the Bolsheviks
- the Right SRs—who supported the Provisional Government.

Bolshevik success in 1917 was partly because the SRs lacked a unified organisation and consistent ideology (or set of beliefs).

## SOCIALIST REVOLUTIONARIES (SRs)

ESTABLISHED	» Emerged from 1870s populist movement » SR Party formally established in 1902
MEMBERS AND SUPPORT BASE	» Peasants were the largest support base, but urban working class also represented
LEADERSHIP	Viktor Chernov, Alexander Kerensky
PLATFORM AND IDEOLOGY	» Radical socialist party » Peasants and workers were the key revolutionary classes » Initially focused on farming issues and gaining support from peasants » Developed program to attract workers » Some members supported the use of terrorism and assassinations » Ideological and tactical disagreements led to disunity and a number of factions: Maximalists, Popular Socialists, Trudoviks, Left SRs, Right SRs

# LIBERALS AND REFORMIST OPPOSITION

**Pavel Miliukov:** ‘It will be our task not to destroy the government, which would only aid **anarchy**, but to instil in it a completely different content, that is, to build a genuine constitutional order.’

**anarchy** a state of disorder and lawlessness due to the breakdown or absence of government authority

### KEY IDEA

Some opposition movements aimed to reform the tsarist regime, rather than sweep it aside by revolution. During the era of industrial growth in the 1890s, middle-class professionals and less radical members of the intelligentsia—such as lawyers, professors and businessmen—became interested in **liberal** ideas. People involved in the work of the zemstvos were also drawn to the liberal movement, and saw it as a basis for reforming the Russian Empire.

**Liberalism** is a broad ideology that is built on the ideals of freedom and liberty.

Liberals believe that:

- individuals deserve fundamental civic rights
- rights should be protected by fair and equal laws
- private property should be safeguarded by laws and regulations
- the rule of law also applies to government.

Liberals believe that a country needs a constitution, as this limits excessive power in the established authorities, and provides a system of checks and balances.

Liberals generally support the free market, as freedom of choice also applies to economic systems.

By 1905, Russia's liberal movement had become a significant opposition that aimed to reform the Romanov autocracy into a democratic and constitutional monarchy. The zemstvos and a group called the Union of Liberation provided the early foundations of Russia's liberal movement. One of the leading figures of the liberal opposition was Pavel Miliukov, who led the Union of Liberation. Russia's liberals called for universal **suffrage** and representative government—but both these initiatives failed to make much progress by 1905.

**liberal/liberalism** belief in the rule of law and the importance of freedoms and civil rights

**suffrage** the right to vote in political elections

## OCTOBRISTS KEY GROUP

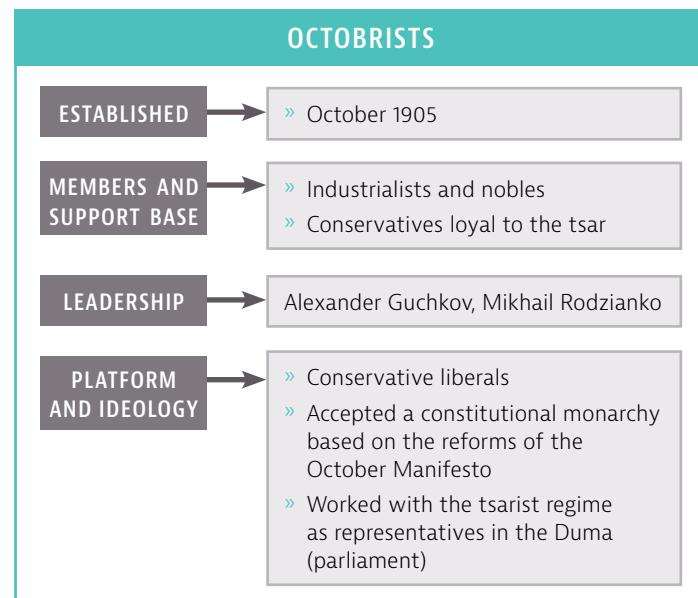
The revolutionary crisis of 1905 saw the emergence of Russia's two main liberal parties: the Octobrists and the Kadets.

Both parties were established in response to the October Manifesto issued by Tsar Nicholas II—which promised civic rights and a degree of representative government. The Union of October 17, better known as the Octobrists, took their name from the tsar's reforms.

For the Octobrists, the October Manifesto was an acceptable basis for constitutional monarchy, and was the limit of their reformist agenda. The Octobrists:

- were loyal monarchists
- were the more conservative of the liberal parties
- were supported by civic-minded industrialists and large landowners.

The Octobrists were led by Alexander Guchkov and Mikhail Rodzianko. After 1905, Octobrist deputies served in all four **Dumas**. And although they were committed to the monarchy, by 1917 many Octobrists were thoroughly disillusioned with Tsar Nicholas.



**Duma** Russian word for 'parliament'

## KADETS KEY GROUP

The official name for the Kadets was Constitutional Democrats. The Kadets formed in late 1905, around the same time as the Octobrists. They were led by Pavel Miliukov, and were the largest and most popular liberal organisation. And although they were conservatives, they were more progressive than the Octobrists.

## DID YOU KNOW?

The leader of the Kadets, Pavel Miliukov, was a professor of history. His area of specialty was Russian history and the reforms of Tsar Peter the Great.

**Constituent Assembly** democratically elected body that discussed and formulated constitutional matters. The Bolsheviks dispersed the first and only Constituent Assembly in January 1918

## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 What values and ideals are important to liberals?
- 2 What reforms prompted the founding of the Octobrists and the Kadets?
- 3 Who was the leader of the Kadets?
- 4 Briefly explain the differences between the Octobrists and the Kadets.

## DISCUSSION

The depiction of political ideologies along a linear political spectrum provides a useful tool for comparison, but it is an imperfect representation. Some political analysts prefer the political compass as comparative framework. Reflect on your own values and political views then take the online 'Political Compass Test'. Discuss whether or not the results were surprising or confirmed your perspective.

[www.politicalcompass.org/test](http://www.politicalcompass.org/test)

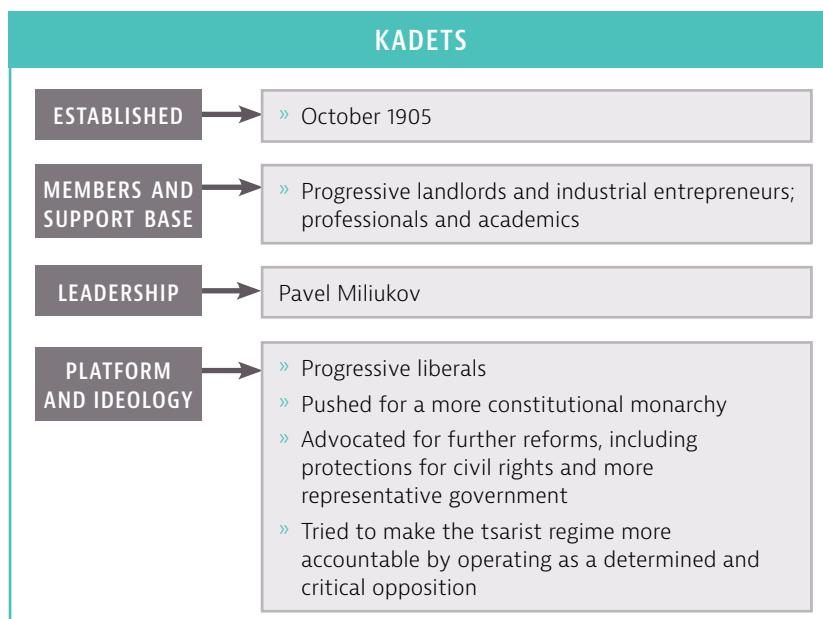
For the Kadets, the October Manifesto was welcome—but they wanted further democratic reforms.

The Kadets formed one of the largest groups in the First Duma, and called for an immediate vote of no confidence in the government. Initially some Kadets pushed for a **Constituent Assembly**—which would allow the Russian people to elect delegates who could discuss and decide the country's political system. After 1906, the party agreed that the tsar should remain as head of state, but a democratic and constitutional government was the ideal. As Miliukov claimed, the Kadets were 'the opposition of His Majesty, not opposition to His Majesty'.<sup>15</sup>

Despite this, the Kadets continued to push for elected representatives to hold further legislative authority. They voiced their opposition to press censorship and the erosion of promised civic rights. The Kadet party platform included:

- industrial labour reforms
- right to strike
- rights for minorities
- improved access to education
- universal suffrage.

Most Kadets were professionals and intellectuals, and many of their members were lawyers. Kadets made up the majority of the first Provisional Government following the February Revolution.



## POLITICAL SPECTRUM

In the Russian context, the revolutionary parties sat in this order on the political spectrum:



# CHAPTER 2 REVIEW

## KEY SUMMARY POINTS

- Marxism provided a thorough and systematic ideology for understanding the modern world, as well as a framework for revolutionary change.
- Marxist ideology emerged as a significant influence in Russia in the late nineteenth century with the founding of the Social Democratic Labour Party (SDs).
- Lenin instigated intense debates within the party, particularly over the issues of membership and organisational discipline. This led to the split between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks.
- Lenin made important contributions to Marxist theory and practice. These included the concepts of a vanguard party, democratic centralism, imperialism as the end-stage of capitalism, and an analysis of Russia's unique role in the socialist revolution.
- The Narodnik–Populists were the most active Russian revolutionaries of the nineteenth century.
- The populist traditions of agrarian socialism and political terrorism were continued in the twentieth century by the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs). The SRs recognised the industrial workers as a revolutionary class, as well as the peasantry.
- The 1905 October Manifesto saw the emergence of formal liberal parties in the Octobrists and Kadets.
- The liberals aimed to reform the tsarist regime rather than overthrow it by revolution.

## ACTIVITY

### EXTENDED RESPONSES

Write an extended response to one or more of the topics below. You might prefer to return to these topics once you have made further progress with your study of the Russian Revolution.

- 1 How did the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks (SDs) contribute to the popular opposition and challenge the existing order?
- 2 How did the SRs contribute to the popular movements that mobilised Russian society and challenged the existing order?
- 3 How did the Octobrists and Kadets contribute to the popular movements that mobilised Russian society and challenged the tsarist regime?

### ESSAY

Write a 600–800-word essay on one of the topics below. Your essay should include an introduction, paragraphs supported by relevant evidence from primary sources and historical interpretations, and a conclusion.

- ‘Rebellions happen, revolutions are made’. Discuss.
- ‘Without a revolutionary theory there cannot be a revolutionary movement.’ To what extent do you agree with this statement?
- ‘The tsarist regime was not able to be reformed. Revolution provided the only solution to the inequalities of the old regime.’ To what extent do you agree?



# A CRISIS OF MODERNISATION

(1904–1905)

## KEY EVENTS

### —1893–1903

Rapid industrialisation initiated under Sergei Witte

### —8 February 1904

Japanese attack on Port Arthur sparks Russo-Japanese War

### —6–9 November 1904

National Congress of the Zemstvos

### —December 1904

Dismissal of four workers from Putilov Steelworks in St Petersburg triggers widespread industrial unrest

### —9 January 1905

Bloody Sunday massacre

### —14 June 1905

Mutiny on the Battleship *Potemkin*

### —23 August 1905

Treaty of Portsmouth ends the Russo-Japanese War

### —14 October 1905

St Petersburg paralysed by general strike

### —17 October 1905

October Manifesto

### —7–18 December 1905

Moscow Soviet workers' uprising

## KEY QUESTIONS

- How did Witte's economic modernisations create conditions that contributed to revolutionary tensions in tsarist Russia?
- How did the Russo-Japanese War aggravate popular unrest and undermine the tsarist regime?
- Why did reforms unintentionally lead to expectations of further political change from the tsarist government?
- How did the actions of Father Gapon and the reactions to Bloody Sunday contribute to a revolutionary crisis in 1905?
- How did different groups, ideas and popular movements challenge the existing order by October 1905?
- To what extent did the October Manifesto address the causes of revolutionary tensions?
- What was the significance of the 1905 Revolution?

*'I will preserve the principle of Autocracy as firmly and unflinchingly as my late father.'*

—Nicholas II

The beginning of the twentieth century brought new opportunities and challenges for tsarist Russia.

However, the living and working conditions of Russia's industrial workforce were dreadful. The exploitation of the proletariat meant that many were receptive to revolutionary ideas and the influence of radical activism.

One modernisation was an extension of railways across Siberia. The subsequent expansion of Russia's military presence into the far east led to the 1904–1905 Russo–Japanese War. The war had disastrous consequences for Russia. Military defeats and economic challenges led to a sharp rise in discontent in the cities.

On 9 January 1905, police opened fire on a peaceful procession of workers who had hoped to present their grievances to Tsar Nicholas II. Hundreds were killed or wounded.

Discontent with the government increased as the year went on, and a broad spectrum of opposition had developed by October 1905. General strikes paralysed St Petersburg and Moscow.

Tsar Nicholas was forced to choose between repression and reform. His October Manifesto granted civic rights and a degree of representative government. It seemed that a revolutionary crisis was averted, and the tsar held on to power. However, many of the long-term conditions that led to the 1905 Revolution were still unresolved—and would emerge again in coming years.

# CHAPTER 3



Source 3.01 Bloody Sunday, St Petersburg, 1905.

# MODERNISATION AND INDUSTRIALISATION

Tsar Alexander III to Tsar Nicholas II: 'Listen to Witte.'

**groznyi** a traditional trait of Russian tsars, meaning awesome, fierce, mighty

Tsar Alexander III was a typical autocrat. He was a **groznyi** tsar who considered social and political reform a threat to his autocratic rule. However, he was willing to support the modernisation of Russia's industry in order to strengthen the regime.

Following the death of Tsar Alexander in 1894, Nicholas continued Russia's push towards industrial modernisation, along with the preservation of his absolute autocracy. Industrialisation was the key to military growth. Minister of Finance Sergei Witte was in charge of modernising the economy so that Russia would continue to be a great power in the twentieth century.

## THE GREAT SPURT

Russia's economic reforms in the years 1893–1903 were described as the 'Great Spurt'. This was because of the expansion of infrastructure and industrialisation under Witte's guidance. Witte employed foreign advisers and managerial experts to guide him on industrial planning. Foreign investment was encouraged, and money was borrowed from foreign banks to fund the development of the economy.

In 1897 the stability of the Russian currency was made safe—the rouble was fixed to the **gold standard**, which encouraged even more foreign investment. Witte also protected local industries by placing tariffs (or taxes) on foreign goods that were sold on the Russian market.

**gold standard** a monetary system that defines the value of a country's currency to an amount in line with its gold reserves

### DID YOU KNOW?

The Trans-Siberian is the longest railway in the world.



↑ Source 3.02 The Trans-Siberian Railway, 1900.

## TRANS-SIBERIAN RAILWAY

Investment in railways was central to Witte's modernisation program. He had a background in railway administration, and was convinced that rail transport would benefit Russia.

In 1891, the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway began. The railway was designed to connect the isolated regions of central and eastern Russia—which were rich in resources—with the emerging industrial centres in the west. The Trans-Siberian Railway would enable further east–west migration, which would boost the industrial workforce and increase trade through the eastern ports.

Although the Trans-Siberian was an important piece of Russian infrastructure, it was not completed until 1916. Until the railway had been completed, ferries and sleighs were required to connect goods and passengers with bridgeheads at Lake Baikal.

## LIMITATIONS

The Great Spurt developed Russia's heavy industry to a level equal to that of Western Europe—but Witte's reforms also had a few defects. His reforms:

- relied on foreign investment
- developed heavy industry, but made little for Russian consumers

- failed to improve the livelihoods of workers and peasants
- led to high interest rates, rising prices and indirect taxes on everyday goods.

Witte's reforms neglected agriculture, with little attention given to modernising and developing farming practices. Witte had pointed out to Tsar Nicholas some possible approaches to tackling rural poverty—but little had come of these discussions.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Witte established a state monopoly on the production and sale of alcohol. This developed into a major source of revenue for the government.

## LIVING AND WORKING CONDITIONS

Land shortages, poverty and famine saw many peasants flock to Russia's industrial centres in search of work. The industrial labour force trebled in the years 1860–1905, and this increase provided a cheap and abundant supply of factory workers. The low cost of Russia's workforce was a major factor in the success of Witte's economic expansion—and also meant that foreign investors and Russia's emerging commercial class could make large profits.

Most workers were employed in large-scale industrial enterprises, with some factories having tens of thousands of employees. By today's standards, machinery and production processes were crude as:

- working conditions were often dangerous
- workers in iron foundries had limited or improvised protection
- workers did 12-hour shifts, and sometimes 14-hour or 16-hour shifts
- there were no legislated workplace protections
- trade unions were illegal.

Managers could impose discipline on workers with fines, or dismiss them from the job. Treating workers badly did not seem to matter—there were plenty of people keen to replace workers who were sacked or injured.

Despite the movement of peasants into cities, the government made little attempt to provide low-cost housing or social welfare. This led to severe overcrowding, and appalling living conditions. Sixteen people lived in one apartment on average, with six people sharing one room. Some workers shared a single bed, with day-shift workers taking the place of night-shift workers in a continuous cycle of exhaustion. These cramped and unsanitary quarters bred disease and psychological distress.

## RISING TENSIONS

Russia's industrialisation in the 1890s came at a time of worldwide economic boom. However, an international recession at the turn of the twentieth century led to businesses cutting wages and reducing the number of workers.

This increased social tensions, as peasants had come to the cities for a better life. And, although they had escaped famine and rural hardships, urban life did not meet their expectations.

Revolutionary agitators were able to explain to the proletariat why their living and working conditions were as they were. Exploited workers directed their anger towards their employers, and also towards the tsarist government. The number of industrial strikes suppressed by military force increased from 19 in 1893 to 522 in 1902.

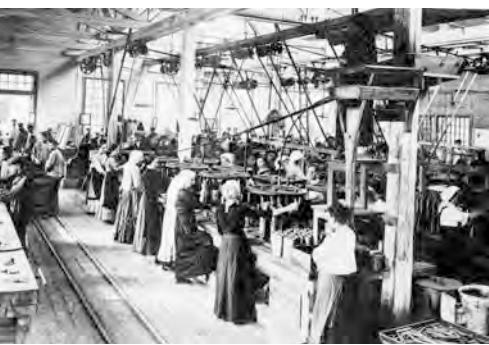
#### ACTIVITY

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Why was the period of industrialisation in the 1890s known as the Great Spurt?
- 2 List the main economic reforms that Witte introduced to drive the Great Spurt.
- 3 Comment on the limitations and negative impacts that emerged from Witte's policies.
- 4 What was the name of the major railway project developed during this time?
- 5 Identify three or more examples why Russian industrial workers were likely to be discontented.

#### EXTENDED RESPONSE

Explain how the Great Spurt contributed to conditions that caused revolutionary tensions in tsarist Russia. Use evidence to support your response.



↑ **Source 3.03** (top) The blacksmith shop in a Sormovsky factory.

↑ **Source 3.04** (bottom) By 1915 the factory was producing military equipment for use in the war.

→ **Source 3.05** From Michael Lynch, *Reaction and Revolutions: Russia 1881–1924* (Oxford: Hodder & Stoughton, 2000), 20–21.

### GROWTH OF POPULATION IN RUSSIA'S TWO MAIN CITIES

YEAR	ST PETERSBURG	MOSCOW
1881	928,000	753,500
1890	1,033,600	1,038,600
1897	1,264,700	1,174,000
1900	1,439,600	1,345,000
1910	1,905,600	1,617,700
1914	2,217,500	1,762,700

### INDUSTRIAL OUTPUT IN THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE (from a base unit of 100 in 1900)

1900	100.0
1904	109.5
1905	98.2
1906	111.7
1909	122.5
1911	149.7
1912	153.2
1913	163.6

### GROWTH IN NATIONAL PRODUCT 1898–1913

Russia	96.8%
Germany	84.2%
Italy	82.7%
Austria	79.0%
France	59.6%
Britain	40.0%

## ACTIVITY

### DATA ANALYSIS

Analyse the statistical data presented in Source 3.05. Describe the trends represented in each dataset, and explain the likely significance for tsarist Russia.

### HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION

#### Historian Steve Smith

The collapse of the autocracy was rooted in a crisis of modernisation. The government hoped that it could carry out modernisation whilst maintaining tight control over society. Yet the effect of industrialization, urbanization, internal migration, and the emergence of new social classes was to set in train forces that served to erode the foundations of the autocratic state.

→ **Source 3.06**  
S.A. Smith, *The Russian Revolution: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2002), 6.

Using Source 3.06 and your own knowledge, evaluate the extent to which the policies intended to modernise the economy created social and political tensions in tsarist Russia.

# SERGEI WITTE, 1849–1915

Sergei Witte was one of the most influential ministers of the tsarist regime in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He played a significant role in the governments of both Alexander III and Nicholas II.

Witte was born in Tiflis, Georgia, and came from a noble family. His father was a civil servant. He attended university in Odessa, and graduated in 1870 with a degree in mathematics. Witte was encouraged by relatives to find work in the emerging railway industry, and he spent twenty years working in railway management.

In 1889, Witte moved into government service when he was appointed Director of the Department of Railway Affairs and, later, Transportation Minister. In these roles he supervised the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway.

Witte was appointed Minister of Finance in 1893—a role he kept for ten years. As Minister of Finance, he initiated and oversaw a program of rapid industrialisation, known as the Great Spurt. His efforts saw the Russian currency (the rouble) placed on the gold standard, and saw considerable foreign investment in Russian industry.

In 1903, Witte was made Chairman of the Committee of Ministers—this was a position that looked like a promotion, but actually reduced his influence in policy-making. He returned to prominence after Tsar Nicholas requested that Witte head peace treaty negotiations with Japan following Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War.

In 1905, amid widespread strikes and unrest, Witte persuaded the tsar to accept democratic reforms. The result was the October Manifesto, which was drafted by Witte and Minister of Education Alexei Obolensky.

Following the October Manifesto, Witte was tasked with forming Russia's first cabinet government as Chairman of the Council of Ministers—essentially acting as Prime Minister. However, once the tide of revolution subsided, Tsar Nicholas came to resent Witte, who he felt had compelled him into making concessions that were not required.

Witte was also unpopular with influential conservatives in the government, and in April 1906 he resigned as Prime Minister. Witte continued to serve in the State Council but played no significant role in politics after his resignation. He died in Petrograd on 13 March 1915.

## KEY POINTS

- Witte served as Minister of Finance under tsars Alexander III and Nicholas II.
- He was the main architect of the rapid industrialisation program known as the Great Spurt.
- Witte secured favourable terms for Russia in the Treaty of Portsmouth, following the Russo-Japanese War.
- Witte advised Tsar Nicholas to introduce the October Manifesto.
- Witte became Prime Minister in late 1905.
- He resigned from his post as Prime Minister in April 1906.



↑ Sergei Witte.

## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 What significant positions did Sergei Witte hold?
- 2 Witte is considered one of the leading statesmen of the late tsarist era. Briefly outline the successes and challenges he faced.

# RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR, 1904–1905

**Tsar Nicholas II:** 'The Japanese are infidels. The might of Holy Russia will crush them.'



↑ **Source 3.07** Illustration of the Great Naval Battle at the Harbor Entrance to Port Arthur in the Russo-Japanese War by Chinsai Rosetsu, 1904.

**garrison** group of soldiers stationed within a city or town; the building in which the group lives

At the turn of the twentieth century, Imperial Russia looked east to expand its empire. Two areas were of particular interest:

- Manchuria in north-east China
- Northern Korea.

The infrastructure needed to transport Russian troops would be supplied by the Trans-Siberian Railway. However, the situation was complicated, as Japan also had ambitions in these territories. When China was defeated by Japan in the 1894–1895 Sino-Japanese War, it gave the tsarist government an opportunity to pressure the Chinese into granting Russia permission to build a railway line across Manchuria.

Russia made further gains in 1898, securing a twenty-five-year lease of the Liaodong Peninsula, including Port Arthur (now Dalian). The lease of Port Arthur was a great advantage—it meant Russia now had access to a port on the Pacific Ocean that was free of ice all year. Russia's other major port in the far east was Vladivostok—but it froze over during winter.

Russia now based its Pacific naval fleet at Port Arthur, which gave them an important strategic position in the region. From 1900 Russia increased its military presence in Manchuria, building up a sizeable **garrison** of troops at Mukden to protect its railways. Although Manchuria had not been officially annexed from China, Russia had essentially taken control.

## THE RISE OF JAPAN

The Japanese government was concerned by Russia's military build-up and territorial advances in the east. Japanese Emperor Meiji (1852–1912) was committed to modernising Japan, which had developed a strong and well-trained military and naval force.

The might of the Japanese military was demonstrated in its victory over China in the 1894–1895 Sino-Japanese War. Significantly, Japan had gained Port Arthur in this conflict but was forced to give it up after Russia, Germany and France intervened in the peace negotiations. The Japanese accepted a larger payment for the loss of Port Arthur (called an 'indemnity') but were embittered by the experience of the 'Triple Intervention', as the action of Russia, Germany and France was called.

As a rising power with imperial ambitions, Japan was committed to expanding its territorial claims, which meant that conflict with Russia was likely. The likelihood of conflict increased when Russia gained logging and mining rights on land bordering Korea.

## FAILED NEGOTIATIONS

In an attempt to dispel rising tensions, the Japanese government proposed well-defined spheres of influence. In return for recognising Russia's presence in Manchuria, Russia should recognise Japan's influence in Korea. Negotiations dragged on for two years with little progress—as the Russian government was not interested in a diplomatic resolution.

Instead, the Russians used the delay in reaching a settlement to strengthen their military force in Manchuria. Influential figures in the tsarist government reportedly welcomed a

war with Japan. Russian Minister of the Interior, Vyacheslav Plehve, famously declared his enthusiasm for ‘a little victorious war to stem the tide of revolution’.<sup>1</sup> In a similar manner, Minister of War General Kuropatkin spoke of how a sure victory would boost national pride.

Tsar Nicholas was also encouraged into warfare by his cousin, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany, who stoked Nicholas’ sense of his racial superiority over the Japanese. For Nicholas, the Japanese were ‘little yellow monkeys’, and Russia’s conflict with Japan was a case of European Christianity making a stand against the spread of the ‘Yellow Peril’. Russian propaganda posters would later depict these sentiments, showing strong Russian soldiers casually flicking shells towards their puny Japanese enemies.

The Japanese sensed the futility of diplomacy and became increasingly alarmed at Russia’s continued military build-up. Japan was supported by its **Anglo-Japanese Alliance** with Britain—which ensured that Britain would not support Russia in a conflict with Japan. Japan broke off negotiations with Russia and, on 8 February 1904, the Japanese Imperial Navy launched a surprise attack on the Russian fleet at Port Arthur. An official declaration of war followed three hours later.

**Anglo-Japanese alliance** 1902  
agreement between Britain and Japan designed to control Russian expansionism in the Pacific

## WAR

The Russo-Japanese War was short and victorious as Plehve had predicted, but the triumph belonged to Japan—not Russia.

The war was a complete disaster for the tsarist regime. The declaration of war was followed by a prolonged siege of Port Arthur. Under the command of Admiral Togo, Japanese forces destroyed or damaged the largest and most important ships in Russia’s Pacific fleet. The rest of the ships were captured or forced to flee to Vladivostok. One of few able commanders in the Russian navy, Vice Admiral Stepan Makarov, was killed attempting to break the Japanese blockade.

Port Arthur eventually surrendered to the Japanese on 2 January 1905, after Russia had lost 31,000 men in a futile defence of the port. The Japanese Imperial Army advanced across the Korean border and inflicted devastating defeats on Russian troops in Manchuria. The Russian army lost 90,000 men in the Battle of Mukden on 11–25 February 1905. The fighting involved many tactics that would later feature in World War I, such as use of heavy artillery, machine guns and mass bayonet charges against entrenched positions.

Russian soldiers were tough and fought bravely, but their commanders were largely incompetent because:

- most Russian generals held their rank because of their loyalty to the tsar rather than their fighting experience
- they lacked the talent and insight required to adapt to modern warfare
- they were notorious for undermining each other’s initiatives.<sup>2</sup>

Further challenges came from the difficulty of providing sufficient equipment and supplies via the Trans-Siberian Railway—which was still incomplete. Many soldiers lacked a full, modern battle kit. One Russian commander joked, ‘The Japanese are beating us with machine guns, but never mind: we’ll beat them with icons’.<sup>3</sup> Even the uniforms of Russian soldiers were inadequate, as they had no pockets and were not suited to prolonged use on a battlefield. According to one observer, after six months the Russian army looked like ‘a bunch of ragamuffins’.<sup>4</sup>

### DID YOU KNOW?

Vice Admiral Stepan Makarov was an accomplished military commander, oceanographer and naval innovator. He wrote several books and designed Russia’s most effective ice-breaking ships. During the Russo-Japanese War, Makarov was one of the few Russian naval commanders to meet the Japanese with aggressive tactics, rather than defensive approaches.

**icons** religious images used for worship by orthodox Christians

The most humiliating defeat for Russia came on 14–15 May 1905 at the Battle of Tsushima. In October 1904, the tsarist admiralty—in a bid to relieve the siege of Port Arthur—had



↑ **Source 3.08** *Fierce Fighting in the Rear at the Battle of Port Arthur* (No. 10 from the series *True Depictions of the Russo-Japanese War*) by Tanaka Ryōzō, 1904.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

The Baltic fleet took eight months to sail around the world and join the conflict in the Russo-Japanese War. The fleet nearly sparked a war with England when it sank a group of fishing boats off the coast of Scotland, when they reportedly mistook the fishing boats for Japanese torpedo boats! The Russian ships had also fired on each other before finally realising their error.

sent the Baltic fleet to set sail for the war in the east, which involved sailing via Europe, Africa and Asia. Heading off from its base near St Petersburg, the Baltic fleet travelled more than 30,000 kilometres through difficult conditions before they encountered the Japanese navy in the Strait of Tsushima.

The long journey had left the Russian ships in poor condition, and the morale of the sailors was low. Port Arthur had already been lost by the time the Baltic fleet arrived, but Russia still hoped to strike a blow against the Japanese navy. However, Admiral Togo's forces completely routed the Baltic fleet in less than twenty-four hours—with most of the damage done in the first forty-five minutes of battle. In the battle, Russia lost:

- all of its eleven battleships
- seven of its eight cruisers
- seven of its nine destroyers.

Over 10,000 Russian seamen were killed or captured, including two admirals. Just three Russian ships managed to reach the safety of Vladivostok. Japan lost three torpedo boats in total, and 117 men.

## THE TREATY OF PORTSMOUTH

Tsar Nicholas insisted that Russia remained committed to war in the east despite the continued losses. However, the Battle of Tsushima made it clear that Japan had achieved a decisive victory. Two days after the battle, the tsarist government called for peace, and Sergei Witte was sent to negotiate a settlement.

The peace talks were mediated by US President Theodore Roosevelt, and resulted in the Treaty of Portsmouth. Signed on 23 August 1905, the conditions imposed on Russia were mild, due to Witte's brilliant diplomatic efforts. Russia escaped having to pay compensation but:

- had to remove its military from Manchuria
- lost its lease of the Liaodong Peninsula.

Japan was allowed to keep half of Sakhalin Island, which was formally a Russian territory but had been occupied by Japanese forces during the war. Japan also:

- gained control of Port Arthur
- had its 'sphere of influence' in Korea formally recognised.

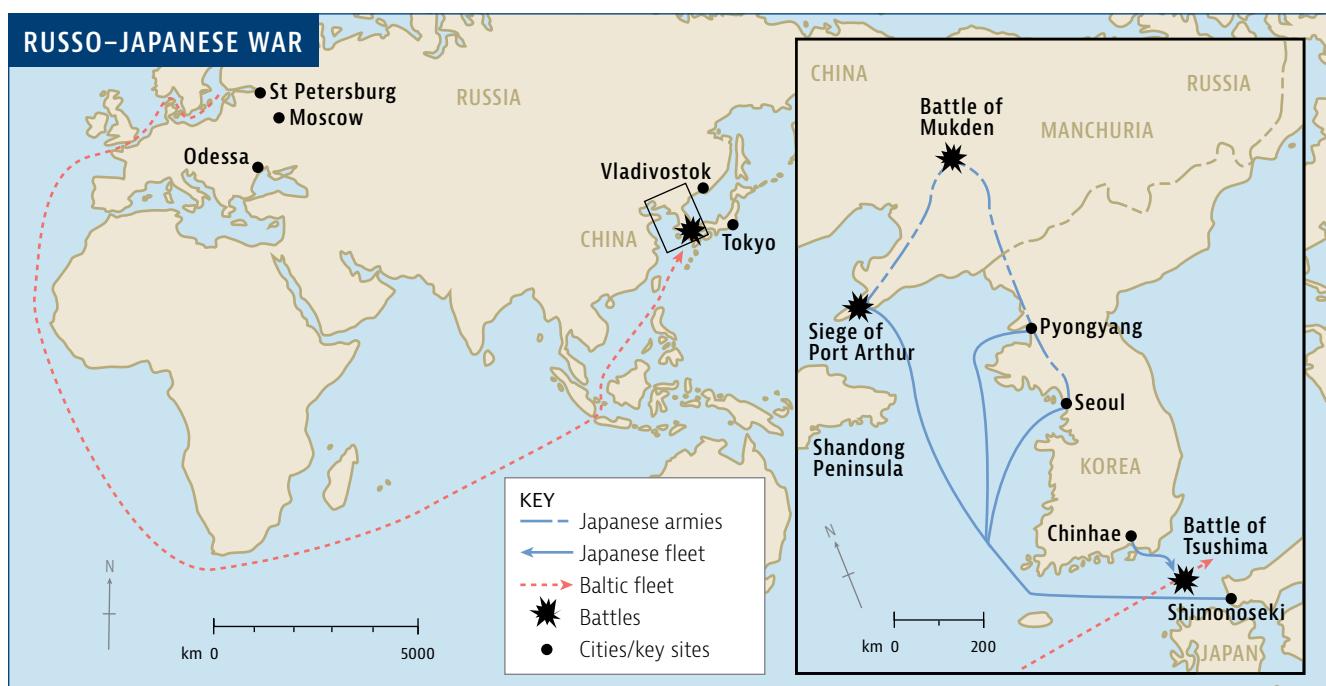
## DOMESTIC IMPACTS OF THE WAR

Far from stemming the tide of revolution, the Russo-Japanese War made the discontent in Russia much worse. News of the humiliating defeats on land and sea were met first by disbelief, then by anger. It was unthinkable that the Russian Empire had been defeated by Japan.

The relatively favourable diplomatic resolution of the war did little to lessen the national humiliation felt by Russians. The patriotism that many people felt at the start of the war was replaced by criticism of the government and its leadership. The war had shown the limitations of Russia's technological development, industry and infrastructure—as well as the inadequacies of Russia's military commanders.

The war had a negative impact on the economy, leading to shortages and a sharp rise in the price of consumer goods. The *real worth* of wages received by industrial workers dropped 25 per cent in twelve months, which increased discontent in the major cities.<sup>5</sup>

**real worth/real wages** the buying power of wages once adjusted for inflation, i.e. the amount of goods and services that can be purchased with the money earned by an employee

**Source 3.09**

**Source 3.10** A Russian propaganda poster, c. 1904. Russians smoke the artillery shells fired at them by Japan and its supporters during the Russo-Japanese War.



**Source 3.11** 'Regarding Russia's War with Japan'. Poster from 1905.



Worker strikes increased during the war, as did peasant revolts, student demonstrations and attacks on government personnel by revolutionary terrorists. At the same time, the push for liberal reforms and support for radical revolutionary movements gained momentum.

The Russo-Japanese War also meant a shortage of military forces available for domestic crises—such as peasant land seizures. As Russians from across the social spectrum grew weary of the war, they became increasingly disenchanted with the tsarist regime and its pursuit of a futile imperialist war.<sup>6</sup>

The Russo-Japanese War helped create the conditions that would lead to revolution by late 1905.

### ACTIVITY

#### HISTORICAL SOURCES

Using Sources 3.10 and 3.11 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Outline the expectations of the Russo-Japanese War from the perspective of the tsarist government.
- 2 Explain why Russia's losses in the Russo-Japanese War were considered a national humiliation.
- 3 Analyse the extent to which the Russo-Japanese War contributed to revolutionary tensions in 1905. Use evidence and details from the sources to support your response.

## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Briefly explain how each of the following factors contributed to the outbreak of war between Russia and Japan:
  - extension of the Trans-Siberian Railway
  - Port Arthur and the Liaodong Peninsula
  - Japanese claims over Korea
  - Russia's military presence in Manchuria
  - failed negotiations
  - attitudes of key individuals in the Russian government.

- 2 When did the Russo-Japanese War begin?
- 3 Using details from the battles of Mukden and Tsushima, briefly explain the military outcomes of the war.
- 4 What treaty brought an end to the Russo-Japanese War? Who was Russia's chief negotiator?
- 5 List three or more challenges for the tsarist regime that emerged from the Russo-Japanese War.

### EXTENDED RESPONSE

Explain how the Russo-Japanese War undermined popular confidence in Tsar Nicholas's government. Use evidence to support your response.



↑ Prince Pyotr Sviatopolk-Mirskii.

### DID YOU KNOW?

The assassination of the much-hated Vyacheslav Plehve was celebrated in the streets by jubilant workers.

## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 What were the reforms proposed to Tsar Nicholas by the National Congress of the Zemstvos, with the support of Interior Minister Sviatopolk-Mirskii?
- 2 How did Tsar Nicholas react to these suggestions?

## MIRSKII AND THE ZEMSTVO PROPOSALS

**Pyotr Sviatopolk-Mirskii:** 'I find myself in the position of being someone who had signed a promissory note for a sum he cannot pay.'

Minister of the Interior Vyacheslav Plehve was one of several tsarist officials killed in the wave of revolutionary terrorism during the Russo-Japanese War. He was assassinated by an SR bomber on 15 July 1904.

Plehve's replacement, Prince Pyotr Sviatopolk-Mirskii, was far more encouraging of liberal ideals than Plehve. Mirskii was an advocate of civil liberties and the rule of law, who:

- eased restrictions on censorship
- abolished corporal punishment
- defended the rights of national minorities.

More importantly, Mirskii worked with the zemstvos to develop proposals for reform. He supported a National Congress of the Zemstvos, held on 6–9 November 1904. According to historian Orlando Figes: 'It was, in effect, the first national assembly in Russian history.'

The National Congress suggested, among other things, that the tsar's advisory State Council should include elected representatives. However, this was a minor gesture towards constitutional reform when compared to the 1905 October Manifesto. The liberal press expressed its gratitude towards Mirskii, and there were high expectations of a political breakthrough, and even talk of a 'Russian Spring'. Mirskii personally presented the zemstvo proposals to the tsar, and suggested that some members of the zemstvos would be worthwhile candidates for the State Council.

It was hoped that these efforts might restore popular confidence in the government, but Nicholas rejected most of the proposals. He said to Witte, 'I shall never, under any circumstances, agree to the representative form of government because I consider it harmful to the people whom God has entrusted to my care'.<sup>8</sup> Some weeks earlier Mirskii was introduced to Tsarina Alexandra and had explained his agenda: 'If we do not press ahead with liberal reform, change will come in the shape of revolution'. The tsarina replied that such ideas were 'frightful'.<sup>9</sup>

Mirskii's efforts were ultimately a lost opportunity. Hopes for change were raised—but ultimately dismissed.

# BLOODY SUNDAY

TURNING POINT

Father Georgi Gapon: 'There is no God any longer. There is no Tsar.'

In December 1904, workers became angry after four of their colleagues from the Putilov Steelworks were dismissed. The Putilov factory was the largest industrial enterprise in St Petersburg, and the Putilov workers were some of the city's most militant. Thousands of workers went on strike in support of their sacked comrades. By early January 1905, the number of striking industrial workers had swelled to 120,000.<sup>10</sup>

## GAPON'S PETITION

Father Georgi Gapon was a prominent member of the St Petersburg workers' community, and was well known to many of the Putilov strikers. He was 'a renegade priest' who worked among the poor people of St Petersburg.<sup>11</sup>

In 1904, Gapon established the Assembly of Russian Factory Workers. Gapon's Assembly was one of several organisations supported by the Ministry of the Interior as a government-sponsored workers' committee. Unions were illegal, but the government hoped to support its own working-class committees to channel worker discontent away from other political organisations. This meant that Father Gapon was on the payroll of the Okhrana.

By the end of 1904, the Assembly of Russian Factory Workers had over 6000 followers, including the four sacked workers.<sup>12</sup> Although Gapon had police connections, his Assembly aimed to support local workers and pursue industrial reform.

Traditionally, Russian people felt helpless when hardship struck, as expressed by the saying, 'God is too high, and the Tsar is far away'. Father Gapon hoped to change this—he would appeal directly to Tsar Nicholas and present the workers' grievances in a petition. The Union of Liberation—an organisation of liberal intellectuals—had some influence on Gapon's petition, which was evident in the political demands it raised.

Gapon's petition would be accompanied by a procession of workers and their families, who would march peacefully to the Winter Palace seeking 'justice and protection' from their *Little Father*. The authorities knew of the preparations for the march. Gapon sent letters to the tsar and Minister of the Interior Mirskii, and met with the Justice Minister the day before the procession.

The authorities responded by bringing in additional troops to reinforce the St Petersburg garrison. Tsar Nicholas left the city for his country retreat at Tsarskoe Selo. This was not known to Gapon and his followers, but the absence of the tsar led authorities to believe that force would not be required to discourage the demonstrators.

## BLOODY SUNDAY

Early in the morning of Sunday 9 January 1905, workers and their families began to gather at four meeting points in St Petersburg's working-class districts. Tens of thousands of people set off towards the city centre. The crowds carried religious icons and sang hymns, such as 'God Save the Tsar'. Most workers were wearing their best clothes.



Source 3.12 Putilov Steelworks strike in January 1905.

### DID YOU KNOW?

The Putilov Steelworks employed around 40,000 workers.

### DID YOU KNOW?

When Mirskii heard that Tsar Nicholas had rejected the zemstvo proposals, he said, 'Everything had failed. Let us build jails'.

*Little Father* a name for the tsar used by common people. It reflected both his paternalistic and divine leadership

Source 3.13 A representation of Bloody Sunday. On 9 January 1905, soldiers tried to prevent unarmed workers and their families from presenting a petition to Tsar Nicholas. Hundreds were killed and injured.



## BLOODY SUNDAY, 1905

Procession led by Father Gapon



Workers' petition ignored



Tsar's troops fire on crowd



200–800 protesters killed or injured



Nicholas' reputation damaged



Prompted more strikes and opposition

The peaceful march was 'like a religious procession' rather than a demonstration.<sup>13</sup> Red flags were banned. Father Gapon carried a crucifix and led one of the columns. Behind him, marchers carried a portrait of the tsar and a banner proclaiming: 'Soldiers do not shoot at the people!'<sup>14</sup> Women and children were prominent at the front of the procession.

However, the authorities had no intention of allowing the workers to present their petition. Thousands of soldiers, including Cossack cavalry, had been deployed throughout the city. The Winter Palace—the tsar's royal residence—was well guarded. Officers shouted at the workers to disperse or approach in smaller groups. The crowds continued to surge forward, and warning shots were fired. As Gapon's column reached the Narva Gate, confusion among the police and soldiers resulted in shots being fired into the crowds.

In the ensuing panic, more soldiers opened fire and the Cossacks charged. Soon forty people lay dead and hundreds were wounded.<sup>15</sup> When he saw the carnage, Father Gapon declared: 'There is no God any longer. There is no Tsar'.

Similar scenes played out in other parts of the city. At the entrance to Palace Square, soldiers tried to deter the crowds by using whips and the flat side of their sabres. When this failed, they took up firing positions. Workers in the front ranks took off their caps, crossed themselves and fell to their knees. Officers still gave the order to fire. Soldiers attacked people along Nevsky Prospekt, the city's main thoroughfare. Many victims had nothing to do with Gapon's procession. Witnesses gave many reports of children being killed. Some became casualties after climbing on fences and statues to get a better view. This exposed them to gunfire and artillery. At the time there were reports of up to 4600 people killed or wounded, although the more likely toll of Bloody Sunday—as it became known—was more likely 200 killed and 800 injured.<sup>16</sup>

### ACTIVITY

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 A strike at which factory raised the level of industrial unrest in January 1905?
- 2 How many workers were on strike in St Petersburg by early January 1905?
- 3 What was the organisation headed by Father Gapon? What was the purpose of this organisation?
- 4 Briefly explain what Father Gapon had hoped to achieve on Sunday 9 January.
- 5 What did Father Gapon say after soldiers fired on the workers and their families?
- 6 How many people were killed and wounded on Bloody Sunday?
- 7 After Bloody Sunday, by what name was Tsar Nicholas known?

## BLOODY NICHOLAS

Tsar Nicholas was not present in St Petersburg on Bloody Sunday, nor did he order his troops to fire. But the authority of the tsar was absolute—and he was therefore seen as ultimately responsible.

Bloody Sunday shattered the faith the working-class people had in their tsar. No longer the 'Little Father', the tsar became popularly known as 'Bloody Nicholas'. One angry worker urged his teenage son, 'Remember, son, remember and swear to repay the Tsar. You saw how much blood he spilled, did you see? Then swear, son, swear!'<sup>17</sup>

Mirskeii, the liberal-minded Minister of the Interior, was dismissed on 18 January 1905. Gapon went into hiding and soon slipped out of the country. The tsarist regime was hardening its stance towards popular unrest.

Ironically, none of the demands in Gapon's petition would have been acceptable to Nicholas in the first place. There was no chance the tsar would reform the autocracy after an appeal by a lowly priest and his working-class followers.

## GEORGI GAPON, 1870–1906

Georgi Gapon was raised in a devout Russian Orthodox peasant family who enrolled him in a seminary school. His parents hoped that the priesthood would provide their son with an opportunity for social advancement.

Gapon showed promise as a student. From an early age he was interested in the radical philosophies of writer Leo Tolstoy, who preached the value of working with the poor, and taking a questioning attitude towards formal church authorities. Gapon explored various occupations before returning to his studies for the priesthood.

Following the death of his wife in 1898, Gapon moved his family to St Petersburg and took up a position as a religious teacher in an orphanage, where he worked to reduce the suffering of the urban poor.

Gapon came to prominence in 1904 when he established the Assembly of Russian Factory Workers. The Assembly was supported by the Ministry of the Interior, leading to speculation that Gapon was an Okhrana 'double agent'. By early 1905 Gapon's Assembly had thousands of members.

In the face of rising industrial unrest, Gapon planned to present a petition to Tsar Nicholas at the head of a peaceful procession of workers. However, the result was Bloody Sunday, with hundreds of people killed and wounded. After warrants were put out for his arrest, Gapon fled Russia for Geneva, and then London. In exile, he mixed with SRs and anarchists.



↑ Georgi Gapon.

He returned to Russia in late 1905, intending to continue his revolutionary work, and got in contact with Okhrana. However, Gapon's connection to Okhrana was uncovered, and he was murdered on the orders of the SR leadership on 28 March 1906.

### ACTIVITY

#### HISTORICAL SOURCES

Using Source 3.14 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Using specific details from the source, outline the perception of Tsar Nicholas in 1905 as presented in the image.
- 2 Explain the developments that led to Bloody Sunday.
- 3 Evaluate the significance of Bloody Sunday as a cause of revolution in Russia in 1905. Use evidence to support your response.



➔ **Source 3.14** Death as Czar [Tsar] of All the Russias, 1905.

## Father Gapon's Petition to Tsar Nicholas II (9 January 1905)

KEY SOURCE

### Sovereign!

We, workers and inhabitants of the city of St. Petersburg ... our wives, children, and helpless old parents, have come to you, Sovereign, to seek justice and protection. We are impoverished and oppressed, we are burdened with work, and insulted. We are treated not like humans [but] like slaves who must suffer a bitter fate and keep silent. And we have suffered, but we only get pushed deeper and deeper into a gulf of misery, ignorance, and lack of rights. Despotism and arbitrariness are suffocating us, we are gasping for breath. Sovereign, we have no strength left. We have reached the limit of our patience. We have come to that terrible moment when it is better to die than to continue unbearable sufferings.

And so we left our work and declared to our employers that we will not return to work until they meet our demands. We do not ask much; we only want that without which life is hard labor and eternal suffering. Our first request was that our employers discuss our needs together with us. But they refused to do this; they denied us the right to speak about our needs, on the grounds that the law does not provide us with such a right. Also unlawful were our other requests: to reduce the working day to eight hours; for them to set wages together with us and by agreement with us; to examine our disputes with lower-level factory administrators; to increase the wages of unskilled workers and women to one ruble per day; to abolish overtime work; to provide medical care attentively and without insult; to build shops so that it is possible to work there and not face death from the awful drafts, rain and snow.

Sovereign, there are thousands of us here; outwardly we are human beings, but in reality neither we nor the Russian people as a whole are provided with any

human rights, even the right to speak, to think, to assemble, to discuss our needs, or to take measure to improve our conditions.

... The entire working people and the peasants are subjected to the arbitrariness of a bureaucratic administration composed of embezzlers of public funds and thieves ... The bureaucratic administration has reduced the country to complete destitution, drawn it into a shameful war, and brings Russia ever further towards ruin.

Sovereign, this is what we face and this is the reason that we have gathered before the walls of your palace. Here we seek our last salvation ... Tear down the wall that separates you from your people and let it rule the country together with you ... Sovereign, examine our requests attentively and without any anger; they incline not to evil, but to the good, both for us and for you ... Russia is too big, her needs are diverse and many, for her to be ruled only by bureaucrats. We need popular representation; it is necessary for the people to help itself and to administer itself. After all, only the people knows its real needs ... order immediately, at once, that representatives of the Russian land from all classes, all estates of the realm be summoned, including representatives from the workers ... Let everyone be free and equal in his voting rights, and to that end order that elections to the Constituent Assembly be conducted under universal, secret and equal suffrage.

This is our main request, everything is based on it; it is the main and only poultice for our painful wounds, without which those wounds must freely bleed and bring us to a quick death.

↑ Source 3.15 'Petition Prepared for Presentation to Nicholas II January 9, 1905 (Bloody Sunday)', *Documents in Russian History*, [academic.shu.edu/russianhistory/index.php/Workers%27\\_Petition%2C\\_January\\_9th%2C\\_1905\\_%28Bloody\\_Sunday%29](http://academic.shu.edu/russianhistory/index.php/Workers%27_Petition%2C_January_9th%2C_1905_%28Bloody_Sunday%29)

**sovereign** a respectful term for addressing a royal or high-ranking ruler

## ACTIVITY

### HISTORICAL SOURCES

Using Source 3.15 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Draw up a table with the following headings and fill it in.

GENERAL GRIEVANCES RAISED IN PETITION	SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF INJUSTICES	PERSUASIVE LANGUAGE USED BY PETITIONERS	SOCIAL GROUPS REPRESENTED BY PETITION

- 2 Using details from the source, outline the challenges faced by working-class people under the tsarist regime.
- 3 List the ways in which the tsarist government had failed to address the concerns of industrial workers by 1905.

# ACCOUNTS OF BLOODY SUNDAY

## Father Georgi Gapon, *The Story of My Life*, 1906

... I turned rapidly to the crowd and shouted to them to lie down, and I also stretched myself on the ground. As we lay thus another volley was fired, and another, and yet another, till it seemed as though the shooting was continuous ... A little boy of ten years, who was carrying a church lantern, fell pierced by a bullet, but still held the lantern tightly and tried to rise again, when another struck him down.

... At last the firing ceased ... Horror crept into my heart. The thought flashed through my mind, 'And this is the work of our Little Father, the Tsar.' Perhaps this anger saved me ... a new chapter was opened in the book of the history of our people ... 'There is no longer any tsar for us!' I exclaimed.

 **Source 3.16** Georgi Gapon, *The Story of My Life* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1906).

## St Petersburg correspondent of *Le Matin* (Paris newspaper)

The soldiers of the Preobrazhensky regiment, without any summons to disperse, shoot down the unfortunate people as if they were playing at bloodshed. Several hundred fall; more than a hundred and fifty are killed. They are almost all children, women, and young people. It is terrible. Blood flows on all sides. At 5 o'clock the crowd is driven back, cut down and repelled on all sides. The people, terror-stricken, fly in every direction. Scared women and children slip, fall, rise to their feet, only to fall again farther on. At this moment a sharp word of command is heard and the victims fall en masse. There had been no disturbances to speak of. The whole crowd is unarmed and has not uttered a single threat.

As I proceeded, there were everywhere troops and Cossacks. Successive discharges of musketry shoot down on all sides the terrorized mob. The soldiers aim at the people's heads and the victims are frightfully disfigured. A woman falls almost at my side. A little farther on I slip on a piece of human brain. Before me is a child of eight years whose face is no longer human. Its mother is kneeling in tears over its corpse. The wounded, as they drag themselves along, leave streams of blood on the snow.

 **Source 3.17** Georgi Gapon, *The Story of My Life* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1906).

## Government report on events of 8–9 January 1905

... On the morning of January 8 ... the priest Gapon prepared and distributed a petition from the workers addressed to the sovereign, in which rude demands of a political nature were expressed along with wishes for changes in working conditions ... the majority of workers were led astray concerning the purpose of the summons to Palace Square.

The fanatical preaching of the priest Gapon, forgetful of the sanctity of his calling, and the criminal agitation of persons of evil intent excited the workers to such an extent that on January 9 they began heading in great throngs towards the centre of the city. In some places bloody clashes took place between them and the troops, in consequence of the stubborn refusal of the crowd to obey the command to disperse, and sometimes even in consequence of attacks upon the troops.

 **Source 3.18** Cited in George Vernadsky, ed., *A Source Book for Russian History From Early Times to 1917*, vol. 1–3 (London: Yale University Press, 1972), 743.

## ACTIVITY

### HISTORICAL SOURCES

Using Sources 3.16, 3.17 and 3.18 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Compare the similarities and differences between these accounts of what happened on 9 January 1905. What might account for these different perspectives of Bloody Sunday?
- 2 In small groups, discuss the ways in which Bloody Sunday revealed the development of revolutionary conflict between the tsarist regime and the Russian people.

### CREATIVE RESPONSE

View the scenes from the film *Nicholas and Alexandra* (1971) that depict Bloody Sunday. Write your own 'eyewitness' account of this day in response.

# THE 1905 REVOLUTION

KEY MOVEMENTS

## DID YOU KNOW?

Grand Duke Sergei and Vyacheslav Plehve were both assassinated on the orders of Yevno Azef, head of the SRs Combat Organisation. Azef was a founding member of the SRs and in charge of organising assassinations. However, he was also an Okhrana double-agent—which means that Plehve was killed by one of his own agents! The success of Azef's terror campaign established his credentials among fellow SRs, and he was thus able to pass an extensive list of the 'who's who' of his own party to the Okhrana.

**autonomy** independence; the ability of people within a state to decide their own future

## DID YOU KNOW?

In 1904, to celebrate the birth of his son, Tsar Nicholas cancelled the redemption tax that peasants had to pay. However, he did this only for one year. In 1905, the tsar faced mass tax avoidance as peasants refused to start paying the much-hated tax again. This was not the first time that Nicholas had inadvertently created expectations for change; in 1896 he had declared the 8-hour working day in honour of his coronation—but it only went for one week.

**Tsar Nicholas II:** 'Rioting and disturbances in the capitals and in many localities of Our Empire fill Our heart with great and heavy grief.'

A wave of popular fury spread across Russia after Bloody Sunday. In the middle of its war with Japan—which was not going well—the tsarist government found itself facing widespread contempt. By the end of January 1905, over 400,000 workers were on strike in St Petersburg alone.<sup>18</sup> Industrial action was taking place in every major city and town. This increased as the year went on. According to historian Laura Engelstein, the widespread unrest evolved into a 'festival of mobilization'.<sup>19</sup> The opposition to the government extended across Russian society, and by late 1905 had created a situation ripe for revolution.

## PEASANTS AND NATIONALITIES

Unrest spread to the countryside. Peasants defied local government officials and lashed out against the nobility. At first peasants challenged the existing order in relatively mild ways, such as hunting or cutting wood in the noble estates. They also refused to pay taxes.

The peasants became bolder, and started to seize the crops and livestock of wealthy landowners. This escalated into plundering estates and burning down manor houses. The relative isolation of many rural areas—and lack of available troops because of the war—made it almost impossible for the government to restore order.

Minority groups—such as Georgians, Poles and Jews—took advantage of the chaos and pushed for greater national **autonomy** and legal rights.

Although the tsarist government was authoritarian by nature, at the local level it was often poorly organised and weak. This meant that crises such as 1905 were handled badly. Emergency measures had to be invented as there were no proper processes to guide provincial authorities.<sup>20</sup> Many local governments were corrupt, ineffective—and subject to the arbitrary wishes of provincial governors. Guidance from the central government was often unsatisfactory, or did not come in time to avert crises.

## STUDENTS

Outrage at the government spread to universities and schools. Students went on strike in large numbers, and university campuses became 'centres of political agitation'.<sup>21</sup> One rally at Moscow University was attended by over 3000 students. Red flags hung from the campus buildings and angry students burned a portrait of the tsar. Even theological academies and secondary schools were caught up by the increasing revolutionary sentiment.

On 18 March 1905, the government ordered that all institutions of higher learning cancel their classes for the rest of the academic year.

## SOLDIERS AND SAILORS

Meanwhile, poor conditions and war-weariness had undermined the confidence of soldiers and sailors in the government by mid-1905. This was alarming, as the military traditionally supported the tsarist regime. Groups of soldiers returning from Manchuria even mutinied as they travelled home along the Trans-Siberian Railway.

However, the most dramatic mutiny occurred on 14 June 1905 aboard the battleship *Potemkin*, which was docked in Odessa, on the Black Sea. The sailors of the *Potemkin* turned on their officers after they were served rotten meat infested with maggots. Some sailors were killed, others were expelled from the ship. The *Potemkin* sailors shelled Odessa in support of striking workers who were clashing with local authorities. The *Potemkin* and its mutinous crew then sailed out of Russian waters for Romania.

The mutiny aboard the *Potemkin* added another layer to the challenges that Tsar Nicholas faced in 1905.

Historian Robert Service argues that, 'the monarchy's fate hung by a thread'.<sup>22</sup> If revolutionary unrest spread more broadly among the military, there would be little the government could do to stem the revolution.

## LIBERALS

Formalised opposition continued to grow. The liberal intelligentsia sought to build on the momentum of the reforms proposed by the National Congress of Zemstvos, and organisations of educated professionals joined the chorus calling for reform.

The Union of Liberation was the largest and most prominent liberal organisation. It held a nationwide campaign of banquets, with speeches on the themes of freedom and civic rights. Toasts were offered to constitutionalism and a Constituent Assembly. Many of the Union's leaders would feature later as members of the Kadets and Octobrists.

In early May 1905, lawyers, engineers, teachers, clerks and other professionals organised themselves into a national alliance called the Union of Unions, which provided the liberal intelligentsia with connections to the industrial workers' movement. Working-class labourers were encouraged to organise and join. Both the Union of Liberation and the Union of Unions demanded reforms such as:

- universal suffrage—the right to vote
- representative government—where voters elect someone to represent them.

After a congress in Moscow on 12–18 October 1905, the liberal movement gained a formal political party: the Constitutional Democratic Party (or Kadets), led by Pavel Miliukov.

## ST PETERSBURG SOVIET

Revolutionaries increased their influence among workers. The SRs, Mensheviks and Bolsheviks were active in leading the strikes and mobilising the demonstrations of 1905. SRs kept up their terror attacks—on 4 February they killed Grand Duke Sergei, former governor of Moscow and uncle to Tsar Nicholas.

On 13 October 1905, the revolutionary movement reached a new stage with the founding of the St Petersburg *Soviet* of Workers' Deputies. Led mostly by Mensheviks, the soviet acted as a workers' council, where representatives from factories could come to advocate for the interests of their comrades. Soviets soon sprang up in other cities, such Kiev and Moscow.<sup>23</sup>

The St Petersburg Soviet was chaired by Menshevik Georgi Nossar, with Leon Trotsky as vice-chairman. Trotsky also edited the soviet's newspaper and drafted its

### DID YOU KNOW?

The 1925 film *Battleship Potemkin*, directed by Sergei Eisenstein, was named the greatest film of all time at the 1958 World's Fair in Brussels.

### DID YOU KNOW?

The involvement of telegraph workers in the October general strike forced the tsarist government to send messages to its armed forces in the far east of Russia via London and then Beijing, rather than across the Russian Empire.

 **Source 3.19** Group of St Petersburg Soviet members arrested in 1905. Trotsky is second from the left.

*soviet* originally referred to a workers', soldiers' or peasants' councils. Soviets became formal organs of the government under the Bolsheviks and acted as 'houses of review' to the Sovnarkom

## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 List the actions of three or more popular movements that challenged the existing order following Bloody Sunday.
- 2 How many workers were on strike in St Petersburg by late January?
- 3 The sailors of which ship mutinied in June 1905?
- 4 Which liberal leader featured prominently in the Union of Liberation, Union of Unions and Constitutional Democrats (Kadets)?
- 5 Briefly explain how the emergence of the St Petersburg Soviet contributed to the revolutionary workers' movement.
- 6 Who was the chairman of the St Petersburg Soviet? Who was its vice-chairman?
- 7 What soviet-sponsored event greatly challenged the tsarist regime from 14 October?

### DID YOU KNOW?

Dmitri Trepov was appointed Governor of St Petersburg a few days after Bloody Sunday. Formerly the head of police in Moscow, Trepov had demonstrated a willingness to adopt repressive measures against subversive groups, such as students. He continued this approach as he attempted to bring order to the capital in late 1905. Witte described Trepov as 'the unofficial dictator' of Russia.

resolutions. The soviet had enormous influence over the workers' movement—and provided a great challenge to the authority of the tsarist government.

On 14 October the soviet called a nationwide general strike. Metalworkers, printers, bakers, railwaymen, telegraph workers, bank clerks, teachers—even the royal ballet dancers—all went on strike. Moscow and St Petersburg were paralysed as workers from all professions brought the cities to a halt. The strikers numbered at least 1.5 million people. It was the largest mass industrial action Russia had ever seen—and showed that the St Petersburg Soviet had more control of the streets of the capital than the government.

## THE OCTOBER MANIFESTO

**Grand Duke Nikolai Romanov:** 'You must support Witte at all costs. It is necessary for the good of Russia and of all of us.'

By mid-October 1905 Tsar Nicholas faced the largest and broadest opposition ever confronted by the tsarist regime. Nicholas was bewildered and distressed by his choices. He could either:

- make an authoritarian response: this was the natural course of action, but the government lacked the resources to enforce order. And Nicholas was not keen on another Bloody Sunday.
- make political concessions: this was the alternative course of action, but reforming the autocracy meant that he would break his coronation oath.

Facing the potential collapse of his regime, Tsar Nicholas looked to Sergei Witte for a solution. Nicholas' mother, Dowager Empress Marie, pleaded with Nicholas to heed Witte's advice: 'I'm sure that the only man who can help you now and be useful is Witte'.

Witte advised that significant reform was required to bring peace and order to the empire, because:

- the structure of government required attention
- the era of repression must end
- the calls for elected and representative government must be heard.

According to Witte: 'The slogan of "freedom" must become the slogan of government activity. There is no other way of saving the state.'<sup>24</sup>

However, Tsar Nicholas was still reluctant to offer concessions to the people. He asked his uncle, Grand Duke Nikolai, if he would accept an appointment as military dictator. Unable to believe what he was hearing, Nikolai drew his pistol and threatened to shoot himself if Nicholas ignored Witte's advice.

Tsar Nicholas finally conceded to reform. Witte drafted the October Manifesto with help from Minister for Education Alexei Obolensky, and outlined the proposed reforms. Tsar Nicholas accepted these terms—and on 17 October 1905 the Manifesto was proclaimed.

### The October Manifesto, 1905

#### KEY SOURCE

We, Nicholas II, By the Grace of God Emperor and Autocrat of all Russia, King of Poland, Grand Duke of Finland, etc., proclaim to all Our loyal subjects:

Rioting and disturbances in the capitals [i.e. St. Petersburg and the old capital, Moscow] 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 well-being of the nation, and the nation's sorrow is his sorrow. The disturbances that have taken place may cause grave tension in the nation and may threaten the integrity and unity of Our state.

By the great vow of service as tsar We are obliged to use every resource of wisdom and of Our authority to bring a speedy end to unrest that is dangerous to Our state. We have ordered the responsible authorities to take measures to terminate direct manifestations of disorder, lawlessness, and violence and to protect peaceful people who quietly seek to fulfil their duties. To carry out successfully the general measures that we have conceived to restore peace to the life of the state, We believe that it is essential to coordinate activities at the highest level of government.

We require the government dutifully to execute our unshakeable will:

(1.) To grant to the population the essential foundations of civil freedom, based on the principles of genuine inviolability of the person, freedom of conscience, speech, assembly and association.

(2.) Without postponing the scheduled elections to the State Duma, to admit to participation in the Duma (insofar as possible in the short time that remains before it is scheduled to convene) of all those classes of the population that now are completely deprived of voting rights; and to leave the further development of a general statute on elections to the future legislative order.

(3.) To establish as an unbreakable rule that no law shall take effect without confirmation by the State Duma and that the elected representatives of the people shall be guaranteed the opportunity to participate in the supervision of the legality of the actions of Our appointed officials.

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

Given at Peterhof the 17th of October in the 1905th year of Our Lord and of Our reign the eleventh.

Nicholas

### Nicholas II, diary entry on the issue of the October Manifesto (19 October 1905)

Through all these horrible days, I constantly met Witte. We very often met in the early morning to part only in the evening when night fell. There were only two ways open; to find an energetic soldier and crush the rebellion by sheer force. That would mean rivers of blood, and in the end we would be where had started. The other way out would be to give to the people their civil rights, freedom of speech and press, also to have laws conformed by a State Duma—that of course would be a constitution. Witte defends this very energetically.

Almost everybody I had an opportunity of consulting, is of the same opinion. Witte put it quite clearly to me that he would accept the Presidency of the Council of Ministers only on the condition that his programme was agreed to, and his actions not interfered with. We discussed it for two days and in the end, invoking God's help I signed. This terrible decision which nevertheless I took quite consciously. I had no one to rely on except honest Trepov. There was no other way out but to cross oneself and give what everyone was asking for.

 **Source 3.20** 'Manifesto of October 17th, 1905,' trans. Daniel Field, *Documents in Russian History*, academic.shu.edu/russianhistory/index.php/Manifesto\_of\_October\_17th%2C\_1905

### ACTIVITY

#### HISTORICAL SOURCES

Using Sources 3.20 and 3.21 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Identify the essential reforms granted in the October Manifesto.
- 2 Explain how different figures in the tsarist regime responded to the October Manifesto.
- 3 Evaluate the significance of the October Manifesto in the 1905 Revolution. Use evidence to support your response.

#### EXTENDED RESPONSE

Explain the significance of the October Manifesto in achieving genuine reform. Use evidence to support your response.

#### CREATIVE RESPONSE

In pairs or small groups, create a dialogue between Sergei Witte and Tsar Nicholas as they discuss their thoughts on the October Manifesto. You might like to include other key individuals as well. Perform your dialogue to the class.

 **Source 3.21** Nicholas II, diary entry on the issue of the October Manifesto (19 October 1905), spartacus-educational.com/RUSwitte.htm#source

# FROM REVOLUTION TO REFORM

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

The October Manifesto proposed significant reforms that would have been inconceivable to the tsarist regime a few years earlier. There was no mention of a constitution, which was a deliberate omission, but:

- fundamental civic rights were promised
- an elected and legislative parliament (the *Duma*) was granted.

**Duma** the Russian word for 'parliament'; from the Russian *dumat*, meaning 'to consider'

In the short-term, the October Manifesto had the desired effect. The opposition to the government was divided. This drastically undermined the revolutionary movement, as many people took the reforms at face value and were satisfied their demands had been met.

## LIBERALS

The liberals ended their opposition to the government following the October Manifesto—but they disagreed on just how far Tsar Nicholas should pursue reform:

- the Octobrists accepted the October Manifesto
- the Kadets hoped for further concessions.

However, both the Octobrists and the Kadets committed themselves to preparing for the forthcoming Duma elections. Both parties also withdrew their support from the militant workers' movement.

## PEASANTS

The October Manifesto provided little for the peasants, but the reforms offered some hope of further progress—particularly land redistribution. The October Manifesto was accompanied by tax reform, with the land redemption payments for 1905 halved, and then cancelled altogether on 6 November 1905. Although this led to a reduction in land seizures and rural unrest in some areas, peasant revolts still continued into 1906.

## WORKERS, REVOLUTIONARIES AND THE SOVIET

Despite the October Manifesto, the St Petersburg Soviet continued to oppose the tsarist regime. The leaders of the soviet saw the Manifesto as 'a fraud on the people, a trick of the Tsar to gain some sort of respite in which to lull the credulous and to win time to rally his forces and then to strike at the revolution'.<sup>25</sup>

The soviet encouraged further revolutionary action, and called on workers to remain committed to the general strike. However, many workers were pleased with the government's proposed reforms, and others were afraid of further economic hardship if they lost their jobs. Thousands of workers returned to work. They were often more interested in immediate day-to-day needs, such as better medical services and an 8-hour working day. The complexity of Marxist political strategies—such as calls for an international socialist proletarian revolution—required a level of insight and commitment that many workers were unwilling (or unable) to make.

The authorities acted swiftly to crush the remnants of the workers' movement. Nossar, the chairman of the soviet, was arrested on 26 November, so Trotsky assumed leadership. On 3 December, soldiers and police stormed the St Petersburg Soviet headquarters and arrested Trotsky along with 260 deputies—which was about half the soviet membership.<sup>26</sup>

The Moscow Soviet, led by Bolsheviks, called for an armed insurrection. Beginning on 7 December, the Moscow Workers' Uprising involved intense streetfighting. Police and workers fought bitter and bloody battles, using firearms, barricades and improvised bombs. Thousands were killed, and whole areas of working-class suburbs were left in ruins from artillery fire.<sup>27</sup> Government troops restored order by 18 December.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF 1905

A very serious revolutionary situation unfolded in 1905—but the tsarist regime avoided a revolution. According to historian Steve Smith, this was not because of strategic or sound leadership by the government: 'That the autocracy came out of the Revolution relatively unscathed had little to do with political tactics'.<sup>28</sup> The crises of late 1905 could have been avoided or diminished by concessions, but earlier proposals for reform were blocked by Tsar Nicholas and his more reactionary advisers.

It was not until the need for reform became acute that Nicholas finally relented. Importantly, this meant that Nicholas felt that the October Manifesto was forced upon him. As a result, his commitment to its ideals was self-serving rather than genuine. The tsar would return to repression to restore his authority in the coming months.

Nevertheless, for the first time the Russian people had been promised political representation—which was an important step towards being citizens rather than subjects. The liberals embraced the opportunity to organise politically—but in the process they divided the anti-tsarist opposition. This was a bitter lesson for the SRs, SDs and the revolutionary workers, who felt betrayed.

The flagging commitment of workers and peasants was another problem for the revolutionary leaders. The chaos of 1905 had exposed the disorganisation and lack of unity among the revolutionaries and the reformists—which enabled the tsarist regime to survive.<sup>29</sup> In essence, an incompetent government was exposed to an ineffectual revolutionary movement.

Lenin later called 1905 a 'dress rehearsal' for the revolutions of 1917. Important lessons in propaganda and agitation were learned, and new political groups emerged. Institutions that would play important roles in the future also developed, such as the Duma and soviets.

Historian Sheila Fitzpatrick contends that the 'political outcome of the 1905 Revolution was ambiguous and in some ways unsatisfactory to all concerned'.<sup>30</sup> The tsarist regime survived, but Tsar Nicholas had been forced to offer concessions that might undermine the autocracy, and he had awakened the people's expectations of change. However, profound revolutionary change was not achieved. Many of the deep-seated causes of Russia's crisis of modernisation were left unresolved. Revolutionaries sustained their commitment to their causes and the conditions of revolution in many ways remained.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Lenin briefly returned to Russia in late 1905, after being in exile in Geneva. He was forced to flee Russia when the tsarist government began its repressive measures.

### ACTIVITY

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Who advised Tsar Nicholas of the need for reform and later drafted the October Manifesto?
- 2 When was the October Manifesto proclaimed?
- 3 Define the word *Duma*, as presented in the October Manifesto.
- 4 List the actions of three or more popular movements towards the existing order following the October Manifesto.
- 5 How did tsarist authorities respond to the St Petersburg and Moscow soviets in December 1905?
- 6 Using dot points, list three or more key points that highlight the significance of the 1905 Revolution.

## ACTIVITY

### QUOTATION BANK

Collate a list of short quotes—historical perspectives and interpretations—regarding the 1905 Revolution. Include a short comment about what each quote reveals about the causes and consequences of the revolution. Continue to add to your 'quote bank' as you read the chapters ahead.

### EXTENDED RESPONSES

Respond to one of more of the topics below. Use evidence to support your response.

- Explain how Russia's period of rapid industrialisation in the 1890s created the preconditions for revolution.
- Explain how the Russo-Japanese War created a negative perception of the tsarist regime across Russian society.
- Explain how Bloody Sunday and the 1905 Revolution challenged the existing order in tsarist Russia.
- Explain the significance of the October Manifesto as a response to challenges facing the tsarist regime in 1905.

## ESSAY

Write a 600–800-word essay on one of the topics below. Your essay should include an introduction, paragraphs supported by relevant evidence from primary sources and historical interpretations, and a conclusion.

- 'Far from appeasing the opponents of tsarism, the October Manifesto created expectations of further change and contributed to further revolutionary demands.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?

## HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION

### Historian Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution* (1930)

The events of 1905 were a *prologue* to the two revolutions of 1917, that of February and that of October. In the prologue all the elements of the drama were included, but not carried through. The Russo-Japanese War had made tsarism totter. Against the background of a mass movement the liberal bourgeoisie had frightened the monarchy with its opposition. The workers had organised independently ... into soviets, a form of organisation then first called into being. Peasant uprisings to seize the land occurred throughout vast stretches of the country ... However, all the revolutionary forces were then going into action for the first time, lacking experience and confidence. The liberals demonstratively backed away from the revolution exactly at the moment when it became clear that to shake tsarism would not be enough, it must be overthrown. This sharp break of the bourgeoisie with the people ... made it easier for the monarchy to differentiate within the army, separating out the loyal units, and to make a bloody settlement with the workers and peasants. Although with a few broken ribs, tsarism came out of the experience of 1905 alive and strong enough.

**prologue** an event or act that leads to another; an introduction

◀ **Source 3.22** Leon Trotsky,  
*The History of the Russian Revolution*  
(1930), trans. Max Eastman, Marxist  
Internet Archive,  
[www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1930/hrr/](http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1930/hrr/)

Using Source 3.22 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Using Trotsky's interpretation and your own knowledge, outline the key elements of the 1905 Revolution.
- 2 Explain what Trotsky means when he argues that 1905 was a 'prologue' to 1917.
- 3 According to Trotsky, why did the 1905 revolution fail?
- 4 Evaluate the extent to which '... tsarism came out of the experience of 1905 alive and strong enough'. Use evidence and Trotsky's interpretation to support your response.

# CHAPTER 3 REVIEW

## KEY SUMMARY POINTS

- Witte's 'Great Spurt' led to the rapid expansion of Russian industry and the emergence of an industrial working class. The living and working conditions of the proletariat were very poor.
- Agriculture remained underdeveloped. Hunger and poverty remained a constant feature of life for most peasants. Many migrated to the cities to become industrial workers.
- Poor living and working conditions in the cities and countryside led to rising discontent with the tsarist regime.
- The Russo-Japanese War resulted in a humiliating defeat for Russia.
- The war worsened social and economic challenges, and heightened popular anger towards the government.
- Unrest exploded into revolution after Bloody Sunday on 9 January 1905. A peaceful procession of workers led by Father Gapon tried to present the tsar with a petition outlining their grievances, but authorities shot at them.
- By October 1905, the tsarist regime was faced with a serious 'revolutionary situation'—a situation that could lead to revolution—and the broadest opposition ever seen in Imperial Russia. Unrest existed in both rural and urban areas, and among national minorities on the outskirts of the empire.
- Tsar Nicholas reluctantly conceded to reform, and granted the October Manifesto. Among these reforms was the promise of an elected and legislative parliament: the Duma.
- The October Manifesto divided the opposition: liberals accepted the reforms, while revolutionaries called for renewed action against the regime.
- The government responded by repressing the soviets and the revolutionary workers' movement it represented. The dispersal of the Moscow Soviet was particularly violent.
- The tsarist regime remained in power following the 1905 Revolution, but many of the political, social and economic tensions that contributed to the crises were unresolved.

## 1905 REVOLUTION



Additional resources: [www.htavshop.com.au/beyond-the-book](http://www.htavshop.com.au/beyond-the-book)

# REPRESSION AND REFORM

(1906–1914)



Source 4.01 Tsar Nicholas II at the opening ceremony of the First Duma, St Petersburg, 1906.

# CHAPTER 4



**'The tragic aspect of the situation is that the Tsar is living in an utter fool's paradise, thinking that He is as strong and all-powerful as before.'**

—Sergei Witte

In April 1906, Tsar Nicholas reasserted his autocratic power with the Fundamental State Laws. As he had promised in the October Manifesto, elections were held and a representative Duma was formed. Thus Russia began its uneasy period of constitutional autocracy.

However, the Duma did not limit the authority of the tsar, as he dismissed both the first and second Dumas. It was not until electoral laws were changed to favour conservative parties—which resulted in a more compliant parliament—that Tsar Nicholas found two acceptable Dumas that served their full five-year terms.

Reaction was followed by reform. In 1906 Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin introduced a series of agricultural reforms. It was hoped that these reforms would result in a group of conservative middle-class peasants, which would have a stabilising influence on the countryside. This solution to Russia's rural tensions was a long-term project, which saw little impact in the short-term.

There was some economic and social progress in the period leading up to World War I. However, the limitations of reform and the institutional weaknesses of the tsarist regime contributed to rising popular anger, and to a significant increase in industrial unrest by 1914.

## KEY QUESTIONS

- To what extent was the democratic representation and legislative power of the Duma limited?
- How did the Fundamental Laws reassert the authority of Tsar Nicholas?
- How did Prime Minister Stolypin stabilise the tsarist regime?
- To what extent were Stolypin's policies and reforms successful?
- To what extent had Russia's social, economic and political tensions increased by early 1914?

## KEY EVENTS

- April 1906**  
Resignation of Prime Minister Sergei Witte
- 23 April 1906**  
Fundamental Laws passed
- June 1906**  
Stolypin appointed Prime Minister
- 8 July 1906**  
First Duma dissolved
- 3 June 1907**  
Second Duma dissolved and new electoral laws passed
- 7 November 1907**  
Third Duma opens
- 5 September 1911**  
Stolypin assassinated
- 4 November 1912**  
Striking workers at Lena minefield massacred by tsarist forces
- 15 November 1912**  
Fourth Duma convened  
(remains in session until 1914)

# LIMITATIONS OF THE DUMAS

KEY DEVELOPMENT

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

Following the 1905 October Manifesto, Russia entered a new period that looked like parliamentary government—even if it was not. In its experiment with democratic institutions, Russia was ruled by an uneasy arrangement where:

- the tsar continued to rule by divine right
- the elected Duma represented the will of the people.

The electoral system was not equal or fully representative. The electoral laws, drafted in December 1905, allowed for all men over the age of twenty-five to vote. However, only landowners with estates of more than 200 hectares were eligible to vote directly for their representatives.<sup>1</sup>

Peasants only had an indirect vote, which meant that they elected someone to vote on their behalf at a higher level. Other prominent social groups—over 60 per cent of the urban working population—were excluded from voting, including:

- factory workers from businesses employing less than fifty employees
- construction workers
- casual tradesmen.<sup>2</sup>

Soldiers and women were not allowed to vote. So it is clear to say that universal suffrage did not emerge from the upheavals of 1905.

The nature of reform promised by the October Manifesto would be weakened in the coming months. Even Witte, the architect of the reforms, admitted, 'I have a constitution in my head, but as to my heart, I spit on it.'<sup>3</sup> He could draft a reasonably liberal constitution and propose a representative Duma, but he cared little for it.

Despite this, Tsar Nicholas blamed Witte for what he saw as an illegitimate and unnecessary amendment to his autocracy. When the reality of representative government emerged, Nicholas exclaimed, 'Curse the Duma, it's all Witte's fault'. And on another occasion: 'As long as I live, I will never trust that man [Witte] again with the smallest thing. I had quite enough of last year's experiment. It is still like a nightmare to me.'<sup>4</sup>

◀ Ivan Goremykin.

## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Who was granted the right to a direct vote in the new electoral laws of December 1905?
- 2 Who was permitted an indirect vote?
- 3 Which social group (or groups) was excluded from voting?
- 4 Who replaced Sergei Witte as Prime Minister?
- 5 What were the names of Russia's upper house and lower houses of parliament?



Witte resigned as Prime Minister on 22 April 1906, the eve of the opening of the First Duma. He was replaced by Ivan Goremykin—an elderly conservative who was ridiculed by his contemporaries for being absentminded. To coincide with the opening of the Duma, Tsar Nicholas issued further laws that extended the role of the State Council.

The State Council—which had previously been the tsar's advisory board—would now work in conjunction with the Duma as an upper chamber. Half of Russia's upper house of parliament was appointed directly by the tsar, while the other half was made up of elected representatives from the nobility, clergy and zemstvos. Unsurprisingly, the State Council was a conservative body that agreed with the tsar on most issues. So a significant element of the October Manifesto—which clearly outlined the Duma as the only legislative body—was given further limitations. According to Trotsky, 'A constitution is given, but the autocracy remains. Everything is given, and nothing is given.'<sup>5</sup>

# THE FUNDAMENTAL LAWS

## KEY DEVELOPMENT

**Leon Trotsky:** 'We have been given a constitution, but absolutism remains.'

Despite granting a legislative Duma, Tsar Nicholas wanted to keep the main principles of autocratic rule. He considered the Duma to be a consultative, rather than legislative body. As Nicholas explained to one of his ministers, 'I created the Duma, not to be directed by it, but to be advised'.<sup>6</sup>

The views of Tsar Nicholas were reinforced on 23 April 1906 when he issued the Fundamental Laws, which outlined how Russia's new political system would function. The Fundamental Laws proclaimed that the tsar had supreme power—as all laws would require his approval. The tsar:

- appointed his own ministers, who were accountable to him and not to the Duma
- retained complete control over foreign affairs
- retained complete control over military matters
- retained complete control over the declaration of states of emergency.

The Fundamental Laws also formalised the shared authority of the Duma and Imperial Council. Both houses of parliament needed to be in agreement for laws to be passed.

The Duma exerted very little legislative influence—the tsar retained significant powers as each law required his direct approval. Furthermore, Article 87 stated that under 'exceptional circumstances' the tsar could dismiss the Duma and legislate on his own. There was a provision that the Duma would formally approve laws within two months; however, this was often overlooked. Once laws were passed, they would be difficult to overturn. The Fundamental Laws significantly undermined the principle of representative government embodied in the Duma. Many reformists were disappointed that tsarist Russia did not emerge as a constitutional monarchy.

However, in the coming years the Duma would provide a valuable forum for civic debates, and offer a critical voice on the issues of the day. Duma deputies had 'parliamentary privilege', which meant they could not be sued for anything they said in the Duma. This allowed them to give bold, candid speeches. The Duma also retained the right to question ministers and review government spending. It became a training ground for people who later took positions of public responsibility following the February Revolution of 1917. Men such as Miliukov, Lvov, Tsereteli and Kerensky gained valuable experience and public recognition from their work in the Duma.

## THE FUNDAMENTAL LAWS

Tsar appoints his own ministers, who are accountable to him and not to the Duma

Tsar retains complete control over foreign affairs

Tsar retains complete control over military matters

Tsar retains complete control over the declaration of states of emergency

Tsar has supreme power—all laws require his approval

### ACTIVITY

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Briefly explain how the Fundamental Laws restricted the legislative authority of the Duma and reasserted the tsar's absolute authority.
- 2 On what date were the Fundamental Laws passed?
- 3 Which Article of the Fundamental Laws allowed the tsar to legislate on his own and dismiss the Duma?

#### DID YOU KNOW?

The Fundamental Laws were essentially Russia's new constitution. However, the term 'constitution' was not used, because it implied that the authority of the tsar was being reduced.

## ACTIVITY

### HISTORICAL SOURCES

Using Source 4.02 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Outline the powers of the sovereign emperor (Tsar Nicholas) under the Fundamental Laws of 1906.
- 2 Explain how the Fundamental Laws undermined the ideals of the October Manifesto.
- 3 Analyse the role of the Fundamental Laws and the limitations of the Duma in contributing to revolutionary tensions. Use evidence to support your response.

→ **Source 4.02** 'Russian Fundamental Laws, 1906,' Original source: *Svod Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii*, 3rd series, vol. 1, pt. 1 (St Petersburg, 1912), 5–26.

### Fundamental Laws, 1906

KEY SOURCE

1. The Russian State is one and indivisible ...
3. The Russian language is the general language of the state, and its use is compulsory in the army, the navy and state and public institutions ...
4. The All-Russian Emperor possesses the supreme autocratic power. Not only fear and conscience, but God himself, commands obedience to his authority.
5. The person of the Sovereign Emperor is sacred and inviolable ...
8. The sovereign emperor possesses the initiative in all legislative matters. The Fundamental Laws may be subject to revision in the State Council and State Duma only on His initiative. The sovereign emperor ratifies the laws. No law can come into force without his approval ...
9. The Sovereign Emperor approves laws; and without his approval no legislative measure can become law.
10. The Sovereign Emperor possesses the administrative power in its totality throughout the entire Russian state ...
12. The sovereign emperor takes charge of all the external relations of the Russian State. He determines the direction of Russia's foreign policy ...
13. The Sovereign Emperor alone declares war, concludes peace, and negotiates treaties with foreign states.
14. The sovereign emperor is the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian army and navy.
15. The sovereign emperor appoints and dismisses the Chairman the Council of Ministers and individual Ministers ...

## THE FIRST DUMA

PARTY	SEATS
Kadets	184
Trudoviks	124
Independents	112
Octobrists	38
National minority parties	32
Minor conservative parties	7

### DID YOU KNOW?

The First Duma is sometimes known as the Duma of Public Anger.

**coalition** two or more groups that join together without necessarily agreeing on all issues

## FIRST DUMA, APRIL-JULY 1906

The election timeline for the First Duma in 1906 was as follows:

- Late February: elections begin
- 4 March: political parties legalised
- Mid-April: elections completed.

The SRs and SDs officially boycotted elections for the First Duma, as they rejected 'the very principles of constitutional monarchy and parliamentary government'.<sup>7</sup>

The First Duma opened on 27 April 1906 with an elaborate ceremony designed to impress the elected deputies. However, the ceremony had the opposite effect: it allowed observers to compare the opulence of the imperial monarch to the destitution of the peasant delegates. The vast gap between the rich and poor in Russian society was made clear.

Key results of the election for the First Duma:

- 38%: Peasants not affiliated (or linked) with any party
- 37%: Kadets, making them the largest political party represented<sup>8</sup>
- 20%: Trudoviks, a breakaway faction of the SRs: now the second-largest political party represented.

Tsar Nicholas and his advisers had hoped for a compliant and politically conservative parliament. However, the Kadets, in one of the first acts of the Duma—working in **coalition** with peasant deputies—sponsored an 'Address to the Throne' that called for further reforms and greater rights for working-class people.

Naturally, the Kadets' demands were unacceptable to Tsar Nicholas and he rejected the call for change. The Duma continued to take a tough stance against the tsarist regime, although it did manage to pass two laws:

- a ban on capital punishment
- a famine relief measure.

However, it also issued 391 statements criticising the actions of the government. Unsurprisingly, Tsar Nicholas dissolved the First Duma after only seventy-three days. A Second Duma was promised for February 1907, and the tsar ruled without a parliament.

## SECOND DUMA, FEBRUARY–JUNE 1907

When the SDs and the SRs realised how much opportunity they would have in the Duma to stir up anti-tsarist sentiment, they decided to participate in the elections for the Second Duma. This resulted in a parliament more radical than the first. It was also divided along the lines of ideology (or belief), with deputies ranging from revolutionaries to monarchists. It was impossible for the tsar and the new Prime Minister Stolypin to work with such a disparate group.



**Source 4.03** Members of the Second Duma, 1907.

The Duma refused to support Stolypin's proposed land reforms and its deputies openly criticised the administration of the military. In early June the SDs were accused of plotting to overthrow the tsarist regime. Menshevik and Bolshevik deputies subsequently had their parliamentary privileges suspended. The Second Duma was dissolved on 3 June 1907, as Nicholas put it, because of the irresponsible and obstructive behaviour of the Duma representatives.

### ACTIVITY

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Which two popular movements participated in the elections for the Second Duma, after boycotting the First Duma?
- 2 Describe the similarities and differences between the first and second Dumas.

### ACTIVITY

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 When did the First Duma open?
- 2 Which political party held the most seats in the Duma?
- 3 Which was the largest social group represented?
- 4 How many days did the First Duma last before it was dissolved?

### THE SECOND DUMA

PARTY	SEATS
Trudoviks	104
Kadets	98
Autonomists	76
Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (SDs)	65
Independents	50
Socialist–Revolutionary Party (SRs)	37
Moderates and Octobrists	32
Minor conservative parties	22
Cossack Group	17
Other	17

## THIRD DUMA, NOVEMBER 1907–JUNE 1912

→ **Source 4.04** Members of the Third Duma, 1912.



On 3 June—the same day that the Second Duma was dissolved—Prime Minister Stolypin brought in sweeping changes to the electoral system. Any hope for genuine commitment to the reforms promised in the October Manifesto was now extinguished.

Because of the timing of these changes, the Second Duma had been dissolved, and the laws were never ratified by the Third Duma. This essentially violated Russia's constitutional laws. Voting was suspended in districts where, according to the Tsar Nicholas, the population 'had not yet reached sufficient levels of civic development'.<sup>9</sup> This lack of 'civic development' generally matched areas where voters had elected radical deputies. Changes to the *franchise* laws imposed further restrictions on the right to vote, with:

- the number of deputies from peasant, urban worker, small landowning and national minority backgrounds drastically reduced
- the number of deputies from the landed gentry greatly increased.

Now, only one in six males were entitled to vote,<sup>10</sup> which meant that 1 per cent of the population was responsible for electing 300 out of the 441 deputies.<sup>11</sup>

The new voting laws were complex, but their objective was clear. Tsar Nicholas and Stolypin achieved a more conservative and compliant Duma, one dominated by right-wing parties that were willing to work with the Prime Minister. Stolypin considered this new parliament to be composed of 'responsible and statesmanlike people'.<sup>12</sup> He was now able to pursue his land reform without the opposition from the Duma.

The Third Duma was elected in 1907 and permitted to serve its full five-year term. Despite being more supportive of the government than the first two Dumas, the Third Duma was still an important forum for political discussion, and contributed towards the development of Russia's public debates and civic understanding.

### THE THIRD DUMA

PARTY	SEATS
Octobrists	154
National minority parties	97
Kadets	54
Minor conservative parties	50
Other	50
Polish-Lithuanian-Belorussian Group	26
Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (SDs)	19
Trudoviks	13
Muslim Group	8
Independents	0

### ACTIVITY

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Briefly explain the changes made to the electoral laws in June 1906.
- 2 How did the Third Duma differ from the First Duma and Second Duma?

#### EXTENDED RESPONSE

Explain how institutional weaknesses in the tsarist system of government that emerged after 1906 contributed to increasing tensions in Russian society. Use evidence to support your response.



## FOURTH DUMA, NOVEMBER 1912–AUGUST 1914

The term of the Fourth Duma was plagued by mounting tensions and crises—and by an increase in protests by industrial workers.

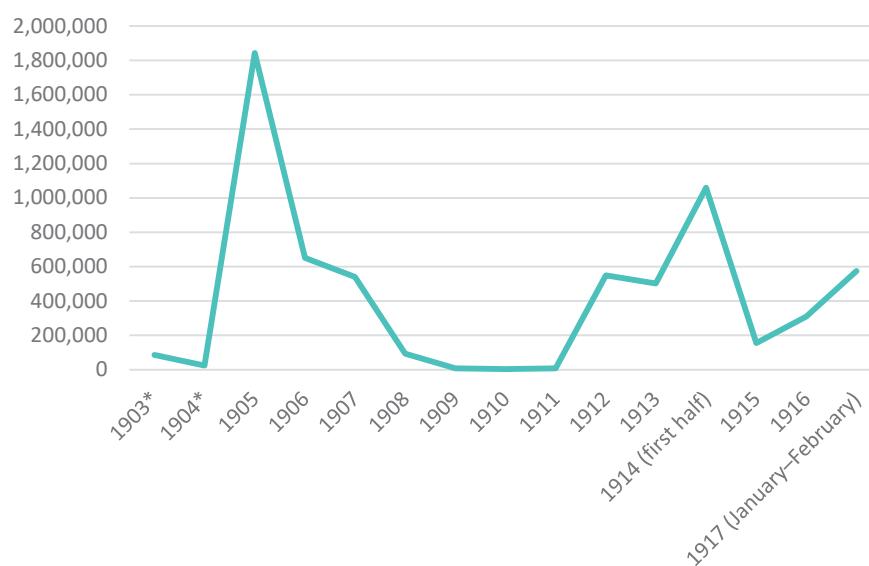
One event that rekindled the radical workers' movement took place on 12 April 1912. Miners from the Lena Goldfields in Siberia were on strike for better pay and conditions, when 500 of them were shot by government forces. Comparisons were made to Bloody Sunday, and the increasingly reactionary stance of the tsarist regime was made clear.

Over the next two years, 3 million workers staged 9000 strikes.<sup>13</sup> In 1911 there had been twenty-four strikes where political demands were made but, by 1914, the number of similar strikes had grown to 2400. On the eve of World War I, striking workers had set up barricades on the streets of St Petersburg and Moscow. Reports issued by German embassy officials in Russia anticipated a renewed period of revolutionary turmoil.

The rise in revolutionary extremism was shown by a wave of assassinations of government officials—including Prime Minister Stolypin, killed in September 1911. While the Fourth Duma was arguably the most conservative of the Dumas, the relationship between the parliament and the government was strained. This period, which is often referred to as the 'Years of Reaction,'<sup>14</sup> saw rising industrial unrest met with increasingly harsh repression.

Many moderate deputies in the Duma were alarmed by the reactionary approach of the tsar, and began to voice their concerns. In the years following Stolypin's death, Duma deputies became increasingly critical of the government in their speeches, and far less conciliatory when questioning tsarist ministers.

### NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN POLITICAL STRIKES



\* The figures for 1903 and 1904 refer to all strikes, not just political strikes.

### THE FOURTH DUMA

PARTY	SEATS
National minority parties	120
Octobrists	98
Minor conservative parties	65
Kadets	59
Other	69
Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (SDs)	14
Trudoviks	10
Independents	7

### ACTIVITY

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- Which significant tsarist official was assassinated in September 1911?
- How many miners were killed in the Lena Goldfields Massacre? What event was this compared to?
- Briefly outline the rise of industrial unrest during this period. Note two or three specific examples to support this.
- How did the tsarist regime respond to this rising unrest?

Source 4.05 Number of participants in political strikes. Graph based on figures from Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1934), 56.

# STOLYPIN: REACTION AND REFORM

**Pyotr Stolypin:** 'I must carry through effective measures of reform, and at the same time I must face the revolution, resist it and stop it.'

## DID YOU KNOW?

In 2008 a Russian television program conducted a poll on who viewers believed were the greatest Russians of all time. Stolypin came second. Medieval prince Alexander Nevsky came first and Josef Stalin was third.

Pyotr Stolypin contributed significantly to the period of reaction and reform that followed the 1905 Revolution. Having shown that he was a capable and decisive provincial governor, Stolypin was chosen by Nicholas to stem the tide of revolution and claw back the authority of the autocracy. In April 1906, Stolypin was appointed Minister of the Interior, and in July 1906 he was promoted to Prime Minister.

Stolypin was a committed monarchist, and he set about protecting the tsar from revolution by suppressing revolutionary movements and reducing the causes of popular discontent. In addressing the challenges that faced the tsarist regime, Stolypin said his guiding principles were, 'suppression first and then, and only then, reform'.<sup>15</sup>

## MARTIAL LAW

In his campaign of 'suppression first', Stolypin employed the army and police to brutally crush the aftermath of the 1905 upheavals. Martial law was declared on 19 August 1906. This was accompanied by a network of military tribunals that processed cases promptly, and without extensive investigation.

In the period 1906–1913, about 3376 people were executed for so-called 'terrorist' and revolutionary activities. And 2193 of these executions occurred in the years 1906–1908. There were so many executions that the hangman's noose became known as the 'Stolypin Necktie'. Stolypin also censored the press and authorised countless police searches and arrests. At the same time, the Okhrana increased its surveillance of universities and liberal activists.

## LAND REFORM

In his land reforms, Stolypin focused on addressing the long-term causes of the 'rural crisis'. He had some experience in this area, and had studied agriculture at university. Stolypin abolished the much-hated redemption payments, which provided peasants with immediate short-term relief. He then turned his attention to land shortages, rural overpopulation and widespread poverty—all made worse by a series of poor harvests.

Unwilling to face further opposition from the Duma, Stolypin issued his land reforms by executive decree (Article 87) on 9 November 1906. His aim was to create an independent middle-class of landowners in the countryside that would serve as loyal and conservative supporters of the government. An influential proportion of the peasantry would therefore become an obstacle to revolution, rather than a potential catalyst. According to Stolypin: 'First of all, we have to create a citizen, a small landowner, and then the peasant problem will be solved'.

Under Stolypin's system, peasants would be allowed to leave the village commune (or mir) and consolidate their strip farms into larger single plots of land. Affordable loans were made available from a Land Bank for those who met the government's eligibility

criteria. Peasants could also sell their share of the formerly communal land to raise additional funds. The government also encouraged peasants to migrate to Siberia, where land was available at low cost. Stolypin claimed, 'The government has placed its wager, not on the needy and the drunken, but on the sturdy and the strong'. Some peasants were thereby able to access more land, and adopted more modern farming methods. Two million peasants left the mir to establish independent farms, while a further 3 million accepted government support and migrated to Siberia.

## IMPACT OF STOLYPIN'S REFORMS

However, the results of Stolypin's reforms were mixed. The land reforms were a long-term project. Stolypin admitted that it would likely take twenty to twenty-five years before the reforms would produce the desired outcome. Some peasants were hostile towards Stolypin's suggested changes in farming practice, and preferred to stick with traditional approaches. Others feared leaving the security of the mir.

Furthermore, very few peasants qualified for the available financial assistance, and those who benefited from the reforms represented only 10 per cent of the rural population. In most areas, Stolypin's reforms redistributed landholdings rather than expanded them. This did not address the immediate concerns of rural poverty, and forced many peasants to look for work in cities—thus continuing the trend of urban migration that began under Witte.

Stolypin's program remained largely unfinished in 1911, at the time of his death. His successors lacked the drive to follow through with policies that had comparable vision and scope. While the long-term result of Stolypin's reforms remained only 'on paper', historian Richard Pipes suggests that Stolypin's achievement was his ability to offer 'a sense of national purpose and hope' after the traumas of 1905.<sup>16</sup>

### DID YOU KNOW?

Stolypin's assassin Dmitri Bogrov was on the payroll of the Okhrana as an informant.

→ Stolypin embodied the approach of reaction and reform.



### ACTIVITY

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 What were Stolypin's 'guiding principles' for addressing the challenges facing Tsarism?
- 2 What was the popular phrase used to describe Stolypin's methods of repression?
- 3 How many people were executed by Stolypin's military tribunals in the years 1906–1913?
- 4 Briefly explain how Stolypin's agricultural reforms aimed to reduce popular discontent in the countryside.
- 5 Comment on the extent to which Stolypin's program was a success.

#### EXTENDED RESPONSE

How did Pyotr Stolypin contribute to the stabilisation of the tsarist regime after the 1905 Revolution? Use evidence to support your response.

# PYOTR STOLYPIN, 1862–1911

## KEY INDIVIDUAL



Pyotr Stolypin came from a prominent aristocratic Russian family. His family had served the tsarist regime since the 1600s, and had accumulated vast estates as a reward for their service. In 1884 he married the daughter of a prominent landowning family, and in 1885 graduated from St Petersburg University, where his studies focused on tobacco farming and agricultural innovation.

After graduating, Stolypin began a career in the civil service. He rose quickly through the ranks, serving in a range of positions in

provincial administrations. In 1902 he was appointed Governor of Grodno, and was the youngest person ever to be given such a position. He became Provincial Governor of Saratov in 1903.

Stolypin proved his leadership and administrative skills in these roles, especially as Saratov was one of the few provinces not affected by rural disturbances in 1905. Further promotions came in 1906, when he was appointed Minister for the Interior in April, and Prime Minister in August.

As Prime Minister, Stolypin introduced sweeping agrarian reforms. His rural legislations gave peasants the opportunity to own private land. Stolypin hoped to create a class of self-sufficient and prosperous peasants who would be more likely to obey the government. However, he ruled in an authoritarian manner despite his progressive reforms:

- He introduced measures for the efficient arrest and conviction of political dissidents. An estimated 3000 people were convicted and executed by his military courts.
- He abused the Russian constitution and dissolved the first two Dumas.
- He changed the electoral laws so that the Third and Fourth Dumas were more conservative and thus more supportive of the government.

Stolypin was also a courageous and assertive leader. In 1906 he travelled throughout Russia and personally oversaw the restoration of order. He preferred to travel unarmed and with a minimal number of bodyguards. There were occasions when

his mere presence was enough to bring calm in the middle of a riot. He ended one rural disturbance by approaching the insurgents and calling out: 'Is that how you show your loyalty to your sovereign?'

Stolypin's life was threatened by revolutionaries on a number of occasions. His house was bombed in August 1906. Stolypin was only slightly hurt, but two of his children were injured. Stolypin was fatally shot by Socialist Revolutionary Dmitri Bogrov on 1 September 1911. In the months prior to his death Stolypin had fallen out of favour with the tsar. It is widely thought that Tsar Nicholas, who detested strong personalities, had lost faith in his Prime Minister and was looking to replace him. As one Duma deputy said, Stolypin 'died politically long before his physical death'.<sup>17</sup> He was nevertheless one of the last great statesmen of Russia's tsarist era.

## KEY POINTS

- Stolypin demonstrated his leadership while serving as a provincial governor.
- In 1906, he was appointed Minister of the Interior, and then Prime Minister.
- A staunch conservative, Stolypin was committed to protecting the tsar from revolution and preserving the monarchy.
- Stolypin was known for his agrarian reforms and uncompromising, ruthless repression.
- He hoped that the emergence of a conservative class of peasants loyal to the monarchy would prevent further revolutionary upheavals.
- He was responsible for reforming Russia's voting laws by constitutionally dubious means, although his changes did result in a more supportive Duma.
- Stolypin was assassinated in September 1911, long before his agrarian reforms had time to show significant results.

## DID YOU KNOW?

In 1906 Stolypin was about to address a potentially riotous village mob when an angry peasant gripped his arm and made to strike him with a club. Stolypin boldly commanded his assailant: 'Here, hold my coat!' The man humbly complied, and Stolypin proceeded to tell the crowd what he thought of their behaviour. His speech shamed the rioters so much that the protest dispersed. Stolypin then calmly collected his coat and went on his way.

# CHAPTER 4 REVIEW

## KEY SUMMARY POINTS

- As promised in the October Manifesto, Russians were allowed elected representatives in the Duma; however, this parliament faced a number of limitations. Electoral laws significantly limited the voting rights of the working classes.
- In April 1906 Tsar Nicholas reasserted his power through the Fundamental Laws.
- The First Duma was dismissed, following its demands for significant reform.
- The Second Duma, which was more radical than the first, was also dissolved.
- Stolypin introduced changes to the electoral system that further restricted the right to vote.
- The third and further Dumas were more conservative and compliant. They served their full five-year terms.
- Prime Minister Stolypin pursued sweeping land reforms, alongside harsh policies of repression.
- Stolypin was assassinated in September 1911.
- His successors lacked his vision.
- Industrial unrest continued to increase in the years leading up to World War I, with 500 workers killed by police in 1912 at the Lena Goldfields Massacre.
- By 1914, Stolypin's agrarian reforms were yet to show significant results.

## ACTIVITY

### ESSAY

Write a 600–800-word essay on one of the topics below. Your essay should include an introduction, paragraphs supported by relevant evidence from primary sources and historical interpretations, and a conclusion.

- 'By 1914, the tsarist regime had overcome challenges to its authority and was in a strong position.' To what extent do you agree with this view?
- 'The 1905 Revolution did not bring about genuine reform in Russia.' To what extent do you agree?
- Tsar Nicholas once said, '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.' Explain the consequences of the tsar's commitment to autocracy as a cause of revolutionary tensions by 1914.
- According to historian Alan Wood, 'the notion of a "constitutional autocracy" was not only impractical, it was clearly a political absurdity which was doomed to fail'. Discuss.
- 'As one of Russia's great statesmen, Stolypin represented a lost opportunity for tsarist Russia to find stability and avoid revolution.' To what extent do you agree?

### CREATIVE RESPONSE

Imagine you are a worker who participated in the Bloody Sunday march in 1905. Create a series of short journal entries to cover the period 1905–1914. In each entry, reflect on your hopes in January 1905 (remember the Workers' Petition) and what has been achieved and what has been suppressed by 1912.



# WAR AND REVOLUTION

(1914–1917)

*'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 will power, 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



**Source 5.01** Burning of Eagles and Tsar's Portraits by Ivan Vladimirov, circa 1917. The painting depicts the burning of a portrait of Tsar Nicholas II during the February Revolution, 1917.

# CHAPTER 5



In February 1914, former Minister for the Interior Pyotr Durnovo warned Tsar Nicholas that a war with Germany would lead to revolution.

World War I exposed and worsened the flaws in the tsarist regime. The flood of patriotism that followed the declaration of war in 1914 was soon forgotten in the wake of successive military defeats and economic distress, for which the government got the blame.

Russia's government was plagued by poor leadership and political scandals—notably the malign influence of Rasputin. As Durnovo had predicted, military defeats and economic woes led to 'social conflict in its most extreme form'. The situation in early 1917 was far worse than it had been in 1905. Peasants, workers, high society and the military had lost confidence in Tsar Nicholas. His wife Tsarina Alexandra was deeply unpopular and the source of much outrage.

In February 1917, a largely spontaneous protest by the women of Petrograd escalated into a mass-revolutionary movement. Troops refused to put down the protest—instead, many joined the revolution. In the middle of this turmoil, new authorities emerged in the Petrograd Soviet and Provisional Committee. Tsar Nicholas agonised over his predicament but was eventually persuaded to abdicate by the High Command and Duma representatives. In what seemed like a decisive break with Russia's autocratic past, the revolution of 'Glorious February' brought 304 years of Romanov rule to an end.

## KEY QUESTIONS

- What were the causes of World War I and its immediate impacts on Russia?
- What were the limitations of Russia's preparations for war?
- How did military challenges contribute to revolutionary tensions?
- How did economic difficulties and social tensions in World War I challenge the tsarist regime?
- What roles did Tsar Nicholas, Tsarina Alexandra and Rasputin play in undermining the tsarist regime?
- What were the immediate triggers of the February Revolution?
- How did popular movements and ideas influence the development and outbreak of the February Revolution?

## KEY EVENTS

- 1 August 1914 NS**  
Germany declares war on Russia
- 13–17 August 1914**  
Battle of Tannenberg
- August 1915**  
Tsar Nicholas takes charge of armed forces
- 4 June–20 September 1916**  
Brusilov Offensive
- 16 December 1916**  
Rasputin murdered
- 23 February 1917**  
International Women's Day marches
- 27 February 1917**  
Petrograd garrison mutiny  
Petrograd Soviet formed  
Provisional Committee assumes authority
- 2 March 1917**  
Abdication of the tsar  
Provisional Government formed

# CAUSES OF WORLD WAR I

KEY DEVELOPMENT

Friedrich Engels: 'War is the mid-wife of every old society pregnant with a new one.'

By 1914, there were strong indications that a conflict between Europe's great powers was likely at any time. The preconditions for war had been set:

- European popular culture glorified the greatness of war. Many people welcomed a war as an opportunity for adventure, and few understood the horrors involved.
- Aggressive **nationalism** was widespread. Governments encouraged these sentiments to secure domestic popular support, and the press commonly celebrated patriotic achievements.
- There was intense rivalry between nations keen on expanding their empires. Relations between Germany and France were tense, and their colonial ambitions in Africa had almost caused a war prior to World War I.
- Ethnic loyalties were a cause of division and conflict—especially in the Balkans and parts of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. As a **Slavic** nation, Russia had historic and cultural ties to the Balkans and took a keen interest in the region.
- The development and build-up of armaments and navies escalated into an arms race. Major powers spent a large portion of their budgets expanding and maintaining their armies. A powerful military was seen as a deterrent to war but, as Tsar Nicholas noted, 'The accelerating arms race is transforming the armed peace into a crushing burden that weighs on all nations and, if prolonged, will lead to the very cataclysm it seeks to avert'.<sup>1</sup> Each nation had detailed plans for mobilisation in readiness for war.
- An intricate balance of treaties divided Europe. Austria-Hungary and Germany were allied by the Triple Alliance. Britain, France and Russia were sworn to mutual defence by the Triple Entente. Other treaties and agreements tied smaller nations to great powers, such as Serbia to Russia, and Belgium to Britain.

**nationalism** identifying with your country and national identity

**Slavic** East European ethnicity with shared culture and origin of language

**'NS'/Dates** Until February 1918, Russia used the Julian calendar, which was thirteen days behind the Gregorian calendar used by the rest of the world.

In this book we have used the dates that applied in Russia at the time of each event. Where an event refers to two countries that used different calendars, we have used the abbreviation NS (New Style) to show dates that follow the Gregorian calendar. All dates after February 1918 follow the Gregorian calendar.

On 28 June 1914 (**NS**), Archduke Franz Ferdinand—the heir to the Austrian-Hungarian throne—was assassinated in the Bosnian city of Sarajevo. The assassin, Gavrilo Princip, was believed to be a member of the Serbian terrorist group, the Black Hand.

## → Source 5.02

### WORLD WAR I ALLIANCES

The nations of the Triple Entente were known as the Allies, while Germany, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire were the Central Powers.

Note: Italy had been a member of the Triple Alliance but joined the Allies at the start of the war.

#### Allies

- British Empire
- French Republic
- Russian Empire

#### Central Powers

- German Empire
- Austrian-Hungarian Empire
- Ottoman Empire



Ferdinand's assassination provided the spark that inflamed Europe's tensions.

Outraged by the murder, the Austrian government sought German support for a declaration of war on Serbia. On 23 July (NS), Austria issued an ultimatum to Serbia so harsh it knew the Serbian government would not accept. One month after the assassination of Ferdinand, Austria declared war on Serbia.

The Serbian government appealed to Russia for support. Russia did not want to see further Austrian expansion into the Balkans and came to Serbia's aid. Tsar Nicholas ordered the partial mobilisation of his troops against Austria on 16 July (29 July NS), then full mobilisation on 17 July (30 July NS).

Nicholas had no enthusiasm for a large-scale war. His partial mobilisation order was an attempt to avoid conflict with Germany. Nicholas had been warned by advisers that the Russian armed forces could not partially mobilise—it was full mobilisation or nothing—but he persisted. Nicholas' orders confused his generals, and his advisers eventually convinced him to follow the full mobilisation plan.

In the final days leading to World War I, Tsar Nicholas and his German cousin Kaiser Wilhelm II exchanged telegrams in an attempt to resolve the impending crisis. However, Russia's mobilisation on 17 July (30 July NS) put enormous pressure on Germany's war strategy—as the Germans wanted to avoid fighting on two fronts by first defeating France, then attacking Russia. On 19 July (1 August NS) Germany declared war on the Russian Empire. By 22 July (4 August NS) the Great War had begun:

- Austria had mobilised
- Germany had declared war on France, and invaded Belgium
- Britain had declared war on Germany.



**Source 5.03** A representation of the assassination of Austria's Archduke Ferdinand.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Tsar Nicholas and Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany had been on quite friendly terms before World War I. The cousins went on holiday together, and enjoyed sailing around the Mediterranean on Wilhelm's yacht.

## INITIAL RESPONSES TO WAR

**Grigory Rasputin:** 'Let Papa not plan for war; for with war will come the end of Russia and yourselves, and you will lose to the last man.'

Tsar Nicholas—like most statesmen of his era—did not anticipate how difficult World War I would be. Few leaders expected or were prepared for a war that lasted years and required all of their nation's resources. Most imagined that it would be over within a few months—a year at most.

Modern warfare was completely new. The use of machine guns, heavy artillery and trench warfare resulted in long, bloody conflicts that had never been seen before. Durnovo, Count Witte and Rasputin all cautioned Nicholas against war with Germany. But once Nicholas had committed his nation to war, he set aside his misgivings—and put his faith in God and the military might of the so-called 'Russian steamroller'.

#### ACTIVITY

##### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Whose assassination was the catalyst for World War I?
- 2 Which Balkans nation was Russia supporting that led to it being drawn into World War I?



Source 5.04 Tsar Nicholas on the balcony of the Winter Palace.



Source 5.05 Russian soldiers fighting in trenches.

The declaration of war caused an immediate outpouring of Russian nationalism, which led to popular expressions of loyalty and goodwill towards the tsar. Nicholas was seen as the living embodiment of his nation, and there was a genuine feeling that everyone should rally behind him and support Russia's war effort. As a result:

- strikes and worker militancy went into dramatic decline
- barricades blocking streets in working-class suburbs of major cities came down overnight
- revolutionaries who questioned the war, such as Lenin, were seen as traitors
- many European socialists set aside their internationalist leanings and supported their own nation's war efforts.

The wave of patriotism in 1914 saw the government change the name of 'St Petersburg'—which sounded German—to the more Russian 'Petrograd'. To make sure they did not interfere in the war effort, the Duma dissolved itself until the end of hostilities.

On 20 July (2 August NS), the day after Germany's declaration of war, a vast crowd gathered in Palace Square to pay homage to their tsar and their country. Nicholas waved to the crowd from a balcony of the Winter Palace. Those gathered in the square below—one of the sites of the 1905 Bloody Sunday massacre—fell to their knees and sang the hymn, 'God Save the Tsar'.

This was an incredibly powerful moment for Nicholas, who shed tears of joy. He felt a deep bond with his people and believed they sincerely loved him. He kept believing they loved him even as his popularity declined over the course of the war. This day was his enduring memory of his subjects, with himself as their 'Little Father'.

Later that day, Nicholas signed Russia's declaration of war, which proclaimed: 'In this fearsome hour of trial let internal dissension be forgotten. May the unity between tsar and people become ever stronger, and may Russia, risen up as one, repel the impudent onslaught enemy.'<sup>2</sup>

World War I would be a trial for every fighting nation. For Russia, the war would cause revolutionary tensions, and ultimately break the bond between the tsar and his people. The patriotism of 1914 was soon forgotten when news of military defeats arrived and problems on the home front emerged.

## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Why was the Russian army popularly described as the 'Russian steamroller'?
- 2 What was the immediate reaction in Russia to World War I? What was its impact?

**Pyotr Durnovo, Memorandum to the tsar, February 1914****KEY SOURCE**

Under what conditions will this clash occur and what will be its probable consequences? The fundamental groupings in a future war are self-evident: Russia, France, and England, on the one side, with Germany, Austria, and Turkey, on the other. It is more than likely that other powers, too, will participate in that war ... Are we prepared for so stubborn a war as the future war of the European nations will undoubtedly become? This question we must answer, without evasion, in the negative ... [Russia's preparations are] quite inadequate considering the unprecedented scale on which a future war will inevitably be fought ... The network of strategic railways is inadequate. The railways ... [are] sufficient, perhaps, for normal traffic, but not commensurate with the colossal demands ... of a European war ... Lastly, it should not be forgotten that the impending war will be fought among the most civilised and technically most advanced nations ... the technical backwardness of our industries does not create favourable conditions for our adoption of the new inventions ... From this point of view, a struggle between Germany and Russia, regardless of its issue, is profoundly undesirable to both sides ... a general European war is mortally dangerous both for Russia and Germany, no matter who wins. It is our firm conviction ... that there must inevitably break out in the defeated country a social revolution which, by the very nature of things, will spread.

**Source 5.06** Cited in Frank Alfred Golder, *Documents of Russian History 1914–1917* (New York: The Century Co., 1927), 8–9.

**ACTIVITY****HISTORICAL SOURCES**

Using Source 5.06 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Outline the likely impacts of a war between the European powers.
- 2 Explain the limitations of Russia's preparedness for a major war in 1914.
- 3 Analyse the expectations for the war and its initial impact on Russia. Use evidence to support your response.

# THE GREAT MILITARY PROGRAM

**Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich:** 'I have no rifles, no shells, no boots!'

As part of its obligations under the 1891 Franco-Russian Alliance, France had agreed to partially fund improvements to Russia's military infrastructure—such as bridges, roads and railway lines to the German and Austrian borders. In 1912, the Great Military Program was announced. This provided more funding for artillery and transport, and for administration of mobilisation plans.

The Great Military Program was due to be completed by 1917, but had made little progress by 1914. One of the limitations of the program was revealed when artillery ammunition reserves almost ran out in the first six months of the war. Russia's Commander-in-Chief, Grand Duke Nikolai, noted: 'The expenditure of shell has reached unheard-of proportions.'<sup>3</sup>

Towards the end of 1914, artillery officers were ordered to reduce the rate of firing to three rounds a day—no matter what the enemy did. Disobedience was subject to court martial. In the early campaigns of the war, the supply of boots and rifles to soldiers was grossly inadequate.

- Russia initially mobilised the largest army in Europe, with 6.5 million men—but had only 4.6 million rifles available.<sup>4</sup>
- Soldiers without guns were instructed to pick one up from a wounded or dead comrade.
- There was no coordinated collection or redistribution of rifles recovered from the field.
- The army was short of the recommended number of cartridges by a billion.
- Canvas boots issued to the first call-up of conscripts were acceptable for a summer campaign but were not suited to winter conditions or trench warfare.

There were also notable deficiencies in the quality of Russia's military leadership. Commander-in-Chief Grand Duke Nikolai was popular with the troops and supported

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Grand Duke Nikolai was one of many male Romanov relatives who towered over Tsar Nicholas. Whereas Duke Nikolai's stature exuded authority, Nicholas' height and less commanding presence was the source of jokes.

**Source 5.07** Tsar Nicholas and Grand Duke Nikolai.



## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- Who was Commander-in-Chief of the Russian armed forces?
- Describe the limitations of the Great Military Program. Note specific examples in your response.
- What were the typical characteristics of many Russian generals?

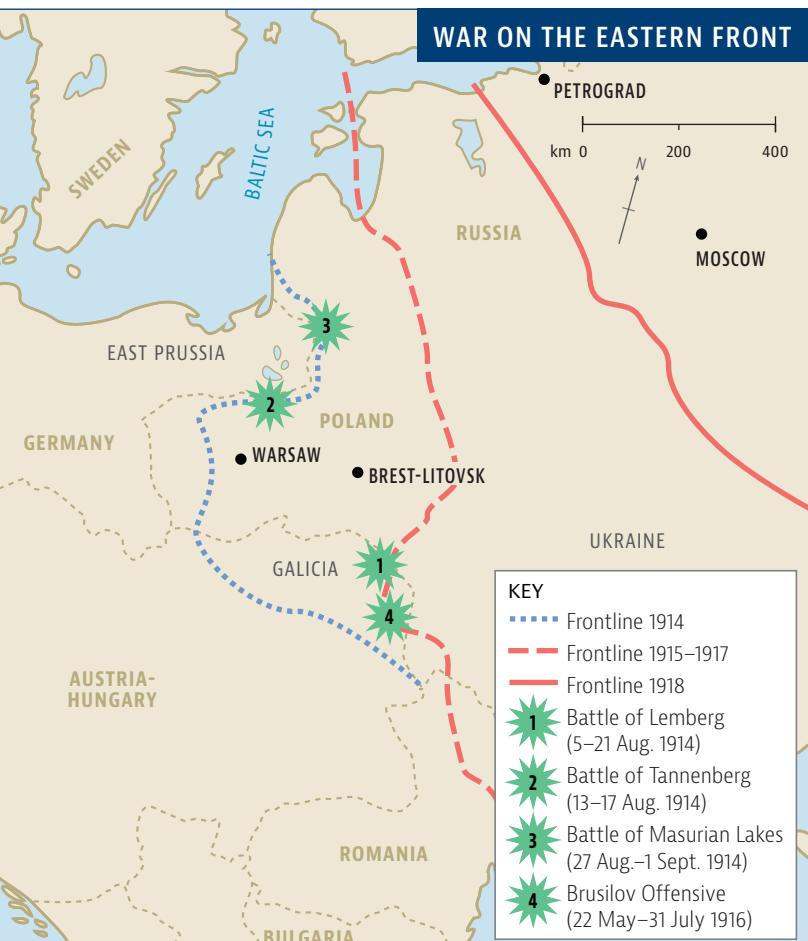
military reforms, but he freely admitted his limitations as a tactical commander. Nikolai was despised by the War Minister General Vladimir Sukhomlinov. Sukhomlinov scorned Nikolai's complaints about his troop's lack of supplies. He claimed that mass bayonet charges and sabre-wielding cavalry were the fundamentals of warfare. Sukhomlinov boasted, 'Look at me! I have not read a military manual for the last twenty years.'

Appointments to the Russian High Command were usually based on seniority of service and loyalty to the tsar, rather than competence. Poor leadership would be a contributing factor to Russia's appalling war casualties and territorial losses. Typical characteristics of Russian generals were:

- interpersonal rivalries
- ignorance of modern military tactics
- limited tactical initiative.

## MILITARY CAMPAIGNS

**General Alexei Polivanov:** 'The army is no longer retreating but simply fleeing ... Headquarters has completely lost its head. Contradictory orders, absence of a plan, feverish changes of commanding officers, and general confusion upset even the most courageous men.' (Polivanov replaced Sukhomlinov as Minister of War in mid-1914.)



### BATTLE OF LEMBERG, 5–21 AUGUST 1914

Russia's initial military strategy involved simultaneous campaigns against German East Prussia and the Austrian province of Galicia. The Russian military had significant success in the Galician campaign. Under the command of generals Ivanov, Brusilov and Ruzsky, the Russian army defeated the Austrian armed forces, which lost approximately 400,000 men—one-third of the Austrian army:

- 100,000 Austrians were killed
- 100,000 Austrians were captured
- 200,000 Austrians were wounded.

A substantial number of Austrian officers were lost. The Russians lost 225,000 men, but the Galician capital of Lemberg was captured. Success at the Battle of Lemberg lifted the mood of the Russian public after their German defeats. The Germans were forced to transfer military forces to support the Austrian Front from collapsing.

← Source 5.08

## BATTLE OF TANNENBERG, 13–17 AUGUST 1914

The Russian invasion of East Prussia was carried out by two armies:

- the First Army, led by General Paul von Rennenkampf
- the Second Army, led by General Alexander Samsonov.

German forces were commanded by generals Eric von Ludendorff and Paul von Hindenburg. Russian forces outnumbered the Germans, but the Russian campaign faced difficulties from the outset—which ultimately led to disaster. The East Prussian invasion was poorly planned:

- General Rennenkampf's First Army took considerable territory in the opening days of the offensive, but supplies could not keep up with the advancing units.
- The Russians failed to encode their wireless transmissions—so the Germans knew the Russian plans in advance, and manoeuvred their forces into favourable positions.
- On 13–17 August, the Germans surrounded and attacked General Samsonov's Second Army at the Battle of Tannenberg. General Rennenkampf was slow in responding to calls for assistance from his rival and did not join the battle.

In four days, 70,000 Russian soldiers were killed or wounded, and 100,000 were captured. The Germans captured 350 heavy artillery guns. A humiliated General Samsonov slipped away from his command post into the forest and shot himself. The Germans suffered 15,000 casualties.



**Source 5.09** Battle of Tannenberg, August 1914.

## BATTLE OF MASURIAN LAKES, 27 AUGUST–1 SEPTEMBER 1914

The Germans made effective use of railways in their defence of East Prussia. Veterans of the Battle of Tannenberg were reinforced by more troops, and moved by rail north against Rennenkampf's First Army. Hindenburg's German forces attacked and almost encircled the Russian First Army at the Battle of Masurian Lakes, 27 August–1 September.

The Russians lost 60,000 men before General Rennenkampf ordered a retreat. The Russian army was thus dealt a humiliating blow and decisively ejected from German territory. Russian defeats at the battles of Tannenberg and Masurian Lakes reflected badly on the tsarist regime.

## BRUSILOV OFFENSIVE, 22 MAY–31 JULY 1916

Austrian-German offensives in 1915 resulted in further Russian losses in Galicia, Poland, Latvia and Lithuania. A million troops were killed and considerable territory lost as the Russian army endured its Great Retreat.

Despite its victories, it was clear to the German High Command that Russia would not be defeated in the immediate future. Germany therefore concentrated its forces on the Western Front. This decision unintentionally allowed the Russian military time to recover, replenish its artillery stocks and equip every soldier with a rifle.

A Russian campaign along the Southwestern Front against the Austrians was planned and led by General Aleksei Brusilov. Brusilov was one of the few genuinely talented Russian military commanders. He was distinguished by his original thinking, preparedness and commitment to decisive action. Brusilov's tactics included heavier but shorter artillery bombardments, which gave the enemy less warning before his assaults.

**Source 5.10** Cossack cavalry charging.



## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Using statistics, outline the significant losses Russia suffered in the battles of Tannenberg and Masurian Lakes.
- 2 How did the Brusilov Offensive differ from other Russian campaigns?

Brusilov made a careful study of Austrian positions, focusing his forces at the weakest points along the Southwestern Front. He also attacked at multiple points simultaneously. The Brusilov Offensive was one of the most stunning campaigns of the war.

Brusilov's army caused the collapse of the Austrian-Hungarian Front, and in ten weeks captured 425,000 men and considerable Galician territory. The Austrian-German armies suffered 760,000 casualties—616,000 of which were Austrian alone. The Brusilov Offensive was one of the deadliest battles of the war. However, victory came at a terrible price, with 550,000 dead or wounded Russian soldiers.

The incompetent and overcautious Russian High Command failed to capitalise on Brusilov's Offensive. Brusilov had launched maximum troop numbers against the Austrians—but this meant that he had committed all of his reserve troops. Reinforcements were slow to arrive and supporting assaults were not launched. The Russian advance came to a halt.

Despite this lack of support, the Brusilov Offensive fulfilled its intentions:

- Germany was forced to transfer troops from the Western Front to the Eastern Front, which relieved pressure on French and British troops at Verdun.
- The Austrian army was effectively knocked out of the war, unable to conduct further campaigns without German support.

However, this limited success on the battlefield came at great cost—and did little to stem discontent on the home front.

## THE HUMAN COST OF WAR

**General Aleksei Brusilov:** 'In a year of war the regular army had vanished. It was replaced by an army of ignoramuses.'

In the first five months of World War I, 400,000 Russian men were killed, and a million wounded. The staggering losses continued the following year: by mid-1915, about 4 million soldiers were dead, wounded or captured.

The figures for Russian casualties vary considerably because of poor record-keeping at the time. However, it is clear that the number of Russian soldiers killed was higher than the number of soldiers lost by their allies or their enemies. The Russian High Command seemed indifferent to this appalling loss of life, and over the course of the war, 15 million men—mostly peasants—were called up to serve the Russian steamroller. The Russian generals apparently saw the peasants as an inexhaustible resource to use against the enemy.

One officer complained to his superiors: 'This is not war, sir, it is slaughter. The Germans use up shells; we use up human lives'. New conscripts were given inadequate basic training—which sometimes lasted just six weeks, and were poorly equipped in the first year of the war. Brusilov complained that draftees were 'disgustingly untrained', which resulted in an army 'more like an ill-trained militia'.<sup>6</sup> A quarter of Russian soldiers were sent to the front unarmed.<sup>7</sup> One commander reported, 'We have no guns. Misfortune, calamity, I'll be blunt—it's a tragedy'.<sup>8</sup>

The Russian army also lost a considerable number of its officer corps in the first months of war. Where Austrian and German officers took precautions for their own safety, Russian officers were known to advance into battle standing up—even when

they ordered their men to crawl. The result was predictable—one division had 40 officers left out of 370, which was a typical predicament throughout the Russian military by 1915. Russian Quartermaster-General Yuri Danilov admitted that, ‘the lack of officers was taking alarming proportions’.<sup>9</sup>

Problems with equipment and training were resolved by 1916, but the damage had been done. Russia’s war efforts hindered Germany’s ability to fully commit to the Western Front—but the human cost for Russia was enormous, and success against the Austrians did not compensate for Russia’s losses to Germany. Vast tracts of the Russian Empire had been lost, and 23 million Russians lived under German occupation.

The loss of territory was a national humiliation, and reflected poorly on the prestige of the tsarist government. The appalling level of causalities sapped the morale of both the troops and the general public. People from all walks of life questioned how Russia could sustain its commitment to the war. The patriotic enthusiasm of 1914 dissolved into fear and anger. Revolutionary ideologies (or beliefs) attracted growing support among workers, soldiers and peasants. Many soldiers could no longer endure the horrors of trench warfare and the loss of so many comrades. By late 1915 increasing numbers of soldiers were deserting the front.



## ACTIVITY

### EXTENDED RESPONSE

Explain how Russia’s military challenges in World War I contributed to rising revolutionary tensions. Use evidence to support your response.

### CREATIVE RESPONSE

A key scene in the film *Dr Zhivago* (1965) vividly depicts the change from patriotic support to mass desertion among Russian soldiers in World War I. View this excerpt and write a brief reflection on what caused this change. Alternatively, compose a creative response from a perspective of the time to one of developments depicted in the film.

◀ **Source 5.11** Russian troops surrendering on the Eastern Front. Despite many losses, the Russian command maintained a confident stance until 1917.

## ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE WAR

**Mikhail Rodzianko:** ‘The country has everything it needs but cannot make adequate use of it.’

Russia entered World War I unprepared for a sustained, total conflict. However, it did have two advantages:

- an enormous population
- a secure food supply.

On the eve of World War I, Russia was the world’s largest grain exporter, but such advantages were undermined as the war went on. The limitations of Russia’s industrial sector were soon apparent. Faced with chronic shortages of war supplies—particularly rifles and shells—the government directed industry to focus on production for the war effort. This focus aided the war effort, but came at the expense of Russia’s civilian population. It led to a rapid decline in living standards for working-class Russians—particularly shortages of basic foods—and was a significant contribution to revolutionary tensions.

## RAILWAYS

Russia's railway infrastructure was unable to cope with the demands of both military mobilisation and the needs of the civilian population. The masses of soldiers, supplies and horses moving to the Eastern Front caused a significant drop in the availability of trains and wagons to deliver food to Russia's cities.

By 1916, Petrograd and Moscow were receiving a third of their usual fuel and food supplies. Factories that previously made parts for locomotives switched to armaments production. This increased delays in train repairs, and created a further factor in the supply crisis. Many of Russia's railway lines were single tracks—which meant that when a train broke down, the entire line stopped. Poor administration resulted in massive hold-ups. Food rotted in carriages waiting for transport while, on occasion, idle rail trucks were tipped off the lines to make way for incoming trains.<sup>10</sup>

Standing for hours on end in queues for bread and other dietary staples became a daily chore for workers. A third of Petrograd's bakeries and two-thirds of its butchers closed because of shortages. Sometimes there was no bread available at all. By 1916, the calorie intake of unskilled workers had fallen by a quarter, and infant mortality had doubled.<sup>11</sup>

While people were not starving, many often went hungry. In the first years of the war, the lack of food was largely a failure of distribution rather than production. The years 1915 and 1916 produced bumper crops, but the government was unable to coordinate the rail system to get food to the cities at the same time as it got its armed forces to the front. The challenges of supply equally applied to fuel. Shortages caused difficulties in industrial production and that meant that the winters of the war years were bitterly cold for ordinary people.



## INFLATION

Backed by the largest gold reserve in the world, the Russian rouble was a strong and stable currency in 1914. However, the war placed severe pressure on the tsarist treasury, which had great difficulty financing the war effort. This was partly because of the government's incompetence.

In August 1914, Tsar Nicholas banned the production and sale of vodka for the duration of the war. He introduced his ban without consulting the Minister of Finance. However, the sales tax on vodka made up about 28 per cent of the Russian government's revenue. This was an enormous amount of revenue to lose, and substitute taxes were unable to replace it.

Russia took out sizeable loans from foreign powers, but expenditure grew from 4 million roubles in 1913 to 30 million roubles in 1916. Between 1914 and 1917, over 1.5 billion roubles was spent on the war. To meet its short-term financial needs, the government abandoned the gold standard and printed more money. The result was an inflated currency—which meant the currency was worth less than the amount printed or stamped on it. By 1917, the rouble could only buy 30 per cent of what it could buy in 1913.

Shortages also led to a steep rise in the price of consumer goods. On average, wages increased by half but food prices increased fourfold. The average real worth of wages fell 65 per cent below their 1913 levels. People from the working classes and lower-middle classes were hit hard by inflation, and any savings they had were wiped out.

Inflation coupled with increased prices led to a fall in working-class living standards, and increased dissatisfaction with the government.

## AGRICULTURE AND THE PEASANTRY

The Russian army was essentially 'peasants in uniform'. Over time, the massive call-up of recruits—most of whom were peasants—reduced the capacity of the agricultural sector. Even wealthy landowners, whose large-scale commercial farms were the most productive, struggled to hire enough labourers. The armed forces also **requisitioned** millions of horses for the war effort.

In an attempt to maintain an adequate grain supply, the tsarist government fixed the price of grain, and introduced a state monopoly on purchases for the army. In 1916, a system of requisitioning set a grain quota for each province to fulfil. However, the peasants were not happy with this, and responded by consuming more of their grain and sowing less.

The war economy meant there were few consumer goods available for trade. The manufacture of tools and agricultural equipment had shifted to war supplies. Because of inflation, there was little incentive for peasants to receive payment in cash. The crisis of grain supply now became a crisis of grain production, as peasants withheld their grain from the market. Instead, they fed up their livestock, ate better or distilled their grain into illegal alcohol, which was a quick 'cash crop' they could trade on the black market.

The system for requisitioning grain was not adequately enforced, and by the end of 1916 there were acute food shortages in towns and cities, and also at the front. Ultimately, the government was blamed for the shortages, while the militant revolutionary groups were the beneficiaries.

## THE RICH GET RICHER

The war was a time of great hardship for the working classes, yet it allowed many of Russia's business elite to vastly increase their wealth. Profits soared as the demands for military orders increased.<sup>12</sup> Discerning industrialists wined and dined people in the government in a bid to secure contracts. Inflation did little harm to those with extensive wealth and financial knowhow, as Russian businessmen shifted their wealth into foreign banks, invested in gold or kept their wealth in assets rather than currency. There were also plenty of opportunities to buy businesses that were in financial difficulty at low cost.

### Leon Trotsky on war profiteering

Speculation of all kinds and gambling on the market went to the point of paroxysm [frenzy]. Enormous fortunes arose out of the bloody foam. The lack of bread and fuel in the capital did not prevent the court jeweler Fabergé from boasting that he had never before done such a flourishing business ... Nobody had any fear of spending too much. 'Society' [social elites] held out its hand and pockets ... A continual shower of gold fell from above ... All came running to grab and gobble.

Those who had the money continued to eat sumptuous meals in fine dining restaurants. The ban on alcohol only applied to vodka, which was the drink of choice for working-class people. Expensive liquors and wines were exempt from the ban—and flowed freely in the clubs of the well-to-do. War meant business, and business was good. Profiteering and the growing social divide between rich and poor contributed to the radicalisation of the popular mood.

**requisition** when a government or official body seizes and claims property or material

### ACTIVITY

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- Describe how each of these economic factors contributed to rising revolutionary tensions in World War I:
  - railways
  - bread
  - inflation
  - agriculture.
- What is Trotsky's intention when he highlights the profiteering that occurred in World War I?

#### EXTENDED RESPONSE

Explain how economic challenges in World War I undermined the tsarist government and led to revolutionary tensions in Russia. Use evidence to support your response.

Source 5.13 Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1934), 46–47.

# WAR AND POLITICS

**Grigory Rasputin:** 'The tsar can change his mind from one minute to the next; he's a sad man; he lacks guts.'

World War I starkly exposed the shortcomings of the tsarist regime—particularly the leadership of Tsar Nicholas. Nicholas had many personality traits that made him ill-suited to the role of autocrat and left him severely challenged by the complexity of Russia's deepening revolutionary crises. Tragedy seemed to haunt his reign, and Nicholas responded to each misfortune with a fatalistic acceptance that it was all 'God's will'.

He possessed a steadfast belief in the sanctity of the autocracy that made it almost impossible for him to accept reform. Stubborn and limited in intelligence, Nicholas was unable to respond to complex challenges effectively. His contemporaries spoke about how his blank face gave few clues to his state of mind. He was also easily swayed by strong personalities, and a terrible judge of people. These characteristics became more apparent as the war crises became more severe—as did the inability and unwillingness of the tsarist state to accept help from willing external organisations, such as the War Industries Committee and the Union of Zemstvos.

## WAR INDUSTRIES COMMITTEE AND UNION OF ZEMSTVOS

In patriotic response to the war, Russia's business elite and nobility founded several voluntary organisations.

The All-Russian Union of Zemstvos and Union of Towns—headed by Prince Georgi Lvov—made efforts to assist with the transport of supplies to the front, and to care for the wounded. However, the union was not supported by the government, and was hindered by official regulations. To Duma President Rodzianko's support of the Union of Zemstvos, Tsar Nicholas responded: 'Rodzianko is meddling in matters that are none of his business'.<sup>13</sup>

A similar predicament was met by the *War Industries Committee*. Formally convened on 25 July 1915 by progressive Moscow industrialists, the War Industries Committee recognised that the majority of government war contracts were awarded to large Petrograd firms that charged excessive prices and were unable to fulfil every order. One example that particularly frustrated the committee was the shortage in shell supplies.

The War Industries Committee was chaired by Alexander Guchkov, an Octobrist deputy in the Duma. Guchkov appealed to the government to allow a more diversified and competitive allocation of war contracts to create a more efficient and productive war economy. Significantly, the committee called for greater involvement by private business in the management of wartime industry. They also sought official support for the collaboration of the Union of Zemstvos, the Duma and the War Industries Committee.

Despite ongoing economic challenges, the tsar and his senior ministers largely rejected the support of the War Industries Committee—which continued to denounce the negligence of the government as the war went on.

### War Industries Committee

an organisation of patriotic businessmen who tried to assist the Russian government with the war effort

## THE PROGRESSIVE BLOC

Tsar Nicholas recalled the Duma on 19 July 1915, after being petitioned by its concerned deputies. Most of the deputies in the Fourth Duma were liberals and conservatives committed to Russia's political institutions. However, the war led many of the deputies to become increasingly critical about the government.

By August 2015, a number of Kadet and Octobrist deputies had come together in a political alliance called the *Progressive Bloc*. Prominent members included Pavel Miliukov and Alexander Guchkov. The Progressive Bloc called for administrative and political reforms, including the dismissal of incompetent ministers and the creation of 'government of public confidence'.

The intention of the Progressive Bloc was to avert revolution by persuading Tsar Nicholas to appoint a more competent cabinet responsible to the Duma. This would mean that Tsar Nicholas would be less to blame for any future misfortune in policy or the war effort. The bloc had the backing of the War Industries Committee and some members of the Council of Ministers and the State Council. Miliukov did his best to make the Progressive Bloc proposals acceptable to the tsar.

However, Nicholas rejected these proposals, and sacked the ministers who backed the reformers. According to Tsarina Alexandra, the so-called 'rebel ministers' were 'fiends worse than the *duma*' who deserved 'a smacking'.<sup>14</sup> Tsar Nicholas would not tolerate any reduction in his authority. On 3 September 1915, the Duma's session was closed until further notice. A significant opportunity to embrace reform and shore up popular support was thus lost: 'They brushed aside the hand that was offered them', recalled Miliukov.<sup>15</sup>

Further Duma sessions were granted, but relations between the government and its parliament continued to deteriorate. On 14 November 1916, Kadet Pavel Miliukov delivered a broad critique of the government in a sensational speech. As he denounced a litany of failures, Miliukov asked with great rhetorical effect: 'Is this stupidity? Or is this treason?' He spoke of the 'dark forces fighting for the benefit of Germany' and 'an enemy hand ... secretly influencing the course of our State affairs'.

### Miliukov's speech to the Duma

#### KEY SOURCE

When the Duma keeps everlastingly insisting that the rear must be organised for a successful struggle, the Government persists in claiming that organising the country means organising a revolution, and deliberately prefers chaos and disorganisation. What is it, stupidity or treason?

The speech was banned from publication, but contraband copies were widely distributed. Miliukov's speech articulated the intolerable political crisis unfolding in Russia, and even conservative supporters of the monarchy agreed with his sentiments.

### ACTIVITY

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 What were the aims of the War Industries Committee?
- 2 What were the intentions of the Progressive Bloc?
- 3 Describe Tsar Nicholas' response to offers of support from liberal groups.
- 4 What question did Miliukov ask in his November 1916 speech to the Duma?

**Progressive Bloc** an alliance of liberal Duma deputies who petitioned the tsar for political reform during World War I, particularly the creation of a government that had public support



↑ Tsarina Alexandra.

← Source 5.14 Cited in Frank Alfred Golder, *Documents of Russian History 1914–1917* (New York: The Century Co., 1927), 164.

# COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF TSAR NICHOLAS

TURNING POINT

The most disastrous political decision ever made by Tsar Nicholas came on 22 August 1915, when he dismissed Grand Duke Nikolai and appointed himself Commander-in-Chief of Russia's armed forces. The grand duke was sent to command the war effort in the Caucasus—far away from political influence. Nicholas took on the role of commander with the best intentions: his country faced great wartime difficulties and the tsar should therefore be with his troops at the front.

## DID YOU KNOW?

The popularity of Grand Duke Nikolai during World War I displeased Tsar Nicholas. The tsar was irritated that churches prayed for the health of his 'Uncle Nikolasha' and that common people hung his portrait in their homes.

Although Grand Duke Nikolai was not a very effective military commander, he was popular with the troops. Nicholas lacked charisma, and did not make a good impression on the soldiers even when he performed simple ceremonial duties. General Brusilov recalled: 'Faced with a group of soldiers, he was nervous and did not know what to say'.<sup>16</sup>

Tsar Nicholas had no experience in military command, so all major battlefield decisions were made by the new chief of staff, General Alekseev. However, any military failures would now be attributed directly to the tsar. All of Tsar Nicholas' advisers—except for the tsarina—had urged him not to go to the front.

The Council of Ministers warned: 'Sire ... to the best of our understanding, your adoption of such a decision threatens Russia, yourself, and the dynasty with serious consequences'.<sup>17</sup> Rodzianko expressed the will of the Duma—as well as the popular mood—when he wrote to the tsar urging him to retract his decision.

However, Nicholas remained stubbornly committed to his new appointment. On 23 August 1915, the tsar arrived at Mogilev and assumed his duties at the Russian High Command.

→ **Source 5.15** Cited in George Vernadsky, ed., *A Source Book for Russian History From Early Times to 1917* (London: Yale University Press, 1972), 844–845.

**anarchy** a state of disorder and lawlessness due to the breakdown or absence of government authority

## Letter from the president of the Duma, Mikhail Rodzianko, to Tsar Nicholas II, August 1915

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 trust 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.

Your Majesty's decision will appear to the people to be a confession of the hopelessness of the situation and of the chaos that has invaded the administration.

Sire! The situation will be even worse if the army, deprived of a leader enjoying its complete confidence, loses courage.

In this event defeat is inevitable, and within the country revolution and **anarchy** will then inevitably break out, sweeping everything from their path.

Your Majesty! Before it is too late, revoke your decision, no matter how hard it may be for you.

Retain Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich at the head of the army.

Reassure troubled and already alarmed minds by forming a government from among those who enjoy your confidence and are known to the country by their public activities.

Sire, it is not yet too late!

On bended knees I beg you fervently not to delay the decision that will protect from approaching harm the sacred person of the Russian tsar and the reigning dynasty.

Sire, give heed to this truthful, heartfelt word from your loyal servant.

The President of the State Duma, Mikhail Rodzianko

## ACTIVITY

### HISTORICAL SOURCES

Using Source 5.15 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- Outline Rodzianko's perspective of the likely consequences of Tsar Nicholas' decision to take command of the armed forces.

- Explain how political challenges emerged for the tsarist regime during World War I.
- Evaluate the leadership of Tsar Nicholas during World War I as a cause of revolution. Use evidence to support your response.



## THE TSARINA AND RASPUTIN

The absence of Tsar Nicholas from Petrograd substantially increased the role of Tsarina Alexandra in day-to-day politics. Nicholas readily sought her support as he left for the front: ‘Think, my wifey, will you not come to the assistance of your hubby now that he is absent?’<sup>18</sup> The tsarina assured Nicholas that she was fit for the task as his lead representative in the capital: ‘Lovey, I am your wall in the rear. I am here, don’t laugh at silly old wifey ... she has “trousers” on unseen.’<sup>19</sup>

What made this development extraordinary, tragic and farcical all at the same time was the influence of a peasant faith healer named Grigory Rasputin. Either through his knowledge of traditional healing, or perhaps hypnotism, Rasputin was able to ease the symptoms of Tsarevich Alexei’s *haemophilia*. Alexei’s condition was a state secret, so a significant factor in the royal family’s reliance upon Rasputin was not widely known.

For the tsarina, Rasputin was a man of God, who she affectionately called ‘Our Friend’. Over time, Rasputin became her spiritual and political confidant. Giving advice based on visions he had ‘seen in the night’, Rasputin exerted a powerful sway over the devout tsarina. His influence increased further once Tsar Nicholas left for the front. In turn, the tsarina pestered Nicholas to approve the recommendations that she and Rasputin had made on policy and ministerial appointments.

The tsar did not always grant their requests, replying to one letter from Alexandra: ‘Our Friend’s opinions of people are sometimes very strange ... therefore one must be careful’.<sup>20</sup> However, Alexandra was persistent, and she often got her way. Nicholas admitted that ‘one Rasputin’ was preferable to ‘ten fits of hysterics every day’. Concerned that her husband lacked political will, Alexandra urged him to comb his hair with Rasputin’s comb before meeting with his ministers.

**haemophilia** a rare inherited bleeding disorder where blood does not clot properly

## MINISTERIAL LEAPFROG

The appointment and dismissal of government ministers became commonplace under Tsarina Alexandra, and was described by people from the time as ‘ministerial leapfrog’. Between September 1915 and February 1917, Russia had:

- four Prime Ministers
- four Ministers of Education
- three Ministers for Foreign Affairs
- three War Ministers
- three Ministers of Transport
- four Ministers of Justice
- five Ministers of the Interior.<sup>21</sup>

Few ministers had the time to develop substantial policy initiatives, or to fully understand their portfolios.

### MINISTERIAL LEAPFROG: SEPTEMBER 1915–1917

Four Prime Ministers

Four Ministers of Education

Three Ministers for Foreign Affairs

Three War Ministers

Three Ministers of Transport

Four Ministers of Justice

Five Ministers of the Interior

Tsarina Alexandra—like Tsar Nicholas—distrusted strong personalities and was fleeting in her support of figures in the cabinet. She also accepted Rasputin's advice unconditionally. She endorsed any candidate that Rasputin put forward as a potential appointee. Most candidates gained Rasputin's patronage through bribery, with vast sums of money changing hands in sometimes depraved settings.

Some appointees were notable for their incompetence and poor character. Boris Stürmer was made Minister of the Interior in January 1916. He was totally out of depth with his responsibilities and had a well-known passion for all things German. His German name did little to alleviate this unwelcome perception. Stürmer was replaced by Alexander Protopopov in September 1916. A conservative Duma deputy, Protopopov had no previous ministerial experience and was mentally unstable—he had candid conversations with a religious icon on his desk, and attended government meetings dressed in a police uniform.

Tsarina Alexandra was not a well-liked public figure, and her German background made her the subject of scorn—she was often referred to as the *nemka* ('German woman'). Alexandra was not a traitor, but her background and poor judgement in ministerial appointments caused enormous damage to the popular perception of the tsarist regime.

Russia's political degeneration during World War I was noted by many political contemporaries. French ambassador to Russia, Maurice Paléologue, wrote to his government: 'I am obliged to report that, at the present moment, the Russian Empire is run by lunatics'. In his assessment of the political situation in Petrograd after August 1915, Grand Duke Nikolai admitted, 'It is now a reign of chaos'.<sup>22</sup>

## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 When did Tsar Nicholas appoint himself Commander-in-Chief?
- 2 Why was the Tsarina Alexandra close to Rasputin?
- 3 Explain the term 'ministerial leapfrog'.

### EXTENDED RESPONSE

Explain how political instability during World War I contributed to a revolutionary situation in Russia by late 1916. Use evidence to support your response.



## DID YOU KNOW?

As Russian was not Alexandra's first language, the tsar and tsarina wrote letters to each other in English. English was also the language spoken among the immediate Romanov family.

## DID YOU KNOW?

In late 1914, Rasputin offered to visit the High Command and give his spiritual support to Russia's troops. He wrote to Grand Duke Nikolai: 'I will come and console you'. Commander-in-Chief Nicholas II replied: 'Come and I will hang you!'

## THE MURDER OF RASPUTIN TURNING POINT

Rasputin's apparent healing abilities were a divine blessing for the tsarina. She never doubted his worth as her trusted spiritual and political adviser. Yet Rasputin also had a dark side that Alexandra refused to acknowledge. He was likely a member of the banned Khlysty sect. The sect believed that spiritual enlightenment could be achieved through frenzied dancing and sexual orgies—after which devotees would repent and feel closer to God.

Despite his role with the royal family, Rasputin continued with his drunken debauchery and seedy behaviour. He gathered a following of women from high society—with whom he allegedly had affairs. Many were apparently attracted by his charm and his remarkable eyes.

Rasputin's behaviour was the source of scandalous rumours, and there was even talk of an affair between himself and Alexandra. Postcards featuring pornographic depictions of the tsarina and her 'mad monk' created quite a public sensation. Political corruption aside, Alexandra's supposed affair with Rasputin was nothing more than rumour—but the gossip was often believed, and it damaged the reputation of the royal family.

Public figures in the Duma and people in high society despaired of the so-called 'dark forces' at work in Russia's government. Many aristocratic men were further incensed by rumours that Rasputin was having sexual relations with ladies of high social standing. Many men spoke of killing Rasputin, and it was widely hoped that, in the event of his death, the tsarina would retreat to a nunnery and Nicholas would listen to more reasoned advice.

In late 1916, Prince Felix Yusupov—a member of one of Russia's wealthiest families—hatched a plot to murder Rasputin. Conspiring with Yusupov were:

- Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich Romanov—a cousin of Tsar Nicholas
- Vladimir Purishkevich—Duma deputy
- Sergei Sukhotin—family friend and army officer
- Dr Stanislaus de Lazovert.

On the night of 16 December, Yusopov lured Rasputin to his palace with the promise of meeting his beautiful wife Irina. Yusopov had prepared a room in his basement with comfortable furnishings, plus wine and cakes that Dr Lazovert had laced with poison. The other conspirators waited upstairs and made cheerful noises to give the impression there was a party, playing Yusupov's one record on the gramophone over and over (the record featured only one song: 'Yankee Doodle Dandy').

The murder did not go to plan. Rasputin drank many glasses of wine and ate the cakes—which supposedly contained enough poison to kill a man many times over. He complained of having a heavy head and burning throat, but was very much alive. Rasputin suggested that he and the prince should move their party to a salon featuring gypsy entertainers.

Yusupov was alarmed by this suggestion, excused himself and briefly consulted with his conspirators, who passed him a pistol. Yusupov returned to the basement, asked Rasputin to bless a large ornamental crucifix—and then shot him in the back. Rasputin let out a roar and fell to the ground, unconscious. Yusupov's conspirators rushed downstairs, and Dr Lazovert declared Rasputin dead. The elated murderers went back upstairs to get curtains to conceal the body, while Yusupov returned to inspect the murder scene. Upon examination, Rasputin opened his eyes, called out 'Felix!' and clutched at Yusupov's jacket.

Yusupov was horrified, and ran out of the room screaming for help. Rasputin crawled outside on his hands and knees crying 'Felix! Felix! I will tell the Tsarina everything!'<sup>23</sup> As Rasputin stumbled towards the palace gates 'roaring like an animal', Purishkevich shot him twice more. Then Purishkevich, Dmitri Pavlovich, Sukhotin and Yusupov kicked and punched Rasputin as he was dying. They wrapped his body in a curtain and pushed it through a hole in the frozen Neva River.

However, the murder of 'Our Friend' did not have the desired result. The police learned of the crime and recovered the body a few days later. Tsarina Alexandra was grief-stricken—but made no plans to retire to a nunnery. Minister for the Interior Alexander Protopopov tried to boost his standing with the empress by claiming that he spoke with Rasputin's ghost each evening.



**Source 5.16** A pornographic postcard that was circulated in Petrograd in 1916. The original image included a caption: 'Holding', which was a pun on Rasputin's influence in Russian politics, as well as his alleged affair with the tsarina.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Purishkevich was a popular but infamous Duma deputy. He was well known for his right-wing and anti-Semitic views. In November 1916, he delivered a controversial speech to the Duma: 'The tsar's ministers ... have been turned into ... marionettes whose threads have been taken firmly in hand by Rasputin and the Empress Alexandra ... the evil genius of Russia ... who has remained a German on the Russian throne and alien to the country and its people'.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

The post-mortem examination of Rasputin found water in his lungs, which suggests he was still breathing when pushed into the Neva River.

**Source 5.17** Caricature of Grigori Rasputin clutching Nicholas II and Tsarina Alexandra. The cartoon is commenting on the control Rasputin held over the royal family.



Nicholas reacted to Rasputin's murder with quiet fury. As a result:

- Grand Duke Dmitri was exiled to Persia
- Yusupov was banished to one of his family's provincial estates
- Purishkevich avoided serious punishment, but only because of his popularity.

After Rasputin's death, the tsar and tsarina became even more isolated from their advisers, ministers and extended family. Nicholas often appeared dazed and apathetic. He spent many evenings completing jigsaw puzzles.

In January 1917 British ambassador George Buchanan asked Nicholas how he intended to regain the public's confidence. Nicholas replied, 'Do you mean that I am to regain the confidence of my people, or that they are to regain mine?'<sup>24</sup> The tsar seemed oblivious to the revolutionary situation unfolding around him. Ten weeks later the reign of the Romanov dynasty was over.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

One of Rasputin's most devout followers was Tsarina Alexandra's lady-in-waiting Anna Vyrubova. Many contemporaries blamed Vyrubova for encouraging Alexandra's devotion to Rasputin.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Rasputin prophesised that if he were murdered by workers or peasants, his death would be of little consequence. However, if he were killed by the aristocracy, a great disaster would engulf Russia.

### ACTIVITY

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Who murdered Rasputin?
- 2 How did Nicholas and Alexandra react to the death of Rasputin?

#### CREATIVE RESPONSE

The song 'Rasputin' (1978) by disco group Boney M is a colourful and entertaining account of the Rasputin legend. Watch a performance of the song and take note of the lyrics. Identify details of the song that:

- accurately highlight elements of Rasputin's influence
- are based on rumour or gossip from the time
- are historically inaccurate.

#### HISTORICAL SOURCES

Using Sources 5.16 and 5.17 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Outline Rasputin's influence over the tsar and tsarina.
- 2 Explain how the Rasputin scandal contributed to revolutionary tensions by late 1916.
- 3 Analyse how political developments in World War I challenged the tsarist regime. Use evidence to support your response.

# GRIGORY RASPUTIN, 1869–1916

Grigory Rasputin was a self-proclaimed holy man (or *starets*) from the village of Pokrovskoye, in western Siberia. As a young man he had a reputation for unruly behaviour, including petty theft and heavy drinking. He married a local woman and had several children before leaving Pokrovskoye on a religious pilgrimage. He returned a changed man: dishevelled, but with a deep commitment to spirituality. Rasputin spent the next years as a wandering preacher (or *strannik*), and would sometimes leave his village for months at a time. It is alleged that he adopted the Khlysty doctrine of 'redemption through sin'.

Around the start of the twentieth century, it was common for members of high society to seek spiritual guidance and traditional healing from peasant mystics. So when, in 1903, Rasputin came to St Petersburg, he was able to meet people in influential aristocratic circles, including members of the extended Romanov family.

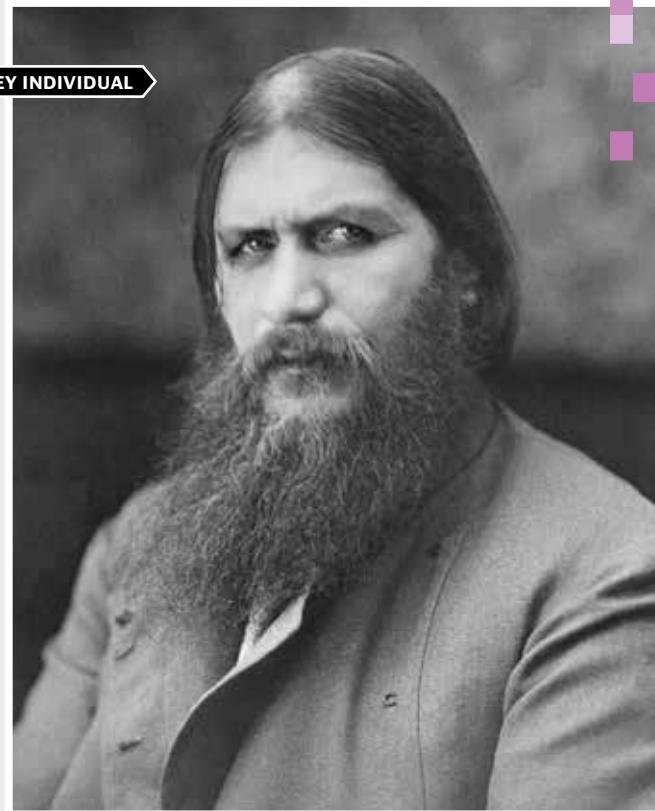
In 1905, Rasputin was introduced to Tsar Nicholas and Tsarina Alexandra. His success in treating their son Alexei's haemophilia convinced Alexandra that Rasputin was close to God. On one occasion Alexei was very sick and the royal doctors had little hope. Rasputin reassured Alexandra: 'God has seen your tears and heard your prayers. Do not grieve. The Little One will not die. Do not allow the doctors to bother him too much'. Alexei recovered, and this led Alexandra to believe that Rasputin could perform miracles.

But by 1912 Rasputin's influence over the royal family was the source of malicious gossip, and his behaviour and corruption considered scandalous. During World War I, when Tsar Nicholas left Petrograd for the front, Rasputin's hold over Alexandra became a political crisis.

Historians generally agree that Rasputin's influence highlighted inherent flaws in the Russian autocracy—that is, the flaws already existed before Rasputin arrived in Petrograd. Historian Alan Wood argues that, 'the scandal which had surrounded Rasputin's name was merely a symptom, not a cause, of the acute malaise [sickness] which inflicted an incompetent and unpopular regime now deep in the throes of a devastating war'.<sup>25</sup>

In December 1916, Rasputin was murdered in a plot that was almost a farce. One of Russia's wealthiest aristocrats, a Romanov grand duke and a conservative Duma deputy were involved. Rasputin's body was buried outside the Romanov's Tsarskoe Selo palace but was exhumed by soldiers after the February Revolution and burned to ash.

## KEY INDIVIDUAL



Source 5.18 Grigory Rasputin.

## KEY POINTS

- Rasputin was a Siberian peasant who was considered to be a holy man.
- He was a valued member of the royal entourage because of his ability to ease Tsarevich Alexei's haemophilia. (Alexei's condition was not public knowledge.)
- He became Tsarina Alexandra's spiritual and political adviser.
- Political corruption worsened due to Rasputin's influence, including so-called 'ministerial leapfrog'.
- He brought the royal family into popular disrepute, and was murdered in a conspiracy by patriotic nobles.

# ALEXANDRA FEODOROVNA ROMANOV, 1872–1918



KEY INDIVIDUAL

Alexandra Romanov was from German and British royal heritage, and her original title was Princess Alix of Hesse. Her grandmother was Queen Victoria of Great Britain. Alix was betrothed to Nicholas Romanov in 1894. Because the couple married shortly after the death of Tsar Alexander III, people who did not like Alexandra dubbed her the 'bride in black'. She took the Russian name Alexandra Feodorovna, and became a devout follower of the Orthodox Church and defender of the autocracy.

Nicholas and Alexandra were a true love match. They were each other's closest confidants. Alexandra was painfully aware of her husband's gentle manner and how he was unprepared for leadership. She took it upon herself to boost Nicholas' confidence, urging him to be '... more autocratic than Peter the Great and sterner than Ivan the Terrible'.<sup>26</sup>

However, Alexandra was unpopular with both the Russian general public and high society. She was the *nemka* (German woman) who arrived in Russia 'behind a coffin' and spoke Russian with a noticeable accent. She was very shy, but rather than being seen as socially awkward, Russian high society considered her arrogant and aloof. She had a particularly strained relationship with her mother-in-law Dowager Empress Marie Feodorovna. Apart from her husband, her only real friend was lady-in-waiting Anna Vyrubova.

Nicholas and Alexandra had five daughters and a son, whom they adored. Alexandra was a devoted mother, but the general public looked down on her because it took her years to have a son (the heir to the throne).

Few people outside the immediate family knew that Tsarevich Alexei had haemophilia, which he inherited from Alexandra. His condition led to the tsarina's reliance and trust in the peasant faith healer Rasputin. This relationship caused enormous public dissent and political instability after August 1915, when the tsarina assumed a greater political role.

Alexandra repeatedly called on Nicholas to be tougher with his critics—and even suggested that outspoken members of the Duma should be hanged or imprisoned. She made many poor judgements—notably when she advised Nicholas at the outbreak of the February Revolution that the troubles were because of a change in the weather and were of no concern.

After Nicholas abdicated the throne in March 1917, Alexandra was placed under house arrest, along with the rest of the Romanov family. The Provisional Government was unable to exile the Romanovs, as foreign governments—including Great Britain—refused to accept the former royals. The conditions under which the family were held became more difficult after the October Revolution.

On 17 July 1918, the Bolsheviks executed Alexandra, Nicholas and their children.

## KEY POINTS

- From the beginning of Nicholas' reign, Tsarina Alexandra was unpopular across Russian society.
- She was Nicholas' closest adviser, but gave him poor advice.
- Alexandra's reliance on Rasputin damaged the integrity of the tsarist regime. This became worse in 1915, when Nicholas became Commander-in-Chief.
- Alexandra's influence over her husband—and corrupt political appointments—made people angry with the government. This contributed significantly to a revolutionary situation by 1917.

**ACTIVITY****ESSAY**

Write a 600–800-word essay on the topic below. Your essay should include an introduction, paragraphs supported by relevant evidence from primary sources and historical interpretations, and a conclusion. Use your Extended Responses from this chapter as the basis for your paragraphs.

- 'World War I made a revolution in Russia inevitable. By 1917, all that was required was a trigger.' To what extent do you agree with this view?

# THE FEBRUARY REVOLUTION



**Tsarina Alexandra:** 'This is a hooligan movement, young people run and shout that there is no bread, simply to create excitement, along with workers who prevent others from working. If the weather were very cold they would probably all stay at home. But all this will pass and become calm if only the Duma will behave itself.'

In October 1916, Petrograd's chief of police reported: 'We are on the eve of big events, compared with which 1905 was child's play'.<sup>27</sup>

By early 1917, people across the political spectrum were expecting a revolutionary crisis of some sort:

- Liberals—including Alexander Guchkov and Georgi Lvov—had spoken of replacing Tsar Nicholas with a constitutional government. They hoped to put Tsarevich Alexei on the throne.
- Petrograd's Bolsheviks planned for a mass demonstration in late April to coincide with international May Day celebrations.

The mood in the capital was explosive. The winter of 1916–1917 was one of the coldest on record, with temperatures regularly sinking to  $-35^{\circ}\text{C}$ . The average February temperature in Petrograd was  $-14^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Because of the weather:

- private rail travel was temporarily banned as the government prioritised all trains for food deliveries
- heavy snowfalls made deliveries difficult
- supplies of food and fuel became critically low.

As a result, working-class people were cold, hungry and angry. On 9 January 150,000 workers demonstrated in commemoration of Bloody Sunday. Further strike action unfolded in late January and early February.

Tsar Nicholas had spent Christmas with his family at Tsarskoe Selo, a few kilometres from Petrograd. On 22 February he headed back to the front. No one predicted that within a month he would return to Petrograd as a private citizen. The developments that led to Tsar Nicholas giving up the throne were spontaneous, and were not led by recognised revolutionaries. However, soldiers and militant workers were critical in establishing a popular revolutionary movement that successfully challenged the existing order.

**ACTIVITY****CREATIVE RESPONSE**

Carefully examine photographs of the February Revolution. Choose a number of people from these images, then compose speech and thought bubbles that illustrate their thoughts and feelings as the revolution unfolded.

# FEBRUARY REVOLUTION TIMELINE

This is how the February Revolution unfolded.

## 18 FEBRUARY

Workers of Petrograd's Putilov Steel Factory go on strike over pay and conditions. The Putilov workers were well known for their militancy, and their workplace was one of the largest in Petrograd. Their strike brings 40,000 workers onto the street.



Source 5.20 Working-class women protesting during the February Days in Petrograd.

### KEY MOVEMENT

## 22 FEBRUARY

The Putilov strike escalates when management locks workers out. Workers from neighbouring factories join the strike. The strikers denounce the government in their protests. A thaw in the weather sees temperatures rise to 8°C, and many workers are keen to be outdoors after sheltering from the bitter cold in previous weeks.

## 23 FEBRUARY

Thousands of Petrograd's working-class women march from their factories to the city centre to commemorate International Women's Day. (Women suffered greatly because of food shortages, as they had to get up at 3.00 am to queue for bread before working long shifts in factories.) The women's march includes banners with anti-war and anti-government slogans, as well as demands such as 'Give us bread!' As they make their way past different factories, the women call out to men working in heavy industries to join them. They throw snowballs at windows to gain their attention. In solidarity, thousands of working men join the protest march, arming themselves with makeshift weapons in preparation for the clashes they expect to have with police. By evening, 90,000 workers have joined the movement.

## 24 FEBRUARY

The strikes and demonstrations gather momentum, and soon there are over 200,000 workers on the streets. No leading revolutionaries direct the action, but grassroots activists work hard to keep the workers militant. The protesters demand an end to the war—and an end to autocratic rule. Troops make efforts to disperse the crowds. There is fighting between workers and police. At night, Minister for the Interior Alexander Protopopov seeks advice from Rasputin's ghost.

## 25 FEBRUARY

It is Saturday. Workers not already on strike join in—as do office workers, teachers and students. The main roads are full of people, as virtually all industries close.

Cossacks are sent to suppress the movement. However, unlike Bloody Sunday—when Cossack units used their whips and sabres with deadly effect—some Cossack soldiers smile and wave at the crowds. One Cossack unit charges up to group of protesters with their sabres held high—then they pull up short, wink at the workers, and ride off. This encourages the protesters to become bolder.

Rumours spread that Cossack soldiers chased off police who were beating up protesters. Some Cossacks hold their horses in formation across key streets, as ordered, but then allow workers to slip underneath. Workers remove their caps and approach groups of soldiers, calling for them to join the workers' protest.

Tsar Nicholas is informed by Tsarina Alexandra that Petrograd is in the grips of a 'hooligan movement' incited by speeches in the Duma and the warmer weather. Nicholas cables General Sergei Khabalov, commander of the Petrograd garrison, and

orders him to suppress the protests: 'I command you tomorrow to end the disorders in the capital which are not permissible in a time of difficult war with Germany and Austria'.<sup>28</sup>

## 26 FEBRUARY

The protests swell to 300,000 people. There is considerable fighting along Petrograd's main thoroughfares, including Nevsky Prospekt. Officers order soldiers to fire directly into the crowds, causing up to 200 casualties. However, some soldiers disobey orders, and shoot into the air instead, or not at all.

Late in the afternoon Rodzianko cables the tsar: 'The situation is serious. The capital is in a state of anarchy. The Government is paralysed. Transport service and the supply of food and fuel have become completely disrupted. General discontent is growing ... There must be no delay. Any procrastination is tantamount to death.'

That night, soldiers hold heated debates in their garrisons. Their morale is low. Many soldiers regret firing on workers—and vow not to do it again. Mutinies erupt among some *regiments* overnight—with some declaring their support for the protesting workers.

However, Tsar Nicholas is unwilling—or unable—to accept the dire predicament facing his government and orders the dismissal of the Duma.

## 27 FEBRUARY TURNING POINT

In the morning Rodzianko again cables the tsar: 'Situation deteriorating. Imperative to take immediate steps for tomorrow will be too late'. After reading Rodzianko's telegram, Nicholas remarks, 'That fat Rodzianko has again sent me some nonsense to which I will not even reply'.

Instead, Nicholas repeats his order for the dismissal of the Duma. A general strike paralyses the city and there are 400,000 workers on the streets. During the day more and more soldiers fraternise with workers, refusing to obey orders. Mutinies spread throughout the Petrograd garrison. One soldier, Feodor Linde, remembered shouting as he ran through his barracks, 'To arms! To arms! They are killing innocent people, our brothers and sisters!'<sup>29</sup>

Companies of supposed loyal troops are deployed, but simply 'melt away' into the crowds. By the end of the day, about 70,000 soldiers have joined the revolutionary movement, as police stations throughout the city are attacked and overrun by revolutionary crowds.

Members of the Duma dutifully agree to officially suspend meeting, but twelve of them—including Rodzianko, Miliukov and Alexander Kerensky—meet privately to discuss the unfolding crisis. They call themselves the Provisional Committee, and hope to achieve the 'reestablishment of order in the capital'.

Soldiers arrive at the Tauride Palace—where the Provisional Committee meets—and demand that the Duma condone their mutinies. Kerensky delivers a speech in praise of the soldiers' actions, which satisfies them. Reluctantly, the Provisional Committee find that they have become a recognised authority, as government ministers resign from their posts, and some flee the capital.

Another group also meeting at the Tauride Palace is the Provisional Executive Committee of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies. The Soviet's Executive Committee (or leadership group), which is made up of SRs and Mensheviks, invites workers to elect



**Source 5.22** Barricades on the streets of Petrograd, 1917.

**regiment/s** military unit containing two or more battalions

### DID YOU KNOW?

Mikhail Rodzianko liked to boast that he was the fattest man in Russia.

### KEY MOVEMENT

**Source 5.23** A crowd at the entrance of the Tauride Palace during the February Revolution, 1917.



**Petrograd Soviet** workers' council established after the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II; a rival power base to Provisional Government

and send delegates to their assembly scheduled for the evening. The committee vote Menshevik Nikolai Chkheidze its chairman and Kerensky vice-chairman.

The first issue of the soviet's newspaper *Izvestia* (News) is the only source of published information available in Petrograd, and is widely distributed. Many soldiers also arrive for the assembly, making up a sizeable number of the soviet deputies. Early in the proceedings it is decided to call the assembly the **Petrograd Soviet** of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.

Late in the day General Khabarov cables the tsar: 'I beg to inform His Imperial Highness that I am not able to carry out his instructions about the restoration of order in the capital'.<sup>30</sup>

## 28 FEBRUARY

There is widespread surrender of police and tsarist officials across the city, including ministers of the government. Workers and soldiers control the streets. Red flags fly from many buildings, and red ribbons and red armbands are worn by many among the revolutionary crowds. The election of workers' and soldiers' deputies to the soviet continues throughout the day. That night, Tsar Nicholas decides that his presence will bring order to the capital, and he sets off for Petrograd by train. However, his train is unable to reach its destination as revolutionary troops control sections of the line. It is decided to head instead to the small town of Pskov, where a better telegraph will allow for faster communication.

## 1 MARCH

The Provisional Committee resolves to take power as a Provisional Government. When certain conditions are agreed to—such as a general amnesty for mutinous troops—the Petrograd Soviet accepts and supports this development. For the orthodox Marxist leadership of the soviet, Russia's revolution had now correctly entered its bourgeois-democratic stage.

Alarmed that some officers refuse to back the revolution, soldier delegates respond by issuing Soviet Order No. 1: soldiers of the Petrograd garrison will obey the orders of the new government so long as they do not 'contradict' the will of the soviet. Despite their initial agreement, the Provisional Government and Petrograd Soviet have become alternative centres of power.

## 2 MARCH

At Pskov, Tsar Nicholas is met by generals of the High Command and representatives of the Provisional Committee. Alexander Guchkov and Vasili Shulgin—on behalf of the Provisional Committee—outline the situation in the capital to Nicholas, including developments at the Tauride Palace. They impress upon the tsar that it is too late for reform, and that only the formation of a new government will avert further revolutionary turmoil. General Ruzsky implores Nicholas to abdicate. He shares with the tsar telegrams from frontline commanders who insist that Russia can no longer successfully fight the war with Nicholas as head of state. Nicholas frets and delays his decision, but reacts with little emotion. The tsar mutters that he had been 'born for bad fortune'. Around 2.30 pm Nicholas declares: 'If it is necessary that I should abdicate for the good of Russia, then I am ready for it'.<sup>31</sup>

Back in the capital, the Provisional Government is formally announced. Pavel Miliukov decides on the cabinet ministers, scribbling their names on a napkin. That evening Nicholas summons the royal physician and inquires after Alexei's health.



↑ Source 5.24 Petrograd garrison soldiers during the February Revolution.

↓ Tsar Nicholas II.



The doctor tells Nicholas that the prognosis is not good. Abdication would mean that Nicholas will likely go into exile, but separation from his family is unacceptable. Nicholas decides that he will abdicate on behalf of himself and his son. Going against Russian Imperial laws of succession, Nicholas announces that his younger brother Mikhail should be the new monarch. In the final hours of his reign, Nicholas puts his family before all other matters.

### 3 MARCH

The morning after Nicholas' abdication, all members of the Provisional Government meet with Grand Duke Mikhail. Guchkov and Miliukov hope Mikhail will agree to head a constitutional monarchy, but Kerensky argues that there should be a decisive break with the Romanov dynasty. Mikhail asks whether his safety can be guaranteed by the new authorities; Kerensky replies that it cannot. At this, Mikhail declares his support for the Provisional Government and offers his abdication.

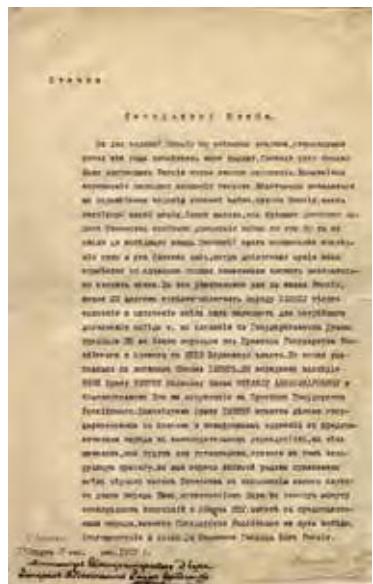
Over ten days, the February Revolution has brought over three hundred years of Romanov rule to an end.

News of 'Glorious February' spread throughout the empire. There are scenes of mass jubilation as the now citizens of Russia celebrate the beginnings of what they assume is a new democratic era. National flags are flown in the non-Russian capitals. Symbols of the tsarist regime—such as statues and crests bearing the double-headed eagle—are defaced or destroyed. Many former police are brutally murdered and dozens of former high officials and ministers are imprisoned.

The new self-proclaimed interim government of Russia was soon given recognition by international governments. The first country to recognise Russia was the United States.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Nicholas Romanov typically recorded quite trivial details in his diary. The day after his abdication he noted the weather and that overnight 'I had a long sound sleep'.



↑ Tsar Nicholas II's abdication statement.

### ACTIVITY

#### TIMELINE

Analyse the chronology of the February Revolution and create your own annotated timeline of the key events. Your timeline should note and explain the following:

- Significant developments that contributed to the escalation of the revolution.
- Contributions by workers and soldiers.
- Actions by significant individuals.

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Identify the dates that correspond to the following developments in the February Revolution:

- Tsarina Alexandra assuring Nicholas that the protests in Petrograd were merely a 'hooligan movement'
- the tsar dismissing the Duma
- the abdication of Tsar Nicholas
- International Women's Day marches
- widespread mutinies by soldiers
- Rodzianko warning the tsar that the 'situation is serious'
- first meeting of the Provisional Committee
- proclamation of Soviet Order No. 1

### DID YOU KNOW?

In one of his last meetings with the tsar before the February Revolution, Duma President Rodzianko tried to convince Nicholas of the mass discontent towards his government. Nicholas asked, 'Is it possible that for twenty-two years I have tried to act for the best, and for twenty-two years it was all a mistake?' Rodzianko replied, 'Yes, your Majesty, for twenty-two years you have followed the wrong course!'

## ACTIVITY

### EVALUATION OF HISTORICAL SOURCES

#### Report by General Alexei Polivanov, Minister of War, July 1915

I consider it my civic and official duty to declare to the Council of Ministers that the country is in danger ... The soldiers are without doubt exhausted by the continued defeats and retreats ... cases of desertion and voluntary surrender to the enemy are becoming more frequent. It is difficult to expect enthusiasm and selflessness from men sent into battle unarmed and ordered to pick up the rifles of their dead comrades ... there is yet one other development especially fought with danger ... there is growing confusion at General Headquarters. It is seized by the fatal psychology of retreat ... back, back, back—that is all that is heard from there.

◀ **Source 5.25** Cited in Ronald Kowalski, *The Russian Revolution 1917–1921* (London: Routledge, 1997), 20.

#### Historian Orlando Figes

... whereas the other European powers managed to adapt and improvise, the tsarist system proved much too rigid and unwieldy, too inflexible and set in its ways, too authoritarian and inefficient, to adapt itself to the situation as it changed. The First World War was a titanic test for the states of Europe—and one that Tsarism failed in a singular and catastrophic way.

◀ **Source 5.26** Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891–1924* (Sydney: Pimlico, 1996), 254.

#### Historian Alan Wood

The tsar foolishly added to his own isolation by assuming personal command of the Russian army in 1915. His unhelpful presence at military headquarters in Mogilev left the conduct of affairs in the capital ... in the hands of his neurotic wife—contemptuously known by the public as nemka ('the German Woman')—and the abominable Rasputin.

◀ **Source 5.27** Alan Wood, *The Origins of the Russian Revolution: 1861–1917* (London: Routledge, 1993), 40.

Using Sources 5.25–5.27 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Outline the significant challenges that faced the tsarist regime during World War I, as presented in the sources.
- 2 Explain how World War I contributed to a revolutionary situation in Russia by 1917.
- 3 Evaluate how flaws in the tsarist regime were made worse by World War I, leading to revolutionary tensions. Use evidence and details from the sources to support your response.

# CHAPTER 5 REVIEW

## KEY SUMMARY POINTS

- Russia entered World War I largely unprepared for a long and substantial conflict.
- There was an initial upsurge of patriotism and loyalty towards the government in response to the war.
- Russia experienced some success against Austrian forces, such as the Battle of Lemberg and the Brusilov Offensive.
- The German military inflicted terrible defeats on the Russian army, including the battles of Tannenberg and Masurian Lakes. By 1915, the Great Retreat had seen Russia lose substantial territory and men.
- Russia's railways were unable to cope with the demands of the war and the needs of the civilian population. Poor economic management and poor financial planning led to widespread shortages of fuel and food by 1916. Living conditions for working-class Russians deteriorated, leading to heightened discontent.
- Non-government bodies—such as the War Industries Committee and Progressive Bloc—tried to support the war effort and improve the government's popular standing. However, Tsar Nicholas rejected all offers of support and reform.
- In August 1915, Tsar Nicholas appointed himself Commander-in-Chief of the Russian army. This increased the influence of Tsarina Alexandra in political matters. The empress was very unpopular, and her decisions led to the government becoming unstable.
- Tsarina Alexandra's closeness to faith healer Rasputin damaged the public perception of the government. However, Rasputin's murder in late 1916 did not improve the political situation.
- A spontaneous revolutionary movement unfolded in February 1917, building from protests at bread shortages and strikes by militant workers. The mutiny of Petrograd soldiers escalated the revolution, and the government lost control of the capital.
- In the midst of the February Revolution, the Provisional Government and Petrograd Soviet emerged as two rival centres of authority—although they had different interests, priorities and representatives.
- Having lost all support, Tsar Nicholas abdicated on behalf of himself and his heir Alexei. Grand Duke Mikhail also rejected the crown, ending three centuries of Romanov rule.

## ACTIVITY

### ESSAY

Write a 600–800-word essay on one of the topics below. Your essay should include an introduction, paragraphs supported by relevant evidence from primary sources and historical interpretations, and a conclusion.

- 'Russia was headed to a revolution with or without World War I. The war simply accelerated the inevitable.' Discuss.
- 'Tsar Nicholas' decision to leave for the front in August 1915 was a significant contribution to his downfall.' To what extent do you agree?
- 'The workers and soldiers of Petrograd brought Tsar Nicholas' government to the brink of collapse; however, it took the High Command and Duma to ensure his abdication.' To what extent do you agree?

- 'By February 1917 the tsarist regime was so unpopular that even a leaderless, spontaneous protest movement was able to topple the government.' Evaluate this statement, with reference to the events of the February Revolution.
- 'Rasputin was a symptom of the failings in the Romanov autocracy, not a cause.' Discuss.
- 'Tsarina Alexandra deserves significant blame for the end of the tsarist regime.' To what extent do you agree?
- 'Tsar Nicholas probably found it easier to abdicate than accept reform.' How did Tsar Nicholas contribute to his own downfall?



# THE DUAL AUTHORITY

(MARCH–OCTOBER 1917)



Source 6.01 Lenin outside Bolshevik headquarters after leaving Finland Station, c. 3 April 1917.

# CHAPTER 6



***'Our tactics: absolute distrust, no support for the Provisional Government.'***

—Vladimir Lenin

The abdication of Tsar Nicholas led to the emergence of the Dual Authority. This peculiar arrangement saw a reluctant and unelected Provisional Government hold formal power, while the soviets—which represented working-class people and soldiers—refused to rule, but held popular support.

The weeks following the February Revolution were filled with hope. Soon, everyone was disappointed. From April 1917 onwards, the Provisional Government lurched from crisis to crisis and its leaders, such as Alexander Kerensky, proved ineffective.

Lenin returned to Russia on the eve of the Provisional Government's first upheaval. Lenin's leadership and the ideas expressed in his April Theses helped to clarify the Bolshevik Party program and set it on course for confrontation with the established authorities. The problems faced by the Provisional Government also created opportunities for Bolshevik agitation to find a receptive audience.

Lenin and his comrades had many setbacks and challenges in their journey to revolutionary triumph. However, by September 1917, the Bolshevik Party had gained mass support. Lenin's ideas of Soviet power, and his consistent opposition to the government and the war, proved to be popular with Russia's soldiers and workers.

Within eight months, the hopes of Democratic February were in tatters, and a revolutionary soviet government seemed likely.

## KEY QUESTIONS

- What were the limitations and weaknesses of the Dual Authority?
- How did Lenin's return and his April Theses contribute to the development of the revolution? What was Trotsky's role in the key developments of 1917?
- How did World War I contribute to political instability and worsening economic conditions under the Provisional Government? What effect did the June Offensive have on these conditions?
- How did key figures in the Provisional Government address challenges or cause problems for the Provisional Government?
- What was the significance of the July Days and the Kornilov Affair in contributing to a revolutionary situation?
- Why did both conservative and moderate socialist parties fail to form effective governments?
- How did the Bolsheviks gain popular support following the July Days?
- Why did a Bolshevik Soviet government seem likely to emerge by October?

# POWER AND AUTHORITY

Alexander Guchkov: 'The Provisional Government does not possess any real power.'

## KEY EVENTS

<b>1 March 1917—</b>	Soviet Order No. 1
<b>2 March 1917—</b>	Proclamation of the Provisional Government
<b>3–4 April 1917—</b>	Lenin's April Theses
<b>20–23 April 1917—</b>	April Crisis
<b>5 May 1917—</b>	First Coalition Government
<b>18 June–2 July 1917—</b>	June Offensive
<b>3–6 July 1917—</b>	The July Days
<b>25 July 1917—</b>	Second Coalition Government
<b>12–15 August 1917—</b>	Moscow State Conference
<b>19–30 August 1917—</b>	Kornilov Affair
<b>13 September 1917—</b>	Bolsheviks gain majority in Petrograd Soviet
<b>14–19 September 1917—</b>	Democratic State Conference
<b>25 September 1917—</b>	Third Coalition Government Trotsky becomes chairman of Petrograd Soviet
<b>7 October 1917—</b>	Preparliament opens

**power vacuum** when an authority or government has lost control and no one has replaced it

**universal suffrage** the right to vote for all citizens

On 2 March 1917, the former Duma deputies of the Provisional Committee proclaimed that they were the Provisional Government of Russia. Appointments to each cabinet post were decided by Pavel Miliukov. Prince Georgi Lvov was named Prime Minister—he was considered a sound choice because of his experience as head of the All-Russian Union of Towns and Zemstvos.

More importantly, Lvov was personable and not a member of any party, and it was hoped that this would reduce potential rivalry within the cabinet. With the exception of Kerensky, the ministers of the first Provisional Government were all liberal conservatives or moderates.

As Miliukov announced the ministers of the new government from the steps of the Tauride Palace, a heckler from the crowd shouted, 'Who appointed you?', to which Miliukov replied, 'We were appointed by the revolution itself!'<sup>1</sup>

Miliukov's snappy response showed the weakness of the Provisional Government—he and his ministers had assumed authority in a **power vacuum** created by the abdication of the tsar. They had formed the government to limit the decline into further social disorder and revolutionary upheaval, not because they wished to rule or wanted power. The Provisional Government was therefore a hesitant and non-elected authority. It had no popular mandate, was limited in its power, and would be judged entirely by its actions.

As a provisional (or temporary) government, the new rulers of Russia declared that they would govern until elections for a Constituent Assembly could decide and formalise constitutional matters.

In the first weeks of its rule, the Provisional Government under Lvov instituted 'a dazzling series of political reforms'.<sup>2</sup> These popular decrees generated considerable goodwill and fulfilled many desired hopes for the new citizens of Russia.

- Trade unions were recognised.
- An eight-hour day was introduced for industrial workers.
- The tsarist police were replaced by a 'people's militia'.
- The Okhrana was abolished.
- Capital punishment was abolished.
- Political prisoners were freed.
- Mutinous soldiers were pardoned for their actions during the February days.
- Freedom of speech, assembly and the press were introduced.
- **Universal suffrage** for all future elections was announced.
- Democratic local governments were established.
- Preparations were made for elections of a Constituent Assembly.

Lenin described Russia after the February Revolution as 'the freest country in the world'.<sup>3</sup>

## SOVIET ORDER NO. 1

The Petrograd Soviet of Workers', Soldiers' and Sailors' Deputies was a further limitation on the authority of the Provisional Government.

On 1 March, the Petrograd Soviet passed its Order No. 1, which stated that the soldiers of the Petrograd garrison were obliged to follow the directives of the government 'only

in such cases as they do not conflict with the orders and resolutions of the Soviet'.<sup>4</sup> This order was intended only for the troops of the capital and was meant to clarify the rights of soldiers.

However, many people interpreted Order No. 1 as a direct challenge to the government's authority over the army in general. The soviets were genuinely popular and representative of workers and soldiers, and the Petrograd Soviet held enormous influence on the streets, factory floors and barracks of the capital.

Despite their power, the soviet leaders resisted calls to take further legislative authority. Soviet Chairman Nikolai Chkheidze was offered a post in the Provisional Government, but rejected it. Following their political ideology, the SRs and most SDs believed that Russia had entered its bourgeois-democratic era, rather than a socialist phase of development.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Trotsky famously said that, 'the country has so radically vomited up the monarchy that it could not ever crawl down the people's throats again'.

## THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT

Prime Minister and  
Minister of the Interior  
Prince Georgi Lvov  
(no party)



Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Pavel Miliukov  
(Kadet)



Minister of War and Navy  
Alexander Guchkov  
(Octobrist)

Minister of Transport  
Nikolai Nekrasov  
(Kadet)



Minister of Trade and Industry  
Alexander Konovalov  
(Progressive)



Minister of Finance  
Mikhail Tereshchenko  
(no party)



Minister of Education  
Andrei Manuilov  
(Kadet)



Ober-Procurator of the Holy Synod [Minister of the Church]  
Vladimir N. Lvov  
(Progressive)



Minister of Agriculture  
Andrei Shingarev  
(Kadet)



Minister of Justice  
Alexander Kerensky  
(SR)



### DID YOU KNOW?

Mikhail Rodzianko was excluded from the Provisional Government because he was considered to be a committed monarchist.

## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1 Who held the following posts in the first Provisional Government?

- Prime Minister
- Minister of War
- Foreign Minister
- Minister of Justice

2 Lenin described Russia under the Provisional Government as 'the freest country in the world'. List five changes that the Provisional Government introduced that support Lenin's view.

3 Copy out this sentence and fill in the blanks, then explain what it means: 'The \_\_\_\_\_ had power without authority; the \_\_\_\_\_ authority without power.'

Essentially, the arrangement of Dual Authority divided power between:

- the Provisional Government that ruled
- the Petrograd Soviet that had popular support.

Or as Kerensky neatly put it, 'The Soviets had power without authority; the Provisional Government authority without power'. His fellow minister Alexander Guchkov admitted that:

The Provisional Government does not possess any real power; and its directives are carried out only to the extent that it is permitted by the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, which enjoys all the essential elements of real power, since the troops, the railroads, the post and telegraph are all in its hands. One can say flatly that the Provisional Government exists only so long as it is permitted by the Soviet.<sup>5</sup>

The Provisional Government was aware that it was provisional and had no mandate to rule, so it left several major issues for the consideration of the Constituent Assembly. Three of these issues would have significant consequences for the government in the coming months. They were:

- Russia's continued involvement in the war.
- land reform
- major economic reforms.

These were critical issues for workers, peasants and soldiers. The fall of Tsar Nicholas led many people to have great hopes in Russia's democratic future. The failure of the Provisional Government to fulfil these expectations would undermine its effectiveness. Meanwhile, Lenin's slogan of 'Peace! Bread! Land!' would become a feature of Bolshevik agitation.

### Proclamation of Provisional Government

Citizens!

The Provisional Committee of the members of the State Duma, with the aid and sympathy of the troops and the population of the capital, has at present scored such a degree of success over the dark forces of the old regime that it can now proceed to a more durable organisation of executive power.

To this end, the Provisional Committee of the State Duma appoints as ministers of the first public cabinet the following persons, the country's confidence in whom is guaranteed by their past public and political activities.

The Cabinet will be guided in its present activity by the following principles:

Full and immediate amnesty in all political and religious cases, including terrorist attempts, military uprising and agrarian offences, and so forth.

Freedom of speech, the press, unions, assembly, and strikes, with the extension of political freedoms to servicemen within limits permitted by military and technical conditions.

Abolition of all class, religious, and national restrictions.

Immediate preparations for the convocation—on the basis of universal, equal, direct and secret suffrage—of a Constituent Assembly which will establish the form of government and the constitution of the country.

Replacement of the police by a people's militia with an elected command, subordinate to the organs of local self-government.

Elections to the organs of local self-government on the basis of universal, direct, equal, and secret ballot.

Non-disarmament and non-transfer from Petrograd of the military units that participated in the revolutionary movement.

Along with the preservation of strict military discipline in the ranks and during performance of military duty, the abolition of all restrictions upon the soldiers' enjoyment of those public rights that have been granted to all other citizens. The Provisional Government considers it its duty to add that it by no means intends to use the military situation to delay in any way the realisation of the above reforms and measures.

*Chairman of the State Duma: M.V. Rodzianko*

*Chairman of the Council of Ministers: Prince G.E. Lvov*

*Ministers: P.N. Miliukov, N.V. Nekrosov, A.I. Konovalov, A.A. Manuilov, M.I. Tereshchenko, V.N. Lvov, A.I. Shingarev, A.F. Kerensky.*

 **Source 6.02** Cited in George Vernadsky, ed., *A Source Book for Russian History from Early Times to 1917* (London: Yale University Press, 1972), 881–882.

**Soviet Order No. 1****KEY SOURCE**

To the garrison of the Petrograd region, all soldiers of the guards, army, artillery, and navy, for your immediate and precise execution; and to the workers of Petrograd, for your information.

The Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies hereby orders:

- 1) All companies, battalions, regiments, artillery depots, batteries, squadrons, and detachments of the various military services, and on ships of the navy—immediately choose committees of elected representatives from the lower ranks of the aforementioned military units.
- 2) All military units that have not yet elected their representatives to the Soviet of Workers' Deputies shall elect one representative from each company—who will appear with appropriate credentials at the building of the State Duma by 10 am on March 2.
- 3) In all its political activities, each military unit will be subordinate to the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies and its committees.
- 4) Orders from the Military Commission of the State Duma [the Provisional Government] may be executed only in cases where they do not contradict the orders and decisions of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.
- 5) All categories of weapons, such as rifles, machine guns, armoured cars, etc.—shall be at the disposal and under the control of the company and battalion committees, and in no case should be issued to officers, even at their demand.
- 6) While on-duty and in the performance of their professional obligations, soldiers must observe the strictest military discipline, but while off-duty and in their political, civilian, and private life, soldiers in no way may be denied those rights that all citizens enjoy.

In particular, standing at attention and compulsory saluting while off-duty are abolished.

- 7) Likewise abolished are titles of officers: Your Excellency, Your Honour, etc., to be replaced with: Mr. General, Mr. Colonel, etc.

Rude treatment of soldiers of all military ranks, and in particular, addressing them using the [informal second-person pronoun] '*thou*', is prohibited, and any violations of this prohibition, as well as all misunderstandings between officers and soldiers, must be communicated to the company committees.

*By the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies*

◀ **Source 6.03** Cited by International Committee of the Fourth International, *World Socialist Website*, [www.wsws.org/en/articles/2017/03/13/orde-m13.html](http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2017/03/13/orde-m13.html)

**ACTIVITY****HISTORICAL SOURCES**

Using Sources 6.02 and 6.03 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Outline the popular changes instituted by the Provisional Government when it came to power.
- 2 Explain how the Provisional Government lacked effective power.
- 3 Evaluate how the Dual Authority contributed to the development of a revolutionary situation. Use evidence to support your response.

***thou*** Russian has two forms of the personal pronoun 'you'. One is informal used when addressing people you know very well, and for speaking to children. The other is formal and more polite. The soldiers wanted to be addressed by the formal 'you'.

**LENIN'S RETURN TO RUSSIA****KEY EVENT**

**Vladimir Lenin: 'Our tactics: absolute distrust, no support for the Provisional Government.'**

At the time of the February Revolution, the leaders of Russia's revolutionary parties were either in prison, overseas, or exiled in Siberia. They had little influence on events in Petrograd during or immediately after the revolution:

- Trotsky was in New York
- Lenin and Martov were in Zurich.

On hearing the news about Tsar Nicholas' abdication, exiled revolutionaries returned to Petrograd as quickly as they could.

In late March, Josef Stalin and Lev Kamenev arrived. They were the first of the leading Bolsheviks to return, and both came from exile in Siberia. Then, much to the disgust

**Pravda** translates as 'truth'; *Pravda* was the main Bolshevik newspaper

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Having read a speech by Chkheidze that suggested an agreement of views between the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, Lenin shouted at his wife Krupskaya: 'It's simply shit!' Shocked at his outburst she scolded, 'Vladimir, what language!' Lenin was unapologetic: 'I repeat: shit!'

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Winston Churchill famously described the German government's cooperation in Lenin's return to Russia: 'They turned upon Russia the most grisly of weapons. They transported Lenin in a sealed truck like a plague bacillus from Switzerland to Russia.'

of lower-level party activists, both Stalin and Kamenev expressed cautious support for the Provisional Government in editorials they wrote for *Pravda*. Under the leadership of Stalin and Kamenev, the position of the Bolsheviks was similar to that of the Mensheviks and SRs. They even discussed moves to reconcile with the Mensheviks.

When the news of reconciling with Mensheviks reached Lenin, he exploded in fury. However, because he was a Russian citizen, Lenin was barred from travelling through German-occupied territory, so the only thing he could do was write angry letters. Allied nations would not issue travel papers to a well known anti-war revolutionary, so it seemed he would be stuck in Switzerland for some time.

Desperate to return and immerse himself in Russian politics, Lenin considered a variety of unlikely schemes to pass through German territory, including:

- hiring an aircraft and a pilot—although the journey would have been incredibly risky
- avoiding questions about his nationality by pretending to be unable to hear or speak.

However, comrades with connections to the broader Swiss socialist movement—who, in turn, had shady contacts with the German government—came to Lenin's rescue. An agreement was made to allow Lenin and thirty-one other Bolsheviks diplomatic immunity to travel by train through German territory in a 'sealed' carriage, without needing passport checks or travel documents. Among those accompanying Lenin were his wife Nadezhda Krupskaya, Grigory Zinoviev, Inessa Armand and Karl Radek. During the journey Lenin composed his thoughts on the political situation in Russia—particularly his ideas on how the Bolsheviks should approach the issues of the day.

**Kronstadt** island naval base off the coast of Petrograd



↑ **Source 6.04** *Lenin at the Finland Station* by M.G. Sokolov. This painting is a 1930s version of a deep fake. It shows Stalin standing behind Lenin, even though Stalin was not on that train in 1917.

## THE FINLAND STATION

Lenin's 'sealed' train pulled into Petrograd's Finland Station on the evening of 3 April 1917, where a crowd of workers and soldiers awaited his homecoming. An honour guard of **Kronstadt** sailors stood at attention, and a delegation of soviet leaders was on hand to meet him.

As Lenin stepped onto the platform, a brass band struck up a revolutionary anthem. Soviet Chairman Nikolai Chkheidze gave a brief welcome speech and expressed his hope that Lenin would work alongside other socialist leaders to support Russia's new democracy.

However, Lenin ignored Chkheidze, and climbed onto an armoured car to deliver his own speech. Against a backdrop of red flags, and lit up by spotlights, Lenin shouted a greeting: 'Comrades, soldiers, sailors and workers!' he declared. 'The imperialist war is the beginning of civil war throughout Europe ... Long live the worldwide socialist revolution!'<sup>16</sup> Lenin was then led to the headquarters of the Bolshevik party in a triumphant procession of workers, soldiers and sailors.

## THE APRIL THESES

The following day, Lenin addressed an assembly of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks at the Tauride Palace. This gathering of SDs was expected to pass joint resolutions and hear speeches on the theme of unity. There was much anticipation for what Lenin would have to say.

However, according to Trotsky, Lenin's speech—which outlined what became known as his April Theses—‘produced the impression of an exploding bomb’.<sup>7</sup> Menshevik Nikolai Sukhanov said, ‘I cannot forget that speech, like a flash of lightning, which shook and astonished not only me ... but also the true believers ... no one had expected anything like it.’<sup>8</sup>

Lenin's April Theses outlined a range of proposals and ideas—but it was his points about the war, and his attitude towards the government and the role of the soviets that caused particular uproar.

Lenin denounced the ‘capitalist nature’ of the Provisional Government and its continued commitment to the ‘predatory imperialist’ war. According to Lenin, the Bolsheviks should offer ‘no support for the Provisional Government; the utter falsity of all its promises should be made clear’.<sup>9</sup> The current soviet position regarding the war—called **Revolutionary Defencism**—was also flawed.

Most Marxists accepted the February Revolution as the correct historical progression for Russia to follow. However, Lenin argued for a second revolution that would place power in the hands of the workers. This revolution to come would be international and socialist, and the soviets would be the foundation of a new revolutionary government. The Bolsheviks therefore needed to focus their energy on propaganda and agitation—their immediate task was to ‘patiently, insistently and systematically’ explain the new party program to the masses.

Speaker after speaker denounced Lenin. Sukhanov recalled the reaction of Menshevik Alexander Bogdanov: ‘This is the ravings of a madman! It’s indecent to applaud this rubbish!’ Sukhanov himself admitted, ‘I felt as though I had been beaten about the head’.<sup>10</sup>

Lenin relished the battle of ideas unleashed by his theses. In the coming days he gave numerous speeches and engaged in heated debates. Lenin possessed incredible self-belief and an iron will—and he was determined to win the party over to his program. He asked the doubters: ‘You are afraid to go back on your old memories? But the time has come to change our linen; we’ve got to take off the old dirty shirt and put on a new one! ... Have done with greetings and resolutions! It’s time to get down to business.’<sup>11</sup>

Some Bolsheviks could not agree with Lenin’s proposals and left the party. However, those Bolsheviks who had disagreed with Stalin and Kamenev’s direction—such as Aleksandr Shlyapnikov and Alexandra Kollontai—wholeheartedly supported the new program. Lenin’s ideas were electric in their impact, and provided a radical manifesto that would appeal to workers and soldiers. Trotsky described it as a case of ‘re-arming the Bolshevik ranks’.<sup>12</sup> Lenin also developed clear slogans to express the essence of his ideas to the working masses:

- ‘Peace! Bread! Land!’
- ‘Turn the imperialist war into a **civil war!**’
- ‘All power to the Soviets!’

It took some time—and considerable intimidation—but by the end of the month Lenin had secured broad backing from the party for his April Theses. This was of immense significance. The Bolsheviks were now the political party most hostile to the government and readily associated with radical class rhetoric and anti-war sentiment.

When Prime Minister Lvov asked about Lenin’s arrival, Menshevik Matvey Skobelev assured him that Lenin was ‘a has-been’ with ‘lunatic ideas’.<sup>13</sup> However, popular anger at the government and its handling of the war would soon reveal the attraction of Lenin’s ideas. According to historian Alexander Rabinowitch, ‘Tailoring the Bolshevik programme so that it would reflect popular aspirations was one of Lenin’s most important contributions to the development of the revolution’.<sup>14</sup>

**Revolutionary Defencism**  
war waged in defence of new revolutionary government

### ACTIVITY

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Where was Lenin at the time of the February Revolution?
- 2 How did Lenin return to Russia?
- 3 When did Lenin deliver his April Theses?
- 4 Outline three or more key ideas expressed in the April Theses.
- 5 Quote one or more perspectives that highlight negative reactions to Lenin’s ideas.
- 6 Note the slogans Lenin developed to summarise the main ideas of the April Theses.

**civil war** in this context ‘civil’ war meant ‘class’ war, according to Lenin

→ **Source 6.05** Vladimir Lenin, 'The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution' (the 'April Theses'), trans. Isaacs Bernard, *Marxists Internet Archive*, [www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/apr/04.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/apr/04.htm). [Original source: *Pravda*, no. 26, 7 April 1917.]

#### KEY SOURCE

### Lenin's April Theses, 4 April 1917

1) In our attitude towards the war, which under the new [provisional] government of Lvov and Co. unquestionably remains on Russia's part a predatory imperialist war owing to the capitalist nature of that government, not the slightest concession to 'revolutionary defencism' is permissible.

The class-conscious proletariat can give its consent to a revolutionary war, which would really justify revolutionary defencism, only on condition: (a) that the power pass to the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants aligned with the proletariat; (b) that all annexations be renounced in deed and not in word; (c) that a complete break be effected in actual fact with all capitalist interests ...

2) The specific feature of the present situation in Russia is that the country is passing from the first stage of the revolution—which, owing to the insufficient class-consciousness and organisation of the proletariat, placed power in the hands of the bourgeoisie—to its second stage, which must place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants ... This peculiar situation demands of us an ability to adapt ourselves to the special conditions of Party work among unprecedentedly large masses of proletarians who have just awakened to political life.

3) No support for the Provisional Government; the utter falsity of all its promises should be made clear, particularly of those relating to the renunciation of annexations ...

4) ... The masses must be made to see that the Soviets of Workers' Deputies are the only possible form of revolutionary government, and that therefore our task is, as long as this government yields to the influence of the bourgeoisie, to present a patient, systematic, and persistent explanation of the errors of their tactics, an explanation especially adapted to the practical needs of the masses ...

As long as we are in the minority we carry on the work of criticising and exposing errors and at the same time we preach the necessity of transferring the entire state power to the Soviets of Workers' Deputies, so that the people may overcome their mistakes by experience.

5) Not a parliamentary republic—to return to a parliamentary republic from the Soviets of Workers' Deputies would be a retrograde step—but a republic of Soviets of Workers', Agricultural Labourers' and Peasants' Deputies throughout the country, from top to bottom.

Abolition of the police, the army and the bureaucracy.

The salaries of all officials, all of whom are elective and displaceable at any time, not to exceed the average wage of a competent worker ...

6) ... Confiscation of all landed estates.

Nationalisation of all lands in the country, the land to be disposed of by the local Soviets of Agricultural Labourers' and Peasants' Deputies ...

7) The immediate union of all banks in the country into a single national bank, and the institution of control over it by the Soviet of Workers' Deputies.

8) It is not our immediate task to 'introduce' socialism, but only to bring social production and the distribution of products at once under the control of the Soviets of Workers' Deputies.

9) Party tasks:

(a) Immediate convocation of a Party congress;

(b) Alteration of the Party Programme, mainly:

(1) On the question of imperialism and the imperialist war;

(2) On our attitude towards the state and our demand for a 'commune state';

(3) Amendment of our out-of-date minimum programme;

(c) Change of the Party's name.

10) A new International.

### ACTIVITY



#### HISTORICAL SOURCES

Using Sources 6.05 and 6.06 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Outline the main ideas expressed in Lenin's April Theses.
- 2 Explain the impact of the April Theses on the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in 1917.
- 3 Analyse the significance of Lenin's return and his April Theses as a contribution to the Russian Revolution. Use evidence to support your response.

### Historian Robert Service

Lenin's words disconcerted everyone who heard them that night; many listeners—or at least those who were close enough to him—thought he had gone off his head ... Just a few colleagues were pleased by what he had said at the Finland Station. Among these were Alexandra Kollontai and Alexander Shlyapnikov. A lot of Bolsheviks of lesser standing in the faction agreed, having been appalled by the agreement of most Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries and indeed many Bolsheviks to lend conditional support to the Provisional Government ... The man who stood high on the armored car in the dead of night had not been a lone wolf; he was part of a pack that would get noisier and stronger. Bolshevism was finding its confidence again. A leader had returned to Petrograd who would give clarity to Bolshevik ideas and add resolve to Bolshevik practical campaigns.

 **Source 6.06** Robert Service, *Lenin: A Biography* (London: Pan Books, 2002), 261–262.



 **Source 6.07** *Lenin on the train to the Finland Station in April 1917* by Aleksandr M. Lopukhov, 1953–1954.

## WAR AND THE APRIL CRISIS

Alexander Kerensky: 'The Old regime has left everything in chaos.'

The abdication of Tsar Nicholas did not resolve any of Russia's problems arising from World War I, as:

- troop morale was low
- the economy was under great strain
- inflation and shortages made life very difficult for working people
- the treasury inherited from the Romanov regime was bankrupt.

Allied governments gave financial aid to the Provisional Government, but on one condition—that peace on the Eastern Front would not be considered until victory over Germany was assured.

The ministers of the Provisional Government were divided over their views of the war—Kerensky and Miliukov were especially at odds—so they initially left the question of peace as one of the issues for the Constituent Assembly to consider. Historian Michael Lynch highlights the paradox this created: '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'.<sup>15</sup>

## REVOLUTIONARY DEFENSISM

On 20 March—two weeks before Lenin arrived at the Finland Station—another major figure in the Russian Marxist movement had returned to Petrograd: Irakli Tsereteli.

Tsereteli was a leading Menshevik, and his welcome reception was much like Lenin's. A band, soviet delegates and a large crowd greeted his return from Siberia. Tsereteli was a charismatic and dynamic influence in Marxist circles, and was well known for his fiery *oratory*.

### ACTIVITY

#### EXTENDED RESPONSE

How did the April Crisis expose the ineffectiveness of the Provisional Government? Use evidence to support your response.

*oratory* public speaking



↑ Irakli Tsereteli.

**indemnities** taking over territories and imposing reparation payments (compensation)

Tsereteli joined the Soviet Executive Committee and had an immediate impact on the soviet leadership. He worked closely with Chairman Nikolai Chkheidze and Matvey Skobelev to give greater clarity, purpose, and consistency to the soviet's position on key issues. Tsereteli encouraged cooperation and unity between socialists—much to Lenin's disgust. He and Kamenev were on good terms.

According to Tsereteli, a socialist revolution was not yet historically appropriate for Russia: 'The time has not yet come to implement the end objectives of the proletariat'.<sup>16</sup> The soviet and its socialist leaders should therefore cooperate with the Provisional Government of the 'progressive bourgeoisie' in building Russia's new democratic state.

Tsereteli's most significant contribution was in shaping the soviet policy towards the war. Tsereteli argued that it was acceptable for Russia to remain in the war, provided its objectives did not include 'annexations and **indemnities**': a war to defend the 'revolutionary democracy' against German military aggression was acceptable, but a war for imperialist gains was not. At the same time, a fair and non-punitive peace should be sought at the most opportune moment.

This policy became known as Revolutionary Defencism. 'It was a bold, dramatic program', argues historian Rex Wade, 'perfectly suited to the moment ... and provided a coherent policy ... on the most pressing issue of the time'.<sup>17</sup>

## DECLARATION OF WAR AIMs

On 14 March, the Petrograd Soviet issued an 'Appeal to the Peoples of the World', which outlined its general desire for a peace 'without annexations or indemnities'. This was given further clarification by Tsereteli's development of Revolutionary Defencism.

The publication of the soviet's stance regarding the war put pressure on the government to publicly declare its own war aims. Tsereteli hoped that the government would align its view of the war with the soviet. Lvov and Kerensky were in favour of Tsereteli's position, but Minister of War Alexander Guchkov and Foreign Minister Pavel Miliukov disagreed.

Miliukov wanted to continue the war through to victory. If Germany was defeated, Russia would be able to annex Constantinople and the Dardanelles Strait, which would give them access to the Mediterranean Sea—an enormous economic and strategic benefit (to which the Allies had already agreed in a secret treaty signed in 1915). To Miliukov, having a revolution should not mean that Russia would lose the Dardanelles. However, his views were in the minority, and were not reflected in the Provisional Government's Declaration of War Aims released on 27 March.

→ **Source 6.08** Cited in Ronald Kowalski, *The Russian Revolution 1917–1921* (London: Routledge, 1997), 51.

### Declaration of War Aims

Leaving to the will of the people, in close union with our allies, the final solution of all questions linked with the world war and its end, the Provisional Government considers it its right and duty now to declare that the objective of free Russia is not the domination of other nations, nor the expropriation [seizure] of their property, nor the forcible seizure of foreign territories, but the ratification [formal agreement] of a stable peace on the basis of national self-determination. The Russian people is not seeking the reinforcement of its external power at the expense of other nations ... But the Russian people will not allow its native land to emerge from the great war humbled and sapped of its life strength.

## MILIUKOV'S NOTE

Miliukov was concerned that the Declaration of War Aims might lead the Allies to assume that Russia intended to withdraw from the war in the near future.

So on 18 April he drafted a note to accompany copies of the declaration that had been prepared for Allied governments and the foreign press. The note confirmed the Provisional Government's desire 'to bring the world war to a decisive victory' and that 'the leading democracies will find a way to establish those guarantees and sanctions which are required'.<sup>18</sup> Miliukov readily repeated these intentions in interviews with foreign journalists.

Workers and soldiers reacted with fury when they read Miliukov's Note, which was leaked to the Russian press and widely publicised in socialist newspapers. The references to 'decisive victory' and 'guarantees and sanctions' were particularly provocative. A public uproar ensued.

From 20 April, massive protests rocked Petrograd. Crowds of more than 25,000 protesters—many of them armed soldiers—carried banners declaring 'Down with Miliukov and Guchkov!' and 'Down with the Imperialist War!'

Other slogans attacked the Provisional Government and even called for the soviet to take power. Several people were killed in clashes between anti-government and pro-government protesters. Soviet deputies were enraged. Chkhheidze remarked to Tsereteli in disgust, 'Miliukov is the evil genius of the Revolution'.<sup>19</sup> However, the Soviet Executive Committee had no desire to topple the government.

### DID YOU KNOW?

During the April Crisis, protesters and the socialist press referred to the Foreign Minister as Miliukov of the Dardanelles, or in Russian, *Miliukov-Dardannelski*.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Tsereteli and Chkhheidze were both of Georgian background. Stalin was also a Georgian.

## THE APRIL CRISIS

Lenin was cautious in his response to the April Crisis. The ordinary members of the Bolshevik Party had a radicalising influence on the protests, but the Bolsheviks did not have a majority in the soviets. Lenin did not feel the time was right for an all-out attack on the government.

However, the protests and anger at the government brought new supporters to the party and gave validity to the Bolshevik program. And where the April Theses had seemed too radical just a few weeks earlier, now many people thought that Lenin's ideas were perceptive and appropriate.

According to historian James White, the April Crisis 'presented the Bolsheviks with a marvelous opportunity to discredit the Provisional Government and the moderate socialists at the same time by showing that the government continued to pursue imperialist aims'.<sup>20</sup>

The Commander of the Petrograd garrison, General Lavr Kornilov, wanted to disperse the crowds by using troops loyal to the government. However, the ministers were appalled by the thought of using violent means to regain authority.

Prime Minister Lvov held crisis talks with Tsereteli and Chkhheidze, who agreed to use the influence of the soviet to diffuse the crisis. The unrest came to an end when the Soviet Executive Committee issued a three-day ban on all demonstrations, and ordered soldiers to not leave their barracks unless instructed by the soviet. By 23 April the streets of Petrograd were calm.

Disaster was averted—but the April Crisis made it clear that the soviet had more authority over the Petrograd garrison than the government. The popular goodwill that had followed the February Revolution was also gone.

## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 According to Tsereteli's policy of Revolutionary Defencism, Russia could continue the war so long as the aims of the conflict did not include ' \_\_\_ and \_\_\_ '.
- 2 When did the soviet make its 'Appeal to the Peoples of the World'?
- 3 How did Miliukov's Note appear to contradict the Provisional Government's Declaration of War Aims?
- 4 On what date did the April Crisis protests begin? Approximately how many people were involved in the protests?
- 5 What were the main demands of the protesters?
- 6 How did the Soviet Executive Committee defuse the April Crisis?
- 7 Name the significant Mensheviks and SRs who became ministers in the First Coalition Provisional Government.

## COALITION GOVERNMENT

The mass discontent of late April left Minister of War Guchkov and Minister of Foreign Affairs Miliukov in untenable positions. Guchkov resigned on 29 April, followed by Miliukov three days later.

The departures of Guchkov and Miliukov led to a significant change in the nature of the Dual Authority. To shore up support and restore a degree of legitimacy to the revolutionary democracy, Prime Minister Lvov urged soviet leaders to join the government.

After exhaustive negotiations, six socialists agreed to join a coalition government on 5 May, alongside four Kadets and a number of non-party ministers:

- Irakli Tsereteli headed the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs (Menshevik)
- Matvey Skobelev was Minister of Labour (Menshevik)
- Viktor Chernov was appointed Minister of Agriculture (SR)
- Mikhail Tereshchenko took up the Foreign Affairs portfolio
- Alexander Kerensky became Minister of War (SR)
- Georgi Lvov continued as Prime Minister.

This second incarnation of the Provisional Government was known as the First Coalition Government. Tsereteli and his comrades hoped that by joining the coalition they could influence the Provisional Government towards more populist policies—especially regarding the war and land reform.

However, coming to agreements on key issues with their Kadet colleagues would be a challenge. But, more importantly, when the Menshevik and SRs in the coalition failed to meet popular expectations, they were politically tarnished by their association with the 'bourgeois' ministers.

## ACTIVITY

### HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION

#### Historian Orlando Figes

The formation of the Coalition, which had been intended to reinforce the democratic centre, had the opposite effect. It accelerated the political and social polarization that led to ... October. On the one hand, most of the provincial rank and file of the Kadets moved with their party leader Miliukov, who had resigned on 4 May, into right-wing opposition against the coalition government. Increasingly they abandoned their liberal self-image as the party of the nation as a whole and began to portray themselves as a party for the defence of bourgeois class interests, property rights, law and order and the Russian Empire. Within the Soviet camp, on the other hand, there was a steady drift to the Left as the mass of the workers and peasants became increasingly disillusioned with the failure of the socialists to use their position in the government to speed up the process of social reform or to bring about a democratic peace ... the initiative for the revolution, for bread, land and peace, was taken up by the Bolsheviks.

Using Source 6.09 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Outline how most of the Kadets reacted to the formation of the Coalition Provisional Government.
- 2 What was the impact on the parties of the soviet, according to Figes?
- 3 Using the extract and further evidence, explain the outcome of the April Crisis in contributing to a revolutionary situation in 1917.

← **Source 6.09** Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891–1924* (Sydney: Pimlico, 1996), 384.

## IRAKLI TSERETELI, 1881–1960

Irakli Tsereteli was born and raised in Georgia. His father was a radical intellectual, and several of his family were members of Georgian socialist movements. Like Lenin, Tsereteli studied law and was first drawn to radical politics as a university student. However, in 1902 he was arrested for leading student demonstrations and sentenced to exile in Siberia.

While in exile, Tsereteli was introduced to Marxism, and on his return to Georgia he joined the Tiflis branch of the SDs, where he became editor of the party's Georgian newspaper. Tsereteli argued against the ideas of Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?* and aligned himself with the Menshevik faction.

In 1907, Tsereteli was elected to the Second Duma and appointed chairman of the SD deputies. He was twenty-five at the time—the youngest member of the Duma. His passionate speeches made him a national figure. When the Second Duma was dissolved in June 1907, Tsereteli was arrested and sentenced to five years imprisonment. In 1913 he was released and exiled to Irkutsk in Siberia. He continued to be a prolific writer and edited a number of journals—his articles ensured his continued importance in the Russian Marxist movement, even while he was in exile.

During World War I, Tsereteli called for an international socialist solution to end the conflict. Following the February Revolution, he returned to Petrograd and joined the Soviet Executive Committee. Tsereteli was one of the most influential figures in the soviet and was largely responsible for developing the policy of Revolutionary Defencism.

In May 1917, he joined the First Coalition Provisional Government as Minister for Posts and Telegraphs. This was a relatively minor position, but it allowed Tsereteli to continue his role in the soviet. Prime Minister Lvov greatly valued Tsereteli for his efforts in liaising between the government and the soviet. In July he served a brief term as Minister for the Interior in the Second Coalition Government.

However, when Trotsky became soviet chairman in September 1917, Tsereteli was forced from the Soviet Executive Committee. In October he left for Georgia in October for family reasons, but returned to Petrograd in early 1918 as a delegate to the Constituent Assembly. As the chief spokesperson for the Mensheviks, Tsereteli gave a fiery condemnation of Bolshevik actions since October.

When the Bolsheviks issued orders for Tsereteli's arrest, he fled to Georgia. In the coming years he served in a number of diplomatic roles representing Georgian interests, including the 1919 Paris Peace Conference. Following the *Red Army* invasion of 1921, Tsereteli fled Georgia for France, and then the USA. Although he has often been overlooked, historian Ron Suny argues that, 'No figure in the revolution has been as greatly underestimated as the Georgian Menshevik Irakli Tsereteli'.<sup>21</sup>

**Red Army** the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army was founded during the Civil War by Leon Trotsky in February 1918. In 1922 it became the army of the Soviet Union. 'Red' symbolises the blood of the workers in their struggle against capitalism

## THE JUNE OFFENSIVE

**Alexander Kerensky:** 'In the name of the salvation of free Russia, you will go where your commanders and your Government send you. On your bayonet-points you will be bearing peace, truth and justice. You will go forward in close ranks, kept firm by the discipline of your duty and your supreme love for the revolution and your country.'

When Tsereteli and the other socialists joined the Provisional Government they had hoped to steer it towards a peace agreement. However, they instead found themselves involved in preparations for a renewed military offensive.

In early May, the government reiterated its previous position regarding the war, but Minister of War Alexander Kerensky was alarmed by reports from frontline commanders that discipline was breaking down. Meanwhile, Allied governments were pressing Russia to maintain its war effort. The collapse of the Russian army would endanger the revolution and could lead to a German victory on the Western Front. Kerensky was determined to avoid both outcomes.

## PERSUADER-IN-CHIEF



Source 6.10 Kerensky addressing troops, May 1917.

On 14 May 1917, Kerensky announced that an offensive was required to restore the fighting capacity and morale of the Russian military. He set out on a three-week tour of the front to raise the spirits of the troops and convince them of their duty to fight for the revolution. Kerensky held huge open-air assemblies with audiences that were generally receptive to his ideas. He even had flowers thrown at his car when he arrived at some meetings.

Kerensky was a flamboyant and captivating speaker. Dubbed the 'Supreme Persuader-in-Chief' by sceptical officers, his speeches were full of dramatic gestures, rousing slogans and emotive imagery. Sometimes he became so excited during his speeches that he would faint. On one occasion he declared to his audience:

You are the freest soldiers in the world. Must you not show the world that the system on which the army is now based [democracy] is the best system? Our army under the monarchy accomplished heroic deeds; will it be a flock of sheep under the republic? I summon you forward, to the struggle of freedom, not to a feast, but to death. We, revolutionaries, have the right to death.<sup>22</sup>

The immediate response was usually enthusiastic, and Kerensky was confident that his charismatic performances had the desired effect. However, their impact usually faded soon after he left.

## THE OFFENSIVE BEGINS

On 22 May General Brusilov was made Commander-in-Chief, replacing General Alekseev. Brusilov was noted for his preparedness and aggressive tactics. He brought this approach to the so-called June Offensive, which began on 18 June. The focus was the Southwestern Front at Galicia—the same location as the Brusilov Offensive of 1916.

Russian troops made significant advances in the early days of the campaign, when heavy artillery bombardment allowed Russian troops to push 30 kilometres into Austrian territory. However, this advance came at a cost of 40,000 men. Many of the soldiers who died were from elite units and were the most disciplined and reliable of Brusilov's men. Reserve troops refused to advance further in support, and by 2 July the offensive had stalled.

## GERMAN COUNTER-OFFENSIVE

The German military came to the aid of the Austrians, and launched a counter-offensive on 6 July that had devastating consequences, such as:

- the whole Russian army began to retreat in panic
- roads were choked with deserters

- the number of deserters increased each day
- thousands of officers were murdered by their men.

Officially, 170,000 Russian soldiers fled the front during the June Offensive—but the real number is likely to be much higher.<sup>23</sup> Historian Orlando Figes puts the figure at 400,000 soldiers.<sup>24</sup> The German army met little resistance, and by late July had advanced 230 kilometres.

The June Offensive was a military disaster and a fiasco for the Provisional Government because:

- the morale of the Russian military was eroded
- the theory of Revolutionary Defencism was discredited
- the coalition of soviet and Provisional Government was put under great strain
- public confidence in the government plummeted
- Bolshevik and SR agitators now had a ready audience for their denunciations of the ‘imperialist’ war.

The June Offensive was only the first of several crises that would plague the Provisional Government over the summer of 1917.

## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 What position did Kerensky have in the Provisional Government at the time of the June Offensive?
- 2 Why was Kerensky called the ‘Supreme Persuader-in-Chief’?
- 3 Who commanded the June Offensive?
- 4 When did the June Offensive begin? When did the Russian advance come to a halt?
- 5 Identify two or more outcomes of the June Offensive that were challenges for the Provisional Government.

## ACTIVITY

### ESSAY

Write a 600–800-word essay on the topic below. Your essay should include an introduction, paragraphs supported by relevant evidence from primary sources and historical interpretations, and a conclusion.

- ‘World War I was significant in the demise of both the tsarist and Provisional Governments.’ Discuss.

# THE JULY DAYS

◀ KEY DEVELOPMENT

**Vladimir Lenin:** ‘One wrong move on our part can wreck everything. If we were not able to seize power, it is naïve to think that we would be able to hold it. In the Soviets of both capitals we are an insignificant minority. This is a basic fact. Events should not be anticipated. Time is on our side.’

As the debacle of the June Offensive unfolded, the Provisional Government faced increasing popular discontent.

Economic conditions deteriorated, which heightened class tensions in the cities. Petrograd seethed through the summer of 1917, and the number of strikes steadily increased. Responding to revolutionary agitation, many workers believed the ‘capitalist bourgeoisie’ were to blame for the continuation of the war and for their everyday hardships.

This social division led to a growing sense of ‘us’ and ‘them’, and was reflected in the increasing use of ‘comrade’ rather than ‘citizen’ as the preferred term of address among workers and soldiers.<sup>25</sup> Factory owners were alarmed by the rise in working-class militancy and urged the government to act to protect their interests. The breakdown of authority and order in the countryside stoked these fears.

The soldiers deserting the front were accustomed to violence, and had been brutalised by their experiences in the trenches. They radicalised the push for land reform as they returned to their villages. Lenin referred to it as a case of 'voting with their feet'. Increasing numbers of estates belonging to the nobility were seized by peasants:

- manor houses were torched
- staff were run off estates
- property was shared out among the villagers
- landowners who resisted were beaten or killed.

The government denounced land seizures as 'unlawful' and urged peasants to wait for the Constituent Assembly. Land Committees investigated and discussed the issue. Agricultural Minister Chernov hoped to present the assembly with a detailed program of reform—but peasants paid little attention to these initiatives. The government was losing its authority over the countryside, and rural disturbances made the problems with the grain supply even worse.

Meanwhile, nationalities started pushing for greater autonomy. This caused tensions within the coalition. A council of political parties, called the Rada, was established in the Ukraine in March 1917. The Rada acted as parliament and represented Ukrainian interests. The Rada had initially declared its support for the Provisional Government—but by June it was pushing for greater political autonomy.

Key figures in the government were willing to offer concessions to the Rada: Kerensky, Tsereteli and Foreign Minister Tereshchenko—himself a Ukrainian. However, the Kadet ministers were appalled by the concessions, and predicted the breakup of the former empire. On 2 July, the Kadets—unwilling to accept this loss of authority and disillusioned by the policies of their socialist colleagues—resigned from the coalition.

## WORKERS AND SOLDIERS PROTEST KEY MOVEMENT

The collapse of the government could not have come at a worse time, as the June Offensive was already failing.

On the same day that the Kadets ministers resigned, a large meeting was held by the First Machine Gun Regiment of the Petrograd garrison. One of the speakers was Trotsky, who had recently joined the Bolsheviks. The soldiers were furious at government measures to deploy them to the front in support of the offensive. Several anti-government resolutions were passed at the meeting, and the soldiers agreed to stage an armed demonstration on 3–4 July.

Working-class militancy also fed into the mood of the soldiers. The barracks of the First Machine Gun Regiment was in the working-class suburb of Vyborg, where the Bolsheviks, Left SRs and anarchists were influential. Workers at several Vyborg factories were on strike. Delegations of soldiers visited factories and encouraged workers to join their protest. Bolshevik activists were at work among the soldiers and workers, encouraging their calls for 'All Power to the Soviets'.

However, the Bolshevik Central Committee did not endorse nor plan the protest. Lenin was unwell and had left Petrograd for a short break in the countryside. The party did not have a dominant position in the soviets and the Bolshevik leaders called for restraint when they heard about the demonstration.

By mid-afternoon of 3 July an angry mass of soldiers and workers began to make its way from Vyborg to the city centre. The soldiers had fixed bayonets to their rifles—many workers were armed, too. Trucks filled with soldiers raced about. Shots were exchanged

### DID YOU KNOW?

In the aftermath of the July Days, the First Machine Gun Regiment was punished by being publicly disarmed, then paraded through the streets past jeering crowds. Lenin's wife, Krupskaya, recalled seeing their sullen, angry faces, and thought that in the long-term the regiment's punishment would damage the government.

with right-wing groups along the way and supposed sniper fire led angry soldiers to break into and search ‘bourgeois’ apartments. Some bystanders were caught up in the shooting, and about 400 people were killed in the confused street fighting of the July Days.

By evening, a huge crowd had gathered in front of the Tauride Palace, which housed the Petrograd Soviet. It was the season of white nights—summer nights when it was never completely dark—which encouraged more people to stay out late on the streets. By 4 July hundreds of thousands of protesters filled the main thoroughfares of the city. A contingent of 2500 sailors arrived from the Kronstadt naval base. The Kronstadt sailors were notorious for their revolutionary passion, and their presence in Petrograd further heightened tensions.

On their way to the soviet, the sailors stopped by the Bolshevik headquarters. Lenin had returned that morning, and he gave a speech in which he welcomed the sailors, praised their revolutionary commitment, and expressed confidence in the eventual triumph of Soviet power. However, Lenin also urged restraint, and gave no specific instructions.<sup>26</sup> The sailors continued on to the Tauride Palace—and altogether about 50,000 soldiers, sailors and workers gathered in the Tauride Palace square.

The mood of the crowd was volatile and hot-tempered. Banners bearing Bolshevik slogans were common, and Bolshevik activists continued to encourage and radicalise the protests. ‘It was a vast display of Bolshevik power’, argues historian Neil Faulkner.<sup>27</sup>

However, the Central Committee remained uncertain and hesitant. According to historian Orlando Figes, ‘the events of 4 July were characterized by almost total confusion. The Bolshevik leaders made up everything as they went along.’<sup>28</sup> Waiting to see what would happen, Lenin and the Bolshevik leadership resolved to support the protests—but offered no guidance on what to do. Lenin later described the July Days as ‘something considerably more than a demonstration and less than a revolution’.<sup>29</sup>

## CHERNOV CONFRONTS THE CROWD



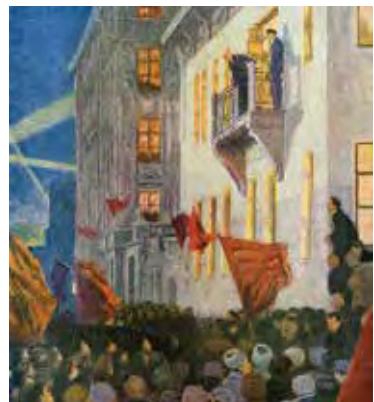
Inside the Tauride Palace, fear and confusion reigned. Reports poured in about street violence and unruly crowds, and only a handful of loyal soldiers was available to guard the entrances. The Soviet Executive Committee chaired intense debates and heard many speeches. Some speakers accused the Bolsheviks of planning a coup, while others urged the soviet to form an exclusively socialist government. Groups of soldiers and workers—often armed—would burst into meetings and demand that the Soviet Executive Committee take action.

Despite the urging of the masses, the soviet leadership—heeded by Chkhheidze and Tsereteli—had no desire to take power. They assured Lvov and the remaining non-Kadet ministers that they still had the support of their socialist colleagues.

However, someone needed to address the crowd outside, and the chosen person was SR leader and Minister of Agriculture Viktor Chernov. As Chernov tried to explain how the soviet leadership and socialist ministers were dealing with the governmental crisis, the crowd surged forward and seized him. Shaking his fist, an enraged worker snarled at Chernov, ‘Take power, you son of a bitch, when it’s given to you!’<sup>30</sup> Chernov was ‘arrested’, bundled into a car and taken hostage by the angry crowd.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Such was the confusion among the Bolsheviks during the July Days that the 4 July issue of *Pravda* had a large white space on the cover. There was meant to be an article about the party’s position on the demonstrations, but no clear decision could be reached at the time of printing, so the space was left blank.



 **Source 6.11** Crowds watch Lenin give a speech from the balcony of Bolshevik headquarters in Petrograd, July 1917.

 Viktor Chernov.

### DID YOU KNOW?

During the July Days a delegation of armed workers from the Putilov steel foundry forced its way onto the speaker’s platform of the soviet. One of the workers gave an angry speech and waved his rifle above his head, but Soviet Chairman Chkhheidze calmly passed the man a document to read and told him to not interrupt ‘our work’. Still angry but unsure of what to do next, the workers left the stage and the soviet meeting continued.

On hearing about Chernov's abduction, the soviet leadership sent several well-known revolutionaries to rescue Chernov. Trotsky was first on the scene: he gave a short speech, shook hands with the most aggressive looking figures in the crowd, then took Chernov by the arm and led him back to the palace.



→ **Source 6.12** Troops of the Provisional Government open fire on crowds attending a street demonstration on Nevsky Prospekt in Petrograd, 4 July 1917.

## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 What caused the Kadets to leave the First Coalition Government in early July 1917?
- 2 Which military group initiated the July Days protests? The arrival of which military group further radicalised the demonstrations on 4 July?
- 3 What location was the scene of significant events during the July Days?
- 4 What did the protesters shout at SR leader Viktor Chernov when he addressed the crowd during the July Days?
- 5 Briefly explain how the following factors brought an end to the July Days:
  - weather
  - lack of clear Bolshevik leadership
  - the actions of Justice Minister Pereverzev
  - the actions of War Minister Kerensky.
- 6 Briefly explain the impact of the July Days on the Bolshevik Party leadership.

## THE PROTESTS DISPERSE

Heavy rain washed over Petrograd in the late afternoon, driving many demonstrators off the streets. Without direction or leadership, the protests began to disperse, and most of the Kronstadt sailors headed back to their base.

To rouse the hostility of the soldiers against the Bolsheviks, Minister of Justice Pavel Pereverzev tried a new set of tactics.

- He leaked to the press unsubstantiated reports that the Bolsheviks were receiving financial support from the German government.
- He ordered a detachment of officers to ransack the offices and printing press of *Pravda*.
- Right-wing newspapers ran headlines accusing Lenin of being a German spy.

Pereverzev's tactics had the desired effect. Troops willing to defend the government and the soviet leadership arrived at Tauride Palace, where they were greeted by jubilant and relieved soviet deputies.

## KERENSKY TAKES ACTION

On 6 July 'Persuader-in-Chief' Kerensky returned from the front, bringing units of loyal soldiers with him. Kerensky was quick to take decisive measures.

- He ordered the seizure of the Bolshevik headquarters and other buildings where the party worked.
- He issued warrants for the arrest of Bolshevik leaders and activists.
- Revolutionaries Lenin and Zinoviev went into hiding, and eventually escaped to Finland.

Sympathetic comrades in the soviet—such as Martov—deplored the anti-Bolshevik crackdown and the use of slander to discredit Lenin.

However, Kerensky remained determined to ruin the Bolsheviks. He declared:

I will not allow anyone to encroach upon the triumphs of the Russian revolution.  
Damnation to those traitors who abandon their brothers who are shedding blood at  
the front. Let those who betray their country in its days of trial be damned!<sup>31</sup>

Kamenev, Kollontai, Lunacharsky and Trotsky were arrested—as were 800 other Bolsheviks. News of the German victories at the front fuelled fears of ‘traitors’ even further, along with speculation that Lenin was an enemy agent. Amid the chaos:

- party supporters were attacked and beaten in the street
- activists were thrown out of a number of factories by angry workmates
- a young man distributing Bolshevik newspapers was killed by men trying to arrest him.

The July Days were a disaster for the Bolsheviks, as they had gambled away their growing popularity in a failed attempt to influence political change through mass demonstrations. Their leaders were now imprisoned or in hiding. To anyone looking on, the Bolsheviks looked like a spent political force. As Grigory Zinoviev later recalled, ‘These were dark, difficult days’.<sup>32</sup>

## ACTIVITY

### ESSAY

Write a 600–800-word essay on the topic below. Your essay should include an introduction, paragraphs supported by relevant evidence from primary sources and historical interpretations, and a conclusion.

- ‘Demonstrations by workers and soldiers provided the trigger for key turning points in the Russian Revolutions of 1917.’ Discuss.

### HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION

#### Historian James White

The elements of continuity between the July and the October days provide an insight into the significance of both events for the way in which the Bolsheviks came to power. For them the experience of July, though traumatic, was highly instructive. It showed them what a seizure of power would involve, what kind of opposition could be expected and what kind of problems they would have to deal with. It showed in particular that in order to take power they would have to be assured of at least the neutrality of the Petrograd garrison and that some way would have to be found of ensuring that troops loyal to the government would not stream into the city and overwhelm the revolutionaries, as they had done in July.

 **Source 6.13** James White, *The Russian Revolution, 1917–1921: A Short History* (London; New York: Edward Arnold, 1994), 112.

Using Source 6.13 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Outline how the July Days were ‘highly instructive’ for the Bolsheviks.
- 2 Explain why the July Days were a political setback for the Bolsheviks. Use the source and additional evidence to support your response.
- 3 Evaluate the significance of the July Days as a contribution to the development of the Russian Revolution in 1917. Use evidence to support your response.

# THE KORNILOV AFFAIR

KEY DEVELOPMENT

**General Lavr Kornilov:** 'It's time to hang the German supporters and spies, with Lenin at their head, and to disperse the Soviet!'

Despite the failure of the June Offensive, Alexander Kerensky believed he was the man of destiny who would unite the nation and 'save' the revolution. His decisiveness in the July Days reinforced this perception.

On 8 July 1917, Georgi Lvov resigned as Prime Minister and named Kerensky as his successor. Lvov was disillusioned with the political in-fighting and rising social tensions, and said to a friend, 'The only way to save the country now is to close down the Soviet and shoot the people. I cannot do that. But Kerensky can.'<sup>33</sup>

Kerensky began negotiations for the formation of another coalition government. In between negotiations, he raced off to meetings at the front with military commanders. Efforts to reassert authority on the streets of Petrograd after the July Days were accompanied by measures to stabilise the military situation—such as reinstating the death penalty for desertion or refusing to obey orders.

General Lavr Kornilov was appointed Commander-in-Chief on 18 July, replacing General Brusilov. Kornilov was a tough, no-nonsense Cossack who was popular among conservatives. He was a strong advocate of military discipline, and made no secret of his deep hatred of the soviet—especially the Bolsheviks.

However, Kornilov had a limited grasp of the complexities of politics. He saw little distinction between Russia's socialist parties, despite their significant differences. One contemporary, General Alekseev, described Kornilov as 'a man with a lion's heart and the brain of a sheep'.<sup>34</sup>

On the same day that he promoted Kornilov, Kerensky moved the government into the Winter Palace. He took up residence in what had been the tsar's bedroom, and insisted that a red flag be lowered or raised upon his arrival and departure. The Petrograd Soviet was compelled to move from the Tauride Palace to the *Smolny Institute*, a former girl's school further from the city centre.

**Smolny Institute** Bolshevik headquarters and meeting place of the Petrograd Soviet

## SECOND COALITION PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT

For some weeks Russia did not have a fully functional government, but Kerensky's measures eventually convinced the Kadets to return to a coalition.

On 25 July the Second Coalition Government formally took office. One of the conditions was that all ministers would serve as individuals—not as representatives of their parties. This further reduced the potential influence of the soviet over socialist ministers.

Tsereteli could not agree to this, but other Menshevik and SR appointees accepted.

Kerensky hoped that his government would unify the nation and establish itself as a stable political authority. Appointing Kornilov Commander-in-Chief was part of this plan. Kornilov wanted a strong government, and soon after his appointment he gave Kerensky several demands:

- restoration of the death penalty for all soldiers, including those in non-combat regions
- a ban on soldiers' committees and political meetings at the front
- military control of the railways

- all factories working for defence industries to be subject to military discipline
- set quotas to apply to defence industries—and any worker who did not meet their quota to be sent to the front
- a ban on strikes, with organisers to face capital punishment

Kornilov's demands were a proposal for martial law—essentially a military dictatorship. Prime Minister Kerensky accepted the need for a strong government and the restoration of discipline at the front, but he was convinced that he should play a decisive role in any such government.

Kerensky began to doubt the wisdom of Kornilov's appointment—which looked like it would undermine his ambitions. While he considered his options, Kerensky gave evasive responses to Kornilov's demands. Sleepless nights took their toll on Kerensky, who began to act erratically.

## MOSCOW STATE CONFERENCE

On 12–15 August 1917, Kerensky convened a meeting of politically interested groups and public figures for the Moscow State Conference. The 2500 delegates were invited by the government to discuss significant issues of national importance. It was an attempt to rally and unify support for the new government.

Those invited to the conference included:

- soviet and Duma deputies
- representatives from both conservative and moderate socialist parties
- military commanders
- trade union leaders
- intellectuals with an interest in civic matters
- industrialists
- government ministers
- zemstvos officials.

The Bolsheviks did not attend, as their leadership was either in hiding or in prison. However, the local party branch did organise a widespread strike: Moscow's trams stopped running for the duration of the conference and many restaurants were closed.

The Moscow State Conference met at the Bolshoi Theatre. However, rather than rallying support for the government, the conference revealed the deep divisions and hostilities within Russian politics.

- Socialists denounced conservatives for putting their self-interest before the needs of the revolution.
- Kadets and military leaders accused the socialists of undermining the war effort and ruining the nation.
- Delegates jeered, cheered and heckled each other, offering little hope for any agreement.

Kerensky had to repeatedly call for order, insisting that this was essential 'in the general interests of the state'.<sup>35</sup> No declaration, policy or initiative came from the Moscow State Conference. According to Trotsky, 'It created nothing and decided nothing'.<sup>36</sup>

The biggest sensation of the conference came on the second day, when General Kornilov arrived. His train was met by a Cossack guard of honour, an orchestra and large crowd of conservatives. Ladies threw flowers at the general and officers carried him on their shoulders to his car.

**Source 6.14** General Lavr Kornilov is carried by officers as he arrives at the Moscow State Conference.



Kornilov's speech lacked the polished delivery of other performances, but his blunt message about the need for order and discipline was met with a standing ovation from military and conservative delegates. The socialists remained seated.

In Kornilov, conservatives had found a strongman who they hoped would 'save' Russia. On the eve of the conference, Rodzianko sent Kornilov a telegram that stated: 'In this threatening hour of heavy trial all thinking Russia looks to you with hope and faith'.<sup>37</sup> Bankers held meetings with Kornilov to brief him on their understanding of the nation's economic conditions. Echoing the sentiments of many conservatives, Kadet Fyodor Rodichev gushed, 'Save Russia and a grateful people will crown you'.<sup>38</sup>

However, the conference left Prime Minister Kerensky dejected and strained, with no united support behind his government. 'I'm sick. I'm a corpse. That conference killed me', he admitted to a colleague.<sup>39</sup>

## KORNILOV'S COUP

Kerensky became even more uneasy in the coming days.

### DID YOU KNOW?

General Kornilov had commanded troops in the Petrograd district during the April Crisis. He resigned from the position and requested a frontline post after the first Provisional Government refused his advice to use force to put down the protesters.

Kornilov had at his disposal units of men from the Caucasus. These men did not speak Russian, so were less likely to be taken in by the agitation of radical socialists. One such unit—called the 'Savage Division'—served as Kornilov's personal bodyguards.

On 19 August 1917, Kornilov ordered Cossack cavalry units—including his Savage Division—to be moved closer to Petrograd and garrisoned in towns with easy rail access to Moscow and the capital. Kornilov argued that the deployment was for the defence of the Northern Front against further German advances.

However, when another commander questioned the military value of the deployment, Kornilov revealed his true intentions.

### Kornilov on his intentions regarding troop movements and the Soviet

It's time to hang the German supporters and spies, with Lenin at their head and to disperse the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies so that it would never reassemble. You are right. I am shifting the cavalry corps mainly so as to bring it up to Petrograd by the end of August and, if a demonstration of the Bolsheviks takes place, to deal with these traitors as they deserve. I want to commit the leadership of this operation to General Krimov [one of Kornilov's loyal commanders]. I am convinced that he will not hesitate, in case of necessity, to hang every member of the Soviet.

It is unclear whether Kornilov intended to remove Prime Minister Kerensky from power—but he did little to ease Kerensky's apprehension. When Kornilov attended one meeting with Kerensky at the Winter Palace, he brought with him guards from the Savage Division and two machine guns.



Sensing the rising tension between Prime Minister Kerensky and Commander-in-Chief Kornilov, Vladimir N. Lvov took it upon himself to smooth over relations.

Lvov had been Minister of the Church in the first two Provisional Governments (and was not related to Georgi Lvov). He was a committed patriot and conservative who believed that Kerensky and Kornilov had no cause for conflict. However, Lvov also had a reputation for meddling. Historian Alexander Rabinowitch describes Lvov as 'a well-meaning though naïve and muddleheaded busybody'.<sup>40</sup> On 25–26 August, Lvov travelled between Petrograd and the

→ Vladimir N. Lvov.

headquarters of the High Command, presenting himself to both Kornilov and Kerensky as a mediator. What followed was one of the more bizarre and confused developments of 1917.

For reasons unknown, Lvov gave differing accounts to Kornilov and Kerensky about what each expected of the other.

- Kornilov gained the impression that he was being encouraged to establish a military dictatorship.
- Kerensky came to the conclusion that Kornilov was demanding dictatorial powers and his resignation.

On 26 August, the situation became even more confused when Kerensky impersonated Lvov during an exchange of telegrams with Kornilov. Asking General Kornilov to 'confirm' his intentions, the exchange only reinforced Kerensky's misunderstandings.

Early in the morning of 27 August, Kerensky notified Kornilov by telegram that he was dismissed and should return to Petrograd. Kornilov was perplexed and outraged. The order made no sense in the context of his most recent communications with the capital. He concluded that either Kerensky had betrayed him, or was hostage to the soviet.

Kornilov rejected Kerensky's order—and commanded his Cossack troops to prepare to advance on Petrograd to 'save Russia'.

## THE DEFENCE OF RED PETROGRAD

As Kornilov's troops made their way by train towards Petrograd, Kerensky became increasingly desperate. There was little he could do to stop Kornilov's rebellion. He dissolved the coalition and formed a Directory government, which consisted of himself and two other ministers. It was essentially a personal dictatorship born out of emergency. He also appealed to the soviet for help.

The soviet leadership agreed to help, and on 28 August it established a Committee for Struggle Against Counter-revolution to defend the capital. One of the conditions for soviet aid to the government was the release of all imprisoned Bolsheviks. So although Lenin remained in hiding, Trotsky and others played important roles in the Committee for Struggle.

The Bolsheviks proved invaluable in the defence of Red Petrograd, as Menshevik Nikolai Sukhanov recalled:

### Sukhanov on the role of the Bolsheviks in organising the defence of Petrograd

... the Committee, in organizing the defence, had to set in motion the masses of workers and soldiers, and these masses, in so far as they were organized, were organized by the Bolsheviks and followed them. At that time theirs was the only organization that was large, welded together by elementary discipline, and united with the democratic rank-and-file of the capital. *Without* them the ... Committee was impotent ... *With* the Bolsheviks, however, ... the Committee had at its disposal all organized worker-soldier strength.

At the initiative of the Bolsheviks, workers' militias known as **Red Guards** were armed and stationed alongside garrison soldiers in readiness for the impending assault. A vast network of trenches, barbed wire and barricades was constructed on the outskirts of the city. About 3000 Kronstadt sailors arrived and took up positions guarding key buildings and bridges.

However, the Kornilov Affair came to an end without armed conflict. The Union of Russian Railroad Workers (Vikzhel) held up the progress of Kornilov's troops by shunting their trains into side stations and refusing to provide engines.

### DID YOU KNOW?

To calm his nerves during the Kornilov Affair, Kerensky paced about in his Winter Palace rooms and sang operatic arias late into the night. V.N. Lvov, who was trying to sleep in an adjacent room, was kept awake all night.

### DID YOU KNOW?

One of the most vivid and important first-hand accounts of 1917 is that by Nikolai Sukhanov. Sukhanov was a Menshevik with close ties to Yuri Martov. He served on the Soviet Executive Committee in its early days and was personally acquainted with all significant Russian socialists. A key meeting of the Bolsheviks on 10 October, during which they made plans for their seizure of power, was held in Sukhanov's apartment, as his wife was a member of the party.

◀ **Source 6.16** Cited in N. N. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution 1917: Eyewitness Account*, Volumes I & II (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962), 505.

**Red Guards** groups of armed workers formed by the Bolsheviks in 1917

The soviet dispatched a delegation of Caucasian soldiers who by chance had been attending a congress in Petrograd. As the soviet troops pleaded with their fellow Cossacks through the carriage windows, Kornilov's Savage Division proved, finally, that they were susceptible to agitation. Once they understood that the soviet had not forced Kerensky into anything, they refused to advance any further.

It was all over by 30 August. General Alekseev was appointed Commander-in-Chief and travelled to the front to relieve Kornilov of his duties. On 1 September, Kornilov and his closest officers were arrested, imprisoned and charged with 'counter-revolutionary conspiracy'.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE KORNILOV AFFAIR

The outcome of the Kornilov Affair was ironic—it was the opposite of what both Kerensky and Kornilov had hoped for. The national government was weaker than ever before, as:

- divisions between soldiers and officers became acute
- military discipline became worse
- desertions increased
- land seizures continued
- the popularity of the prime minister plummeted.

Soldiers and workers—and many soviet deputies—suspected that Prime Minister Kerensky had been involved in some sort of conspiracy. Conservatives were appalled. The man they considered their 'saviour' had been provoked into an untimely anti-soviet venture, and ultimately betrayed. Crime rates in the cities soared, as did class divisions.

The Kornilov Affair did terrible damage to Kerensky's reputation. His leadership was now hopelessly compromised. There were widespread rumours that he was taking drugs and hardly sleeping.

Kerensky hoped to form another full coalition cabinet as soon as possible, but both sides of the political spectrum were wary of forming government. Moderate Mensheviks and SRs were publicly discredited by their involvement in Kerensky's previous coalitions with the Kadets, and they were fast losing their influence in the soviets.

Source 6.17 Soldiers and Red Guards on the streets of Petrograd, 1917.



By contrast, the popularity of the Bolsheviks among workers and soldiers had grown dramatically. They had recovered from the setback of the July Days. The party was able to portray itself as the most energetic defenders of the revolution—and its followers were now armed, because there was no way the Red Guards were going to return their rifles. In discussing the outcome of the Kornilov Affair, Trotsky said, 'The army that rose against Kornilov was the army-to-be of the October revolution'.<sup>41</sup>

## ACTIVITY



### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 When was Kornilov appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Russian military?
- 2 Briefly summarise the demands Kornilov made shortly after his appointment.
- 3 What was decided by the Moscow State Conference?
- 4 Briefly explain the developments that led General Kornilov to attempt a coup against Kerensky's government and the Petrograd Soviet.
- 5 How did the soviet defend Petrograd against Kornilov's forces?
- 6 What was the outcome of the Kornilov Affair for:
  - Conservatives who supported Kornilov?
  - Kerensky?
  - Bolsheviks?

### EXTENDED RESPONSE

How did the Kornilov Affair both undermine the authority of the Provisional Government and increase popular support for the Bolsheviks? Use evidence to support your response.

## LAVR KORNILOV, 1870–1918

Lavr Kornilov was a career soldier. He first trained in the artillery corps, and later received officer training at the General Staff Academy. With mixed Cossack-Buryat heritage, Kornilov was encouraged to become an 'Asian specialist' and was posted on military espionage missions to India and Iran, where he could use his gift for languages.

He was decorated for bravery in the Russo-Japanese War. In the years 1907–1911 he worked as a military attaché at the Russian Embassy in China, where he studied the Chinese language and met future Nationalist leader Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek).

Kornilov was appointed commander of an infantry division when World War I began, and rose to the rank of major general. He was captured by Austrian forces in 1915, but escaped and returned to active duty in 1916. After the February Revolution, Kornilov was put in command of the Petrograd garrison. He resigned this post after the April Crisis and was sent to the front.

Appointed Commander-in-Chief by Kerensky following the July Days, many Kadets, business leaders and officers looked to Kornilov as the 'saviour' of Russia. This expectation was short-lived as he fell from grace in late August 1917 following a confused falling out with the Prime Minister. He was arrested in early September but escaped from custody after the October Revolution.

Kornilov then re-emerged as one of the White Army commanders in the Armed Forces of South Russia during the Civil War, and was killed in battle in April 1918. Later, when the Red Army found his grave, communist soldiers dug up his corpse and paraded it through a nearby town before burning it in the main square.



↑ General Lavr Kornilov.



# THE RISE OF THE BOLSHEVIKS

Vladimir Lenin: 'All Power to the Soviets!'

Despite the damage the July Days had caused the Bolshevik movement, the party continued to function.

Mid-level leaders—such as Yakov Sverdlov, Felix Dzerzhinsky and Nikolai Bukharin—stepped in to keep the Central Committee functioning. Bolshevik agitators in the factories and barracks were still committed to their work, even if they sometimes received a hostile reception. In mid-July, Sverdlov reported, 'We are keeping our heads. The organization is not destroyed.'<sup>42</sup>

The Bolsheviks had demonstrated their effectiveness as agitators and organisers by their contribution to the defence of Petrograd during the Kornilov Affair. More importantly, the Bolsheviks were the only political party that was consistently opposed to the government and the war. This increased their popular support as workers and soldiers looked for an alternative to the Mensheviks and SRs.

The Bolsheviks were also the group most readily associated with Soviet power. Class tensions and economic distress led many people to see the Bolshevik program as a viable response to their hopes, fears and discontent. Food shortages had become acute—people would often line up at midnight in the hope that there would be something to buy when the shops opened. The food-supply crisis added to the perception that the Provisional Government was a failure.

Although the Bolsheviks offered no certain solutions, they had come to reflect popular aspirations—based on the ideals of Soviet power and hatred of the bourgeoisie.

By late August, many provincial soviets were controlled by Bolshevik majorities: the cities of Kronstadt, Yekaterinburg, Tsaritsyn, Riga and Saratov, among others, were passing Bolshevik resolutions—including demands for a revolutionary soviet government. This pattern was repeated in smaller district soviets, such as Vyborg in Petrograd.

Many provincial soviets were even functioning as the chief local authorities, taking responsibility for law and order, food supply, labour disputes and social welfare. Significantly, many of the resolutions and initiatives of provincial and district soviets were out of step with the All-Russian Soviet in Petrograd.<sup>43</sup>

## DEMOCRATIC STATE CONFERENCE

### DID YOU KNOW?

In 1917, the term 'democracy' meant 'socialist' to Russians. Discussions of the 'forces of democracy' and all things 'democratic' referred to left-wing political groups who represented working-class people, not the bourgeoisie.

While Kerensky searched out possible candidates for a new coalition government, the Soviet Executive Committee and leaders of the moderate socialist parties grappled with the dilemma of state power.

- Should they form an exclusively socialist coalition government?
- Were the soviets the best basis for political authority?
- Should the Kadets be represented in government?

These questions were debated intensely at the Democratic State Conference on 14–19 September 1907. The conference was attended by representatives of socialist parties, soviet deputies and trade unions, but it was a muddled and bitter gathering.

Moderates in the Bolshevik Party—headed by Kamenev—pushed for an all-socialist government. This was supported by the Menshevik-Internationalists and Left SRs (which both had political platforms similar to the Bolsheviks).

However, Tsereteli argued that without the Kadets any future government was likely to face civil war. He and other moderate socialists were unwilling to move beyond their ideological principles. Contradictory resolutions were passed, yet no clear agreement could be reached. The whole conference was summed up by historian James White: ‘After a great many speeches and discussions it had emerged that the conference had decided nothing whatsoever’.<sup>44</sup>

The deliberations of the conference were made irrelevant on 25 September when Kerensky secured agreement for a Third Coalition Provisional Government.

Meanwhile, the reluctance of the Mensheviks and SRs to form a soviet government at the Democratic State Conference led Lenin to call on the Bolsheviks to prepare for a seizure of power.

## PREPARLIAMENT AND THE LAST COALITION

Kerensky had set 17 September as the date for elections to the Constituent Assembly. However, the Kornilov Affair and following governmental crisis saw the elections cancelled and a new election proposed for 12 November.

Meanwhile, in an attempt to secure some political legitimacy, Kerensky and the moderates in the soviet arranged for a Preparliament that would act as a prelude to the Constituent Assembly, and advise the government on policy initiatives. The Preparliament included socialist delegates from the Democratic State Conference, as well as representatives of propertied classes and the zemstvos. The Preparliament opened on 7 October with a series of patriotic declarations—until Trotsky took to the stage.

In a rousing speech, Trotsky denounced Kerensky’s new government. He thundered from the rostrum, ‘All power to the soviets! All land to the people! Long live an immediate, just, democratic peace!’<sup>45</sup> He then led the Bolsheviks in a walk-out to show their contempt for the gathering. The Preparliament proved to be little more than a talk-shop, needlessly debating and discussing issues that had already been discussed.

Delaying the elections to a Constituent Assembly was a fatal mistake—by the time the proposed elections took place, the last Provisional Government would be swept into the dustbin of history.

The Third Coalition was the weakest and least successful of all the Provisional Governments. Its cabinet aimed at little more than staying in power until the Constituent Assembly elections. Historian Rex Wade argues that, ‘no one had much hope for it and all talk was of what would replace it’.<sup>46</sup> The Third Coalition lasted just four weeks.

By mid-September, the Bolsheviks had gained majorities—the most seats—in the Moscow and Petrograd soviets. On 25 September—the same day Kerensky formed his last coalition—Trotsky replaced Chkhheidze as Chairman of the Petrograd Soviet. As historian Orlando Figes put it: ‘This was the beginning of the end’.<sup>47</sup>

The announcement of Trotsky’s appointment was met with roars of approval by soviet deputies. One of the first resolutions passed under his chairmanship was a call for the resignation of the government.

### DID YOU KNOW?

When the Soviet Executive Committee was replaced in late September, Tsereteli gave a final speech directed at Trotsky and the new leadership: ‘We are stepping down in the knowledge that over the past six months we have honorably held high the banner of revolution. Now the banner is in your hands. We can only hope that you will be able to hold it aloft for at least half that period.’

### DID YOU KNOW?

Leon Trotsky, a key protagonist in this drama, argued:

‘You might say in general about this government, that up to the days of October in hard moments it was always undergoing a crisis, and in the intervals between crises it was merely existing. Continually “discussing its condition,” it found no time for business’.

In another coincidence, Lenin returned to Petrograd on the same day as the opening of the Preparliament. He was determined to push for a Bolshevik seizure of power. On 15 September, Lenin had written to the Central Committee:

→ **Source 6.18** Cited in Alexander Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd* (Chicago: Haymarket Books and Pluto Press, 2004), 179.

### Lenin to the Central Committee

The Bolsheviks, having obtained a majority in the soviets of workers' and soldiers' deputies in both capitals, can and *must* take state power into their own hands. They can because the active majority of revolutionary elements in the two chief cities is large enough to carry the people with it, to overcome the opposition's resistance, to smash it, and to gain and retain power.

A number of comrades disagreed with these sentiments in mid-September—but by late October Lenin's revolutionary agenda would be realised.

## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 What revolutionary ideal associated with the Bolsheviks was a key factor in their popularity with workers and soldiers by August–September 1917?
- 2 When did the Democratic State Conference meet? Who attended this meeting? What was decided by the conference?
- 3 When did Kerensky form the Third Coalition Government?
- 4 What was the purpose of the Preparliament?
- 5 Describe the stability and authority of the Third Coalition.
- 6 What developments led Trotsky to be elected Chairman of the Petrograd Soviet on 25 September?
- 7 From mid-September, what was Lenin encouraging the Bolshevik Party to do?

### EXTENDED RESPONSE

How did the ideal of Soviet power contribute to the rise of the Bolsheviks? Use evidence to support your response.



## THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENTS

The Provisional Government was actually a series of different governments. Russia experienced five governments in eight months—which shows the instability of political authority in 1917. There were some people who provided continuity in each cabinet, such as Kerensky and Tereshchenko, but a variety of other Kadets, Mensheviks and SRs served in each ministry.

- First Provisional Government (2 May)
- First Coalition Government (5 May)
- Second Coalition Government (25 July–27 August)
- The Directory (1–27 September)
- Third Coalition Government (25 September–26 October)

Notably, a significant crisis led to the collapse of each successive government. The final crisis would be the October Revolution, which saw a Bolshevik Soviet government come to power.

← **Source 6.19** Deputies of the Petrograd Soviet, 1917.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Mikhail Tereshchenko was Finance Minister in the first Provisional Government and Minister for Foreign Affairs in the Coalition Governments. His initial inclusion in the government came as a surprise to many political observers, given the vast fortune he had earned as a landowner and sugar-industry magnate.

# ALEXANDER KERENSKY, 1881–1970

Alexander Kerensky was born in 1881 in Simbirsk, which also happened to be Lenin's hometown. Kerensky's father was headmaster of the school that Lenin attended.

Kerensky studied law and history at St Petersburg University, where he was also attracted to revolutionary politics. He joined the SRs in 1905, becoming the editor of their newspaper *Stormy Petrel*. Kerensky was briefly imprisoned and exiled in 1906. On his release, he established himself as a defence lawyer for people charged with political crimes, and travelled to Siberia to investigate and represent victims of the Lena Goldfields Massacre.

In 1912, Kerensky was elected to the Duma, where he gained a following among workers for his dramatic and often controversial speeches. Kerensky was a key figure in the February Revolution, and rose to prominence as a member of the Petrograd Soviet and as Minister for Justice in the first Provisional Government.

He became Minister of War during the First Coalition, and tried to improve the standing of the government by ordering a massive military campaign known as the June Offensive. He toured the front with General Brusilov and made a series of stirring speeches to the troops. However, the June Offensive was ultimately unsuccessful.

Kerensky became Prime Minister following the July Days. Many hoped that his charismatic leadership would 'save' the revolution, but his political credibility was damaged after the Kornilov Affair.

Kerensky continued to lead the Provisional Government, but was forced from power in the October Revolution. Kerensky fled Petrograd when the Bolsheviks seized power. He rallied Cossacks and troops from the front to challenge Bolsheviks in late October, but his forces were defeated in the Battle of Pulkovo Heights.

Kerensky went into hiding, then fled Russia—first to Finland, then to London. He spent most of the next twenty years living in France. When his Australian-born wife Nel became ill in 1945 they moved to Brisbane to be with her family. He later moved to the USA, where he taught history at Stanford University. He died of cancer in 1970, aged 89.

## KEY INDIVIDUAL



↑ Alexander Kerensky.

## KEY POINTS

- Kerensky was an influential SR deputy in the Duma.
- He was famous for his skill as a public speaker and his work defending people charged with political offences.
- During the February Revolution, he addressed crowds of soldiers and protesting workers who arrived at the Tauride Palace.
- Kerensky held a place in the Petrograd Soviet and the Provisional Government.
- He was first Minister for Justice, then Minister for War, and became Prime Minister in July 1917.
- Kerensky had significant involvement in a number of key developments of 1917: the June Offensive, July Days and the Kornilov Affair, and led three of the five Provisional Governments.
- His popularity plummeted from September 1917, and his government was overthrown in the October Revolution.

## ACTIVITY

### HISTORICAL SOURCES

#### W.H. Chamberlin

The Provisional Government that replaced the fallen autocracy was weak to the point of impotence. It was conspicuously lacking in all the means by which a state normally enforces its authority. The tsarist regime was supported on tradition, on a bureaucracy that was often venal and inefficient but that still had required some administrative experience, on the army and police. The Provisional Government not only missed all these old supports of centralized authority, but it failed to create any new ones.

◀ **Source 6.20** W.H. Chamberlin, *The Russian Revolution 1918–1921* (New York: Universal Library, 1965), 100.

#### Nikolai Sukhanov

... the Bolsheviks were working stubbornly and without let-up. They were among the masses, at the factory-benches, every day without a pause. Tens of speakers, big and little, were speaking in Petersburg, at the factories and in the barracks, every blessed day. For the masses they had become their own people, because they were always there, taking the lead in details as well as in the most important affairs of the factory or barracks. They had become the sole hope, if only because since they were one with the masses they were lavish with promises and sweet though fairy tales. The mass lived and breathed together with the Bolsheviks. It was in the hands of the party of Lenin and Trotsky.

◀ **Source 6.21** N. N. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution 1917: Eyewitness Account*, Volumes I & II (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962), 529.

Using Sources 6.20 and 6.21 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Outline the weaknesses of the Provisional Government, according to Chamberlin.
- 2 Explain how the Bolsheviks gained majorities in the soviets by September 1917, according to Sukhanov.
- 3 Analyse the contribution of the Bolsheviks in mobilising popular discontent towards the Provisional Government. Use evidence to support your response.

### CREATIVE RESPONSE

Who are you in 1917? By September 1917 Russians were grappling with significant political choices that centred around the major issues of the day. The questions of land reform, the war and political authority dominated politics. Imagine you are living in Russia in 1917, then take the online quiz below to see where you sit on the Political Compass of the Revolution! Discuss and compare your results with your classmates.

[arzamas.academy/materials/1269](http://arzamas.academy/materials/1269)

[russianlife.com/stories/online/who-are-you-in-1917-russia/](http://russianlife.com/stories/online/who-are-you-in-1917-russia/)

# CHAPTER 6 REVIEW

## KEY SUMMARY POINTS

- After the February Revolution, Russia was governed by a system of Dual Authority. The Provisional Government was the formal authority, but the Petrograd Soviet held popular support and influence.
- When Lenin returned to Russia and presented his April Theses, many were shocked and outraged. However, he soon won over the party to his program. This positioned the Bolsheviks as the most radical anti-war, anti-government political group. In the coming months this gained them popular support.
- World War I posed considerable challenges for the Provisional Government. Conflict with the soviets over the government's position towards the war led to the April Crisis. Economic problems and social tensions worsened as the war went on.
- War Minister Kerensky hoped to revive patriotism and military discipline through the June Offensive. This had some limited short-term gains, but soon turned into a disaster.
- During the July Days, the Provisional Government and Petrograd Soviet were both confronted by massive armed demonstrations that tried to force political change. Although the Bolsheviks had offered limited and reluctant leadership to these protests, they received the blame, and afterwards they seemed to be broken as a political force.
- A confused and complex web of rivalries, conspiracy and confusion led General Kornilov to attempt to take power in Petrograd and disperse the soviet. Prime Minister Kerensky called on the soviet for help. The Bolsheviks played a key role in the subsequent mobilisation of workers and soldiers to defend the capital, which led to their political revival. Kerensky's reputation was significantly discredited by the Kornilov Affair.
- Despite a number of opportunities, such as the Democratic State Conference, the Mensheviks and SRs could not agree on common terms to form an exclusively socialist coalition or a soviet government. This discredited them in the eyes of ordinary people, who switched their backing to the parties of the radical Left.
- By September the Bolsheviks had gained considerable popular support among workers and soldiers. This was reflected by their majorities in a number of soviets, including Petrograd and Moscow.

## ACTIVITY

### HISTORICAL INQUIRY

Conduct an historical inquiry on the topic below, then compose a series of 'big questions' that allow you to explore this area of study in depth. Use your questions to focus your research and to identify evidence to support your response. Your inquiry should include an introduction, a number of paragraphs that use evidence to address each of your research questions, a conclusion and a bibliography that reflects wide reading.

'The Kornilov Affair revealed that by September 1917 there were only two political futures for Russia: Soviet power or military dictatorship.' What factors led to the downfall of the Provisional Government and the rise of the Bolsheviks?



Additional resources: [www.htavshop.com.au/beyond-the-book](http://www.htavshop.com.au/beyond-the-book)

# THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION

(10–27 OCTOBER 1917)

***'History will not forgive us if we do not take power now.'***

—Vladimir Lenin

As 1917 wore on, the drumbeat of Bolshevik agitation for 'All Power to the Soviets' and 'Peace! Land! Bread!' continued to undermine the troubled Provisional Government. Calls for an exclusively socialist government became more popular among Russia's workers and soldiers, while the increasing number of land seizures by the peasants showed that the government had almost no influence in the countryside.

Amid this upheaval, Kerensky was unable to bridge the divide between radical demands for change and rule by a government of liberals and moderate socialists. The arrangement of the Dual Authority between the Provisional Government and Petrograd Soviet gradually fell apart in the aftermath of the Kornilov Affair. As the government's power withered away, Lenin agitated for a soviet seizure of power.

In late October, the Bolsheviks overthrew Kerensky's last cabinet of ministers, and at the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets declared the founding of a new government: the Council of People's Commissars (or *Sovnarkom*).

***Sovnarkom*** acronym for the Council of People's Commissars, the Soviet government that came to power in the October Revolution

## KEY QUESTIONS

- What were the events and other conditions that led to the October Revolution?
- How did Kerensky, Lenin and Trotsky influence the events of October 1917?
- What was the role of the Bolsheviks in the October Revolution?
- What ideas and popular movements undermined the Provisional Government as the existing order?

## KEY EVENTS

### —10 October 1917

Bolshevik Central Committee meet to discuss whether to seize power from the Provisional Government

### —16 October 1917

First full meeting of Military Revolutionary Committee (Milrevcom)

### —23–24 October 1917

Kerensky orders arrest of leading Bolsheviks, closure of Bolshevik newspapers and raising the bridges of central Petrograd

### —24 October 1917

Trotsky's Milrevcom troops and Red Guards begin to re-take city from Kerensky's forces

### —25–26 October 1917

A Bolshevik-led insurrection seizes power in the 'storming' of the Winter Palace

Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets

### —27 October 1917

Founding of the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom) declared

# CHAPTER 7



Source 7.01 *The Winter Palace is Captured*, by Vladimir Serov, 1950.

# DECLINE OF PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT

Alexander Kerensky: 'I want to take the middle road, but nobody will help me.'



Source 7.02 A revolutionary poster from 1917: 'All Power to the Soviets'.

By September 1917, the Bolsheviks' militant class rhetoric and unwavering anti-war stance had been accepted by Russia's soldiers and workers. Increasingly, it seemed that only a government based on the authority of the soviets could act on the demands for 'Peace, Bread and Land'. And even though the Bolsheviks were not the only radical socialist party, they were the political group most readily identified with these ideals.

The radical socialist left, headed by the Bolsheviks, 'became the political alternative for the disappointed and disenchanted, for those looking for new leadership'.<sup>1</sup> 'Soviet power' emerged as a genuinely popular aspiration. It was commonly understood to mean the establishment of a governmental authority that would act in the best wishes of the working classes and exclude the bourgeoisie from power.

By early October, class tensions, economic hardship and the breakdown of law and order had set Petrograd on edge. The Provisional Government's authority was in rapid decline. With the peasantry again undertaking land seizures, the countryside more or less ruled itself. Russia was more than ever ready for revolutionary change.

Now that the Bolsheviks had majorities in the Petrograd and Moscow soviets, Lenin revived the slogan 'All Power to the Soviets' and bombarded his party colleagues with letters demanding that a plan for seizing power be set in motion.

## MEETING OF BOLSHEVIKS ON 10 OCTOBER

Source 7.03 'There is such a party!' Lenin stands to speak at the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets, June 1917. Josef Stalin is seated next to him; Yakov Sverdlov behind.



It was clear to Lenin that only a Bolshevik uprising would bring about a true soviet-style government. Lenin had long advocated removing the Provisional Government. As the Bolsheviks were the only genuine revolutionary party, it was essential for Lenin that any soviet government should be dominated by a Bolshevik majority.

Back in June 1917, at the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets, the Menshevik Irakli Tsereteli had argued that there was not a single party willing to take power and offer a viable alternative to the Dual Authority. Lenin had leaped up at the back of the hall and shouted, 'Yes there is! There is such a party—the Bolsheviks!'<sup>2</sup> Most delegates reportedly laughed at his claims, but few opponents were laughing by October—the time for a Bolshevik-led revolution was imminent.

However, not all Bolsheviks agreed with Lenin. Lev Kamenev and Grigory Zinoviev felt that the party should wait until the elections to the Constituent Assembly, which were scheduled for 12 November. Why should the Bolsheviks risk their ever-increasing popularity and the escalating revolutionary movement?

Lenin was beside himself with rage over such wavering. On 7 October he returned to Petrograd from his countryside hideout, and three days later called a meeting of the Bolshevik Central Committee to discuss staging an uprising. 'History will not forgive us if we do not take power now', Lenin argued.<sup>3</sup>

Lenin's sense of urgency was because he felt that:

- if they waited any longer, a coalition socialist government might be formed that would marginalise himself and the Bolsheviks
- the international situation and the mood of the Russian working classes were ready for a revolutionary uprising.

However, rather than an immediate seizure of power, Trotsky favoured waiting until the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets in late October. The majority of the committee, including Lenin, eventually adopted Trotsky's proposal. Often represented as a decisive plan to seize power, those meeting on 10 October agreed on the principle of an armed insurrection—but did not set an exact date.<sup>4</sup>

Historians Rex Wade and Alexander Rabinowitch argue that it was a declaration of intent to overthrow the government at the most suitable opportunity.<sup>5</sup> However, the forthcoming Congress of Soviets was seen as the most appropriate setting for the formation of a new socialist government.

By contrast, historian Richard Pipes interprets the 10 October meeting as a definite resolution to seize power to coincide with the Soviet Congress. A new soviet government could then be presented to the All-Russian Congress as an accomplished fact, which would make the uprising look like a transfer of power rather than a **coup d'état**. As Lenin later put it, 'If we seize power today, we seize it not in opposition to the Soviets but on their behalf'.<sup>6</sup> Zinoviev and Kamenev remained adamantly opposed to an uprising, and publicly stated their objections in the socialist newspaper *Novaia Zhizn* (New Life) (which was edited by Maxim Gorky).

### Lev Kamenev

Before history, before the international proletariat, before the Russian Revolution and the Russian working class, we have no right to stake the whole future on the card of an armed uprising ... Constituent Assembly and soviets [are] ... the combined type of state institution toward which we are travelling.

Lenin was furious—the plans for a Bolshevik coup were now an open secret.



**coup d'état** sudden overthrow of a government, often by military personnel or officials

◀ **Source 7.04** Leon Trotsky,  
*History of the Russian Revolution*  
(London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1934),  
1004.

◀ **Source 7.05** Lenin addresses the Bolshevik Central Committee at Petrograd, 10 October 1917. In this official Communist party representation, the only recognisable figures other than Lenin are Stalin, Dzerzhinsky and Sverdlov.

## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

At the meeting of the Bolshevik Central Committee on 10 October 1917, three different positions were put forward about whether or when a Bolshevik uprising might occur. Match the correct perspective to the key people below.

Lenin
Trotsky
Kamenev and Zinoviev

- The Bolsheviks should not attempt to seize power, but wait until the Constituent Assembly.
- There should be an immediate Bolshevik-led seizure of power.
- The Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets would provide the best time for an uprising to succeed.

### HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

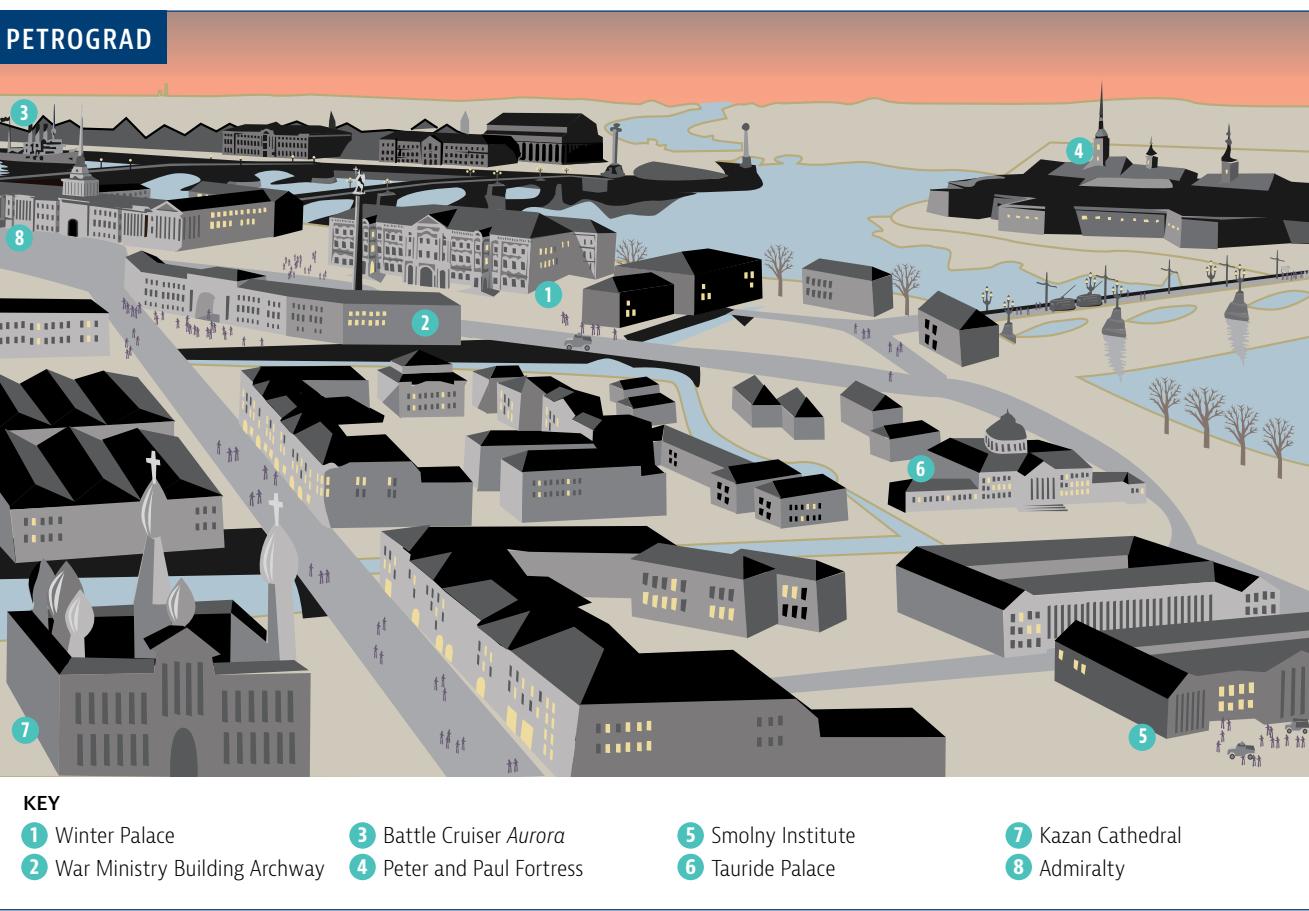
Evaluate and discuss the significance of the 10 October Central Committee meeting in explaining the causes of the October Revolution. Compare the interpretations of historians Richard Pipes and Alexander Rabinowitch in your response.

### MAP EXERCISE

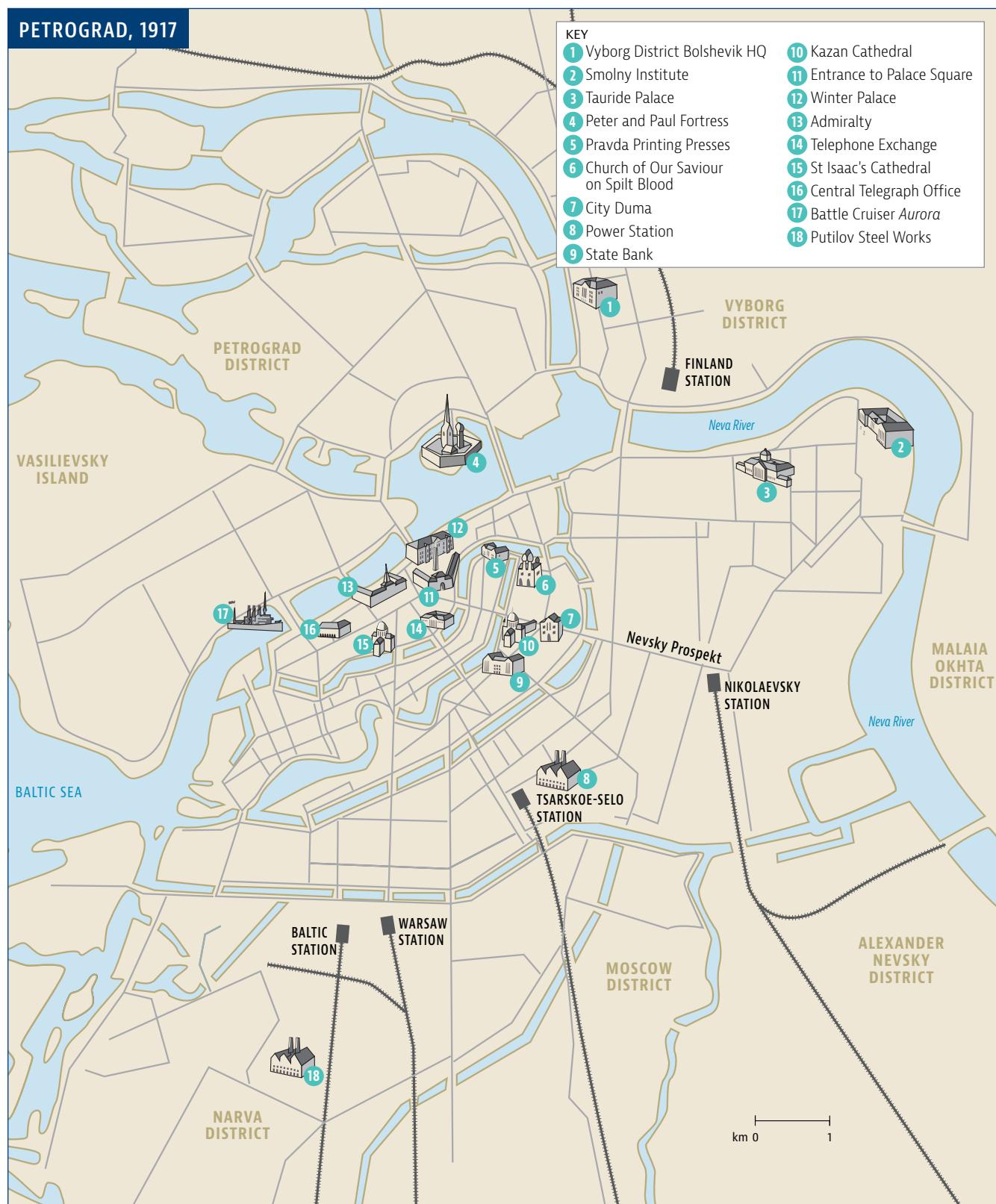
As you read about the October Revolution, carefully examine the maps and diagrams of Petrograd on pages 146–147.

- Select three locations that were critical in the October Revolution and explain their importance.

#### Source 7.06



## Source 7.07



# MILITARY REVOLUTIONARY COMMITTEE

**Vladimir Lenin:** 'To treat the insurrection in a Marxist manner, that is like an art, we must without waiting a minute organise ... insurgent detachments, distribute forces, move reliable regiments to the most important points.'

In mid-October 1917 Alexander Kerensky ordered the soldiers of the Petrograd garrison to be transferred to the Northern Front—supposedly to reinforce the capital against advancing German forces. However, Kerensky's real intention was to rid the capital of troublesome troops and lure the Bolsheviks into an ill-planned uprising.

Kerensky's plan backfired when the soldiers of the garrison opposed the move. The Bolsheviks accused the Provisional Government of plotting to abandon the capital and close down the soviets. Rumours were further inflamed after former Duma chairman Mikhail Rodzianko publicly declared, 'To hell with Petrograd!'

The Petrograd Soviet now moved to defend the city against German invasion, and to protect itself from the threat of counter-revolution. On 16 October, a Military Revolutionary Committee (Milrevcom)—led by a five-man leadership executive—was formed to take direct control of the city's garrison. This gave the soviet substantial authority over Petrograd's soldiers.

Importantly, Trotsky and two other Bolsheviks—Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko and Nikolai Krylenko —were the key members of the committee. The remaining two leadership positions were held by Left SRs.<sup>8</sup> Although the Milrevcom was created as a defence organ of the soviet, it was largely directed by Bolsheviks.

The Milrevcom announced to Petrograd's workers and soldiers that it would defend the capital against German advance and—more significantly—that it would defend the soviet against any Kornilov-style coup.

## KERENSKY FIGHTS BACK

**Alexander Kerensky:** 'If only the Bolsheviks would come out, and then I will put them down.'

### 23 OCTOBER

Late on the night of 23 October, Kerensky finally made his move against the Bolsheviks. In doing so, he unintentionally gave Lenin and Trotsky the excuse they needed to seize power.

Kerensky ordered that the bridges linking Petrograd's militant working-class districts with the rest of the city to be raised. Troops loyal to the Provisional Government shut down the printing presses of the Bolshevik newspapers *Rabochi Put* (Workers' Road) and *Soldat* (Soldier). Attempts were made to arrest leading Bolsheviks and members of the Milrevcom, but without success.<sup>9</sup>

Trotsky decided that Kerensky was attempting an anti-soviet counter-revolution and consequently used the authority of the Milrevcom to re-take the city. One Milrevcom member recalled Trotsky's thunderous call to gather at Committee headquarters: 'Kerensky is on the offensive ... We need everyone at *Smolny!*'<sup>10</sup>



↑ Alexander Kerensky.

**Smolny Institute** Bolshevik headquarters and meeting place of the Petrograd Soviet

Kerensky had ignored the Milrevcom declaration that decisive measures would be taken against any perceived threat to the Petrograd Soviet. He had therefore inadvertently started the October Revolution.<sup>11</sup>

## 24 OCTOBER

On 24 October, Red Guards and Milrevcom soldiers took over the blockade checkpoints that Kerensky had imposed on the city. The Bolshevik printing presses were recaptured and new editions of *Soldat* and *Rabochi Put* were shortly rolling off the press. Armed workers, soldiers and sailors spilled into Petrograd's centre from the suburbs.

As night fell, Trotsky's forces seized control of strategic buildings and offices. In explaining the actions of the Milrevcom, Trotsky said to members of the Petrograd Soviet, 'This is defence, comrades. This is defence.'<sup>12</sup> There was relatively little open fighting. Soldiers loyal to the Provisional Government often walked away, or surrendered without a fight.

By early morning, the Bolsheviks had control of the main telegraph and post offices, the State Bank, the electricity station and the train stations.

Meanwhile, the Provisional Government was confined to the Winter Palace, and started making hasty preparations to defend itself. Early the next day, Kerensky left the Winter Palace in a car borrowed from the US embassy. He hoped to rally loyal troops from the front and bring them to the capital—but he would never return.

### Richard Pipes

October was not a revolution but a classic coup d'état planned in the dead of night on October 10th, and executed two weeks later ... The seizure of power, masterminded by Trotsky, was a model putsch [coup] ... Conceived and carried out in the strictest secrecy, it eschewed barricades and mob actions in favour of surgical strikes against the organ of the state. It was so successfully camouflaged as a transfer of power to the All-Russian Congress of Soviets that virtually no one, including the rank and file of the Bolshevik Party, had any inkling of what had happened.

 **Source 7.08** Richard Pipes, 'The Great October Revolution as a Clandestine Coup d'Etat', in *Times Literary Supplement*, 6 (November 1992): 3–4.

### Alexander Rabinowitch

Only in the wake of the government's direct attack on the Left was an armed uprising of the kind envisioned by Lenin feasible. For ... the Petrograd masses, to the extent that they supported the Bolsheviks in the overthrow of the Provisional Government, did so not out of any sympathy for strictly Bolshevik rule but because they believed the revolution and the Congress to be in imminent danger.

 **Source 7.09** Alexander Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd* (Chicago: Haymarket Books and Pluto Press, 2004), 314.

## ACTIVITY

### HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Alexander Rabinowitch (Source 7.09) suggests that Trotsky's response to Kerensky's moves of 23–24 October 1917 were defensive rather than offensive. Compare this interpretation with that of Richard Pipes (Source 7.08), who argues that October was a coup driven by Lenin and led by Trotsky. Discuss Sources 7.08 and 7.09 and evaluate the evidence these historians use to explain the roles of Lenin and Trotsky in October 1917.



## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 When was the Milrevcom formed?
- 2 What was the purpose of the Milrevcom?
- 3 Who led the Milrevcom?
- 4 Who triggered the events of the October Revolution: Trotsky or Kerensky? Briefly explain how.
- 5 What decision was made by the Bolshevik Central Committee following Lenin's arrival at the Smolny Institute?



### 25 OCTOBER

Meanwhile, Lenin had left his hiding place in Petrograd's outskirts and made his way into the city. He realised that the Provisional Government was vulnerable, and he was anxious to seize power before the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets (which was scheduled to open on the evening of 25 October).

Lenin arrived at the Smolny Institute just before midnight on 24 October. Following a quick briefing from Trotsky, he called a meeting of the Party's Central Committee—and at around 2.00 am the committee members gave their formal approval to the armed seizure of power.

They drew up plans to pursue the attack against the remnants of Kerensky's government, who were still in the Winter Palace. Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko, who would lead the assault on the Winter Palace, declared: 'To work! Our leader is with us! Full speed ahead!'<sup>13</sup>

Lenin's arrival at the Smolny Institute had an electrifying effect on the Bolsheviks. He browbeat his comrades into changing their attitudes from defence to attack, and galvanised the party into action.<sup>14</sup> At 10.00 am on 25 October, Lenin released a statement to the press.

#### Lenin's statement to the press, 25 October 1917

The Provisional Government has been deposed. Government authority 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 proletariat and garrison.

However, although Petrograd was effectively in the hands of the soviet forces, Lenin's declaration that the government had been overthrown was premature. While Milrevcom troops and Red Guards continued to strengthen their control of the city during the day, by nightfall the Winter Palace remained in the hands of Provisional Government ministers.

## ASSAULT ON THE WINTER PALACE

**Leon Trotsky:** 'The will of the Congress has been anticipated by the tremendous fact of the insurrection of the Petersburg workers and soldiers, which has taken place tonight. It simply remains for us to develop our victory.'

In his movie, *October: Ten Days That Shook the World*, Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein depicted the overthrow of the Provisional Government as a triumphant storming of the Winter Palace by heroic soldiers, sailors and workers. The Great October Socialist Revolution—and the legend of this mass-revolutionary onslaught—was thereafter celebrated by Soviet historians.

However, the actual attack on the Winter Palace was confused and poorly organised. The Milrevcom was forced to delay its initial assault after reinforcements from Kronstadt naval base were three hours late.

A key part of the plan was to use the cannons from the fortress that faced the Winter Palace across the Neva River. But at the last minute the Bolsheviks discovered the cannons were rusty museum pieces. They found replacement cannons, but no suitable shells were available.

### DID YOU KNOW?

During the filming of Eisenstein's *October: Ten Days That Shook the World*, one caretaker at the Winter Palace reportedly told the director: 'Your people were more careful last time'. Many extras in the film were Civil War veterans who brought along their own rifles and live ammunition as props for the 'storming' scenes.

The signal to begin the assault on the palace was a red lantern hoisted on a flagpole from the fortress, followed by the cruiser Aurora firing its guns. However, none of the Bolsheviks could find a red lantern. Georgiy Blagonravov, the Bolshevik in charge of the fortress, went out to find a lantern—but got lost and fell in a ditch. When he finally returned with a lantern, it was not red and could not be attached to the flagpole. In the end, a purple flare was the best they could do. To make matters worse, the Aurora was late to arrive in position.<sup>15</sup>

Lenin was infuriated by the delays and mishaps. Nikolai Podvoisky of the Milrevcom recalled that Lenin ‘paced around the Smolny like a lion in a cage. He needed the Winter Palace at any cost: it remained the last gate on the road to workers’ power. [He] scolded ... he screamed ... he was ready to shoot us.’<sup>16</sup>

Things were not going any better for the Provisional Government. Many soldiers had tired of waiting for the Bolshevik assault, and slipped away to eat dinner at the city’s restaurants. The defence of the building was left to the 140 volunteers of the Women’s Death Battalion, forty disabled soldiers led by an officer with artificial legs, a bicycle unit, a handful of young trainee officers and a small detachment of Cossacks.<sup>17</sup>

At 9.40 pm the Aurora fired one blank round to signal the launch of the assault. The cannons of the fortress opened fire around 11.00 pm. Few shells hit the palace—the only damage visible the next day was a shattered window and a broken cornice.

On hearing the artillery fire, government ministers hid under tables, while many of the Women’s Death Battalion became hysterical.<sup>18</sup> Over the coming hours more and more Red Guards, sailors and Milrevcom soldiers haphazardly entered the Winter Palace.<sup>19</sup>

The final bastion of the Provisional Government haemorrhaged from an ever-increasing flow of pro-Bolshevik forces. One entrance had been left totally unguarded, while a group of Bolshevik troops broke in through a basement window. American journalist John Reed was able to walk in ‘unrebuked’, speak to palace servants and invading Red Guards, and then stroll out again.<sup>20</sup>

The Winter Palace was so big that Milrevcom troops could not initially find the remaining Provisional Government ministers. At 2.10 am on 26 October, Bolshevik forces finally found them. The Milrevcom official Antonov-Ovseenko declared the ministers under arrest and led them away to be imprisoned in the fortress.

## 25–26 OCTOBER KEY DEVELOPMENT

25 October 1917

### —Midnight

Lenin arrives at the Smolny Institute.

### —2.00 am

Bolshevik Central Committee meets and draws up plans for seizure of power.

### —9.00 am

Kerensky flees the Winter Palace.

### —10.00 am

Lenin releases statement declaring overthrow of Provisional Government.

### —9.40 pm

Cruiser *Aurora* signals start of assault on the Winter Palace.



◀ The cruiser ship *Aurora*.

26 October 1917

### —10.40 pm

Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets opens.

### —11.00 pm

Cannons of fortress open fire on Winter Palace.

### —1.00 am

Trotsky condemns SR and Menshevik delegates of Soviet Congress. Martov leads remaining Menshevik delegates in protest walk-out.

### —2.10 am

Bolshevik troops led by Antonov-Ovseenko arrest ministers of Provisional Government.

### —3.00 am

News of capture of Winter Palace announced to Soviet Congress.



◀ The Winter Palace.

### —6.00 am

Recess of Soviet Congress called.

### —8.40 pm

Soviet Congress re-opens. Lenin addresses Congress and delivers decrees on Peace and Land.

## DID YOU KNOW?

As the Kronstadt sailors marched to join the assault on the Winter Palace, they chanted a poem by revolutionary poet Vladimir Mayakovsky: 'Eat pineapples, chew on quail. Your last day is coming, bourgeois!' (In 1917 pineapples and quail were luxury foods that working-class people could never afford.)

## Historian Peter Kenez

Historians have asked whether the Bolshevik seizure of power in October was a coup d'état, carried out by the impetuous Bolsheviks, or a true revolution, the work of the radical workers and soldiers of Petrograd. But perhaps the most striking aspect of events was neither the Bolsheviks' daring, nor the behaviour of the workers, but the complete disintegration of governmental authority. Every politically aware person in Petrograd knew the Bolsheviks were about to act, but the government could not defend itself. Under the circumstances one could hardly speak of a coup d'état, much less a conspiracy. The Bolsheviks seized power because the country was in the throes of anarchy.



↑ **Source 7.11** Peter Kenez, *A History of the Soviet Union from the Beginning to the End* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 27–28.

↑ **Source 7.12** An artist's impression of the storming of the Winter Palace, October 1917.

## ACTIVITY

### HISTORICAL SOURCES

Using Sources 7.11, 7.12, 7.13 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Compare how the sources depict the fall of the Provisional Government.
- 2 Explain how the Bolsheviks came to power in October 1917.
- 3 Analyse the significance of Trotsky and the Milrevcom in the events of October 1917. Use evidence to support your response.

**ACTIVITY****CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING**

- 1 List three or more challenges faced by soviet forces during the October insurrection.
- 2 List three or more challenges faced by the Provisional Government in its final days.

**EXTENDED RESPONSE**

Explain how the support of workers, soldiers and sailors for Soviet power influenced the development of the October Revolution. Use evidence to support your response.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

In his final phone call from the Winter Palace, Agriculture Minister Maslov expressed the despair felt by the remaining socialists in the Provisional Government: 'The democracy sent us into the Provisional Government: we did not want the appointments, but we went. Yet now ... when we are being shot, we are not supported ... we will die. But my final words will be: Contempt and damnation to the democracy which knew how to appoint us but was unable to defend us!'

# THE CONGRESS OF SOVIETS

**John Reed:** 'Behind us great Smolny, bright with lights, hummed like a gigantic hive.'

## 25–26 OCTOBER

At the Smolny Institute, the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets had formally opened at 10.40 pm, despite disruptions by the Bolshevik delegates. The first to speak was Yuri Martov, a leading Menshevik-Internationalist. Martov proposed that the soviet form a socialist coalition government. His proposal was met with wild cheers and applause.

Martov was followed by a series of Menshevik and SR delegates who denounced the actions of the Bolsheviks. At 1.00 am most Mensheviks and SRs joined in walk-out protests against events unfolding at the Winter Palace. Bolshevik delegates stomped their feet and whistled as the SRs and Mensheviks began to leave. The walk-out was an act of astounding foolishness.

Historian Robert Service argues that, in staging a walk-out, the moderate socialists were offering ineffective disapproval rather than a true challenge on the floor of the Congress.<sup>21</sup> As the moderates left the hall, Martov tried to revive his call for a coalition government. He asked whether or not a compromise could be made.

Trotsky then rose and gave one of his most famous speeches, in which he dismissed any notion of the Bolsheviks having to compromise with other political parties.

### Trotsky's speech at the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets,

26 October 1917

KEY SOURCE

A rising of the masses requires no justification. What has happened is an insurrection, and not a conspiracy. We hardened the revolutionary energy of the Petersburg workers and soldiers ... The masses followed our banner and our insurrection was victorious. And now we are told: Renounce [give up] your victory, make concessions, compromise. With whom I ask? ... No, here no compromise is possible. To those who have left and those who tell us to do this we must say: You are miserable bankrupts, your role is played out; go back where you ought to go: into the dustbin of history!

◀ **Source 7.13** Cited in Alexander Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd* (Chicago: Haymarket Books and Pluto Press, 2004.), 296.

Martov, enraged, called out, 'Then we will go!' and led the remaining Menshevik and SR delegates out of the Congress.<sup>22</sup> Only members of the Left SR Party stayed. The Bolsheviks now had control of the Soviet Congress.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

As Martov walked out of the Congress, he muttered at those who remained, 'Someday you will understand the crime in which you are participating'.

News of the fall of the Winter Palace arrived around 3.00 am and was received with cheering. A manifesto written by Lenin, 'To All Workers, Soldiers and Peasants', proclaiming the establishment of Soviet power, was read out. Promising to bring about 'Peace, Bread and Land', the manifesto was enthusiastically received and passed unanimously.

→ **Source 7.14** Cited in Alexander Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd* (Chicago: Haymarket Books and Pluto Press, 2004.), 303.

### Lenin, 'To all Workers, Soldiers and Peasants'

Supported by an overwhelming majority of the workers, soldiers, and peasants, and basing itself on the victorious insurrection of the workers and the garrison of Petrograd, the Congress hereby resolves to take governmental power into its own hands.

It seemed Soviet power was triumphant. Kamenev, the Congress chairman, brought the night's events to a close just before 6.00 am on 26 October. It was declared that the Congress would resume the next evening.

### ACTIVITY

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Briefly describe the actions of Martov at the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets.
- 2 Briefly describe the impact of Trotsky's speech at the Soviet Congress.

#### FILM ANALYSIS

View relevant excerpts from Sergei Eisenstein's film *October: Ten Days That Shook the World*. Write a short review that highlights the historical strengths and limitations of this depiction of the October Revolution.

### ACTIVITY

#### HISTORICAL SOURCES

Using Sources 7.13 and 7.14 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Outline the key developments in the October Revolution that occurred at the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets.
- 2 Explain the significance of Lenin and Trotsky in the events of October 1917.
- 3 Evaluate the contribution of the Bolshevik party in challenging the Provisional Government. Use evidence to support your response.

↓ **Source 7.15** Lenin addresses the deputies of the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets, Smolny Institute, October 1917.



# THE LEADERSHIP OF LENIN AND TROTSKY

The leadership of both Lenin and Trotsky was significant in the events of October 1917. Lenin's ideas fuelled the October Revolution. His charisma at the meeting of the Central Committee on the night of 24–25 October was central to the shift from defence to attack against the Provisional Government. And it was Lenin who announced the founding of an exclusively socialist government at the Soviet Congress. Trotsky argued that Lenin's contribution was essential:

Had I not been present in 1917 in Petersburg, the October Revolution would still have taken place—on the condition that Lenin was present and in command. If neither Lenin nor I had been present in Petersburg, there would have been no October Revolution: the leadership of the Bolshevik party would have prevented it from occurring.<sup>23</sup>

Trotsky, as Chairman of the Milrevcom, was responsible for the initial military response to Kerensky's moves of 23 October. Once Lenin had convinced the party leadership to overthrow the government, Trotsky planned and directed the uprising. He was also significant at the Second Congress of Soviets in provoking the remaining Menshevik delegates to leave. Although they would later become bitter enemies, this is how Josef Stalin outlined Trotsky's role in the October uprising in an article in *Pravda* in November 1918:

All practical work in connection with the organization of the uprising was done under the immediate direction of Comrade Trotsky, the president of the Petrograd Soviet. It can be stated with certainty that the Party is indebted primarily and principally to Comrade Trotsky for the rapid going over of the garrison to the side of the Soviet and the efficient manner in which the work of the Military Revolutionary Committee was organized.<sup>24</sup>

It is often said that Trotsky 'organised' the Bolshevik seizure of power, and Lenin 'inspired' it.



## DID YOU KNOW?

Lenin did not look much like 'Lenin' during the October Days. To disguise his appearance and avoid arrest by the Provisional Government, Lenin was clean-shaven and without the beard that had become his trademark.

Source 7.18 Drawing of Lenin by M. Shafran.



Source 7.16 Statue of Lenin at the State Museum of Political History, St Petersburg.

Source 7.17 Leon Trotsky.



# FORMATION OF SOVIET GOVERNMENT

**Vladimir Lenin:** 'Council of People's Commissars, Council of People's Commissars. That is splendid. That smells of revolution.'

## 26–27 OCTOBER

During the day of 26 October 1917, little appeared to have changed in Petrograd and most people went about their business as normal. At 8.40 pm, when the Congress of Soviets resumed, Lenin finally made an appearance at the podium. He proclaimed, 'We shall now proceed to build, on the space cleared of historical rubbish, the airy, towering edifice of socialist society'.<sup>25</sup> He read out decrees on 'Peace' and 'Land' and was greeted by thunderous applause.

Early on the morning of 27 October, Lenin announced a further development. A new Soviet government was to be formed: the Council of People's **Commissars** (Sovnarkom). All the ministers—or 'commissars' as they were called—were Bolsheviks:

- Alexandra Kollontai—Commissar of Social Welfare
- Josef Stalin—Commissar of Nationalities
- Aleksandr Shlyapnikov—Commissar of Labour
- Anatoli Lunacharsky—Commissar for Enlightenment (arts and education)
- Trotsky—Commissar of Foreign Affairs.

Lenin was the new government's chairman.<sup>26</sup>

**Commissars** minister or official of the Soviet government

**CEC** all-Russian Central Executive Committee of the Soviets, chaired by Sverdlov and, later, Kalinin

## DID YOU KNOW?

On the evening of 26 October, as Lenin and Trotsky tried to get some sleep on the floor of an office at the Smolny Institute, Lenin commented: 'You know, from persecution and a life underground, to come into power so suddenly ... it makes your head spin!'

On 27 October a new Soviet Central Executive Committee (**CEC**) was voted in. It was made up of twenty-nine Left SRs, six Menshevik-Internationalists and sixty-two Bolsheviks.<sup>27</sup> Although the relationship between the Soviet CEC, the Bolshevik Party Central Committee and Sovnarkom was unclear and complex, Lenin and his comrades clearly dominated the new system of government. Many Bolsheviks held seats on all committees simultaneously.<sup>28</sup>

Soviet power had been proclaimed, but it was unclear exactly what it meant. The Bolsheviks had mass support for their ideal of 'All Power to the Soviets' and their aggressive class rhetoric, but workers and soldiers had not favoured 'All Power to the Bolsheviks'.

To appease people's concerns, Lenin claimed that the Sovnarkom would only rule until the Constituent Assembly convened in early 1918, and that the proposed November elections would go ahead as planned.

Despite Lenin's announcement, he and the more radically minded Bolsheviks had still accomplished what they had set out to achieve. The 'bourgeois' Provisional Government had been overthrown and the Bolsheviks had come to power.

## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Copy this table and match the leaders to their new roles in Sovnarkom:

Lenin	Commissar of Social Welfare
Trotsky	Commissar of Foreign Affairs
Stalin	Commissar for Enlightenment
Kollontai	Chairman
Shlyapnikov	Commissar of Nationalities
Lunacharsky	Commissar of Labour

# CHAPTER 7 REVIEW

## KEY SUMMARY POINTS

- By October 1917, the authority of the Provisional Government has reached a critically low point.
- On 10 October, the Bolshevik party leadership agrees to overthrow the Provisional Government at a favourable time in the near future.
- Trotsky institutes the Military Revolutionary Committee (Milrevcom) to defend the soviet from any direct threat.
- On 23 October Kerensky acts to block Bolshevik plans to seize power, but actually provokes them into action.
- From 24–26 October the Provisional Government loses control of Petrograd. Its remaining ministers are overthrown by Bolshevik soldiers and Red Guards during the assault on the Winter Palace.
- Lenin's leadership is critical for inspiring the October Revolution and convincing the party to overthrow the government.
- At the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets, moderate socialists walk out in protest against the Bolsheviks, unwittingly leaving them in control.
- A new Bolshevik-led Soviet government (Sovnarkom) is declared.

## ACTIVITY

### GROUP WORK

In a small group, analyse a timeline of the key events of October 1917. Use a colour scheme or annotations to show which developments were the result of:

- Lenin's actions or leadership
- Trotsky's actions or leadership
- chance, circumstances or poor planning
- Kerensky or the Provisional Government's actions
- long-term causes of the Revolution
- short-term triggers of the Revolution.

### ESSAY

Write a 600–800-word essay on one of the topics below. Your essay should include an introduction, paragraphs supported by relevant evidence from primary sources and historical interpretations, and a conclusion.

- 'More than any other individual, Lenin played a central role in the October revolution of 1917.'
- 'The inadequacies of Kerensky were just as important as the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky in causing the October revolution of 1917.'
- 'The October Revolution could not have succeeded without broad support for Soviet power among workers and soldiers.'
- 'The events of October 1917 were more a Bolshevik coup than a popular revolution.'



# SECTION B

## CONSEQUENCES OF REVOLUTION

- What were the consequences of revolution?
- How did the new regime consolidate its power?
- What were the experiences of those who lived through the revolution?
- To what extent was society changed and revolutionary ideas achieved or compromised?<sup>1</sup>

*'Yes, we shall destroy everything and on the ruins we shall build our temple.'*

*'Trust in the mood, but don't forget your rifles.'*

VLADIMIR  
LENIN



<sup>1</sup> Extract from the VCE History Revolutions Study Design (2022–2026) © VCAA, reproduced by permission.

### ABBREVIATIONS

AGITPROP	agitational propaganda	KOMBEDY	Committees of the Poor	RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic
AFSR	Armed Forces of South Russia	KOMUCH	Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly	SRSALP	Russian Social Democratic Labour Party
CEC	Soviet Central Executive Committee	NARKOMPROS	Commissariat for Enlightenment (Arts, Literacy and Education)	SDs	Social Democratic Workers' Party
CHEKA	All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution, Speculation and Sabotage	NEP	New Economic Policy	SOVNARKOM	Council of People's Commissars
COMINTERN	Communist International	NKVD	People's Commissar of Internal Affairs	SRs	Socialist Revolutionaries
GOELRO	State Commission for the Electrification of Russia	OGPU	United State Political Administration	USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
GOSPLAN	State Planning Committee	POLITBURO	Political bureau of the Bolshevik Central Committee	VESENKA	Supreme Council of the National Economy
				VIKZHEL	Union of Russian Railroad Workers
				ZHENOTDEL	Women's Department of the Central Committee



'Are you helping to eliminate illiteracy? All in society. Down with illiteracy.'

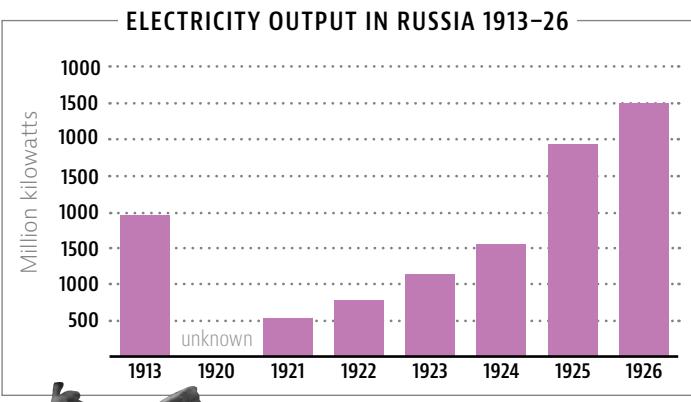
**70%**

PETROGRAD

**50%**

MOSCOW

FALL IN URBAN POPULATION  
c. 1920



*'There is nothing immoral in the proletariat finishing off a class that is collapsing—that is its right.'*

LEON TROTSKY

*'The Bolshevik revolution wrought calamity on a scale commensurate with the transformation in the human condition it sought to achieve.'*

HISTORIAN STEVE SMITH

**10 million**

DEATHS DURING CIVIL WAR PERIOD



**5 million**

DEATHS FROM DISEASE AND STARVATION

**'DOWN WITH LENIN AND HORSEMEAT! GIVE US THE TSAR AND PORK.'**

Petrograd graffiti, c. 1919

# EXPERIENCES OF REVOLUTION

Note: These fictional characters are based on historical research.



Aleksandr, a Chekist, c. 1919:

'Like my comrades in the Red Army, I serve on the front—but my front is perhaps more dangerous. The Whites are in uniform, yet not all enemies of the revolution are so easily seen. I am a sword and shield of the revolution. If I uncover a threat to our Soviet government then my pistol will be drawn and I will shoot! Up against the wall! Yes, in this fight for a new world terrible things must be done and the bourgeoisie will suffer. This is a fight to the death!'



Ilya, Moscow industrial worker, c. 1923:

'The winter of 1918 and 1919 ... those were cold, hungry days. We searched for anything to burn in the stove, there was little bread and we ate horsemeat. If I'd been able to get my hands on a dog or cat I'd have eaten that too! I thought the revolution would bring freedom, but then all I remember is cold and hunger. Today, there are markets open and I have steady work. I can't complain about my lot. I would not say critical things of the government—that is dangerous.'



Vanya, Kadet politician, c. 1918:

Usurpers! Thieves! The Bolsheviks have stolen power! They betray Russia and have sold out to the Germans. They shoot down the people. They are not even true Russians! We must rouse the Cossacks and rally behind true patriots like Kornilov and Denikin. Stern leadership is required. We must save the Empire from the Lenin-Trotsky gang of criminals!



Masha, socialist artist, c. 1920:

Red, red, red! A new world! Workers march! The burzhooi tremble! Lenin, Trotsky, Kollontai, Lunacharsky ... heroes all! See the calloused hands of the worker? His hammer? With these a new world is built. How can I capture this excitement on a canvas?



Fedor, former lawyer, c. 1918:

Once I had a successful career, a fine apartment ... all gone! I've been attacked in the street by hooligans and my home is filled with stinking workers. Today I was forced at gunpoint to sweep the streets. Where is the law? I would leave my precious Russia but I fear being jailed or worse...

**Elena, Petrograd factory worker, c. 1924:**

I cried when I heard that Comrade Lenin was dead. The revolution changed my life. My mother was one of those who called for bread in February 1917. The tsar cared nothing for the people. But life is still a struggle—I work long hours in the factory. But at night I go to reading classes. My mother would not believe the rights we women have now.

**Sergei, peasant, c. 1922:**

In 1917 my fellow villagers and I took what was rightly ours: the land. We loved the revolution!

When the Civil War came, it was said the Whites would bring back the landlords. But the Communists took our grain—many starved. With the NEP we can trade our grain again. Still, I am suspicious of the government.

**Ivan, Kronstadt sailor, c. March 1921:**

Hear that? Artillery and rifles! The so-called 'red' troops commanded by the murderous Trotsky are coming to get revolutionary Kronstadt! What was the Civil War for? Russia is a prison: they starve peasants, shoot workers and throw opponents in jail. Down with Commissarocracy!

**Tatiana, aristocratic landowner, c. 1916:**

Russia must be governed by a stern hand. This is as God commands. How could anyone other than the Holy Tsar rule this vast land? But dark forces have gathered around the throne. I worry day and night how the war has stirred up the anger of the common folk. I hear that estates in neighbouring provinces have been attacked by peasant soldiers. My husband served valiantly as an officer, but I have been burdened with fear and despair since his death. What will become of me? What will become of Russia?

**Lev, Menshevik politician, c. mid-1917:**

The bourgeois revolution has been accomplished and a new democratic age has dawned. We must unite the forces of democracy to build this new Russia! But comrades, beware the false promises of the Bolsheviks! They talk of bread, land and peace but offer no sensible policies. To even consider a socialist revolution so soon after Glorious February is to invite a Civil War. This is irresponsible and false Marxism!

**ACTIVITY****DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

Consider the perspectives portrayed here then discuss the following as a class or in small groups.

- Which person's experience do you connect or empathise with the most? Why?
- Identify one or more historically significant events or developments that impacted on each person's experience.
- Select the person whose experience most highlights to you the ways that revolutionary ideas were achieved or compromised. Be prepared to justify your response.

# 26 OCTOBER 1917–1927



1917

## 27 OCTOBER 1917

Formation of Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom) announced. New Soviet Central Executive Committee (CEC) elected. Decrees on Press and Land issued

## 29 OCTOBER 1917

Union of Russian Railroad Workers (Vikzhel) demands formation of coalition socialist government

## 1 NOVEMBER 1917

Sovnarkom rejects Vikzhel's demands. Kamenev and four other Bolshevik commissars resign in protest

## 2 NOVEMBER 1917

'Declaration of the Rights of the People of Russia' decree granted national self-determination of many groups. Milrevcom troops gain control of Moscow

## 8 NOVEMBER 1917

Sverdlov elected chairman of Soviet CEC

## 12 NOVEMBER 1917

Elections for Constituent Assembly begin (concluded by 15 November)

## 14 NOVEMBER 1917

'Workers' Control' Decree. State Bank employees refuse to hand over money to government officials

## 20 NOVEMBER 1917

Control of State Bank funds gained by Red Guards

## 22 NOVEMBER 1917

Criminal justice system abolished and replaced by People's Courts

## 28 NOVEMBER 1917

Kadet party banned and its leaders arrested

## 2 DECEMBER 1917

Ceasefire with Germany. Vesenkha established

## 5 DECEMBER 1917

Decree on 'Marriage'

## 7 DECEMBER 1917

Cheka created

## 9–10 DECEMBER 1917

Left SRs enter Sovnarkom

## 14 DECEMBER 1917

Banks, stock companies and financial institutions nationalised

## 16 DECEMBER 1917

Formal ranks and saluting abolished in armed forces

## LATE DECEMBER 1917

Volunteer Army led by Generals Alekseev and Kornilov founded at Rostov-on-Don



1918

## 1 JANUARY 1918

Assassination attempt on Lenin

## 5–6 JANUARY 1918

Constituent Assembly convened, but dissolved after one day

—  
— 5–6 January 1918  
Constituent Assembly convened and dissolved  
— 7 December 1917  
Cheka created

KEY EVENT →

KEY EVENT →

# TIMELINE

-18 February 1918	German army resumes offensive	-3 March 1918	Treaty of Brest-Litovsk	April 1918	Formal recognition of state capitalism	-28 June 1918	War Communism	5 September 1918	Decree on Red Terror
<b>1918</b> (continued)	<b>8 JANUARY 1918</b> Third All-Russian Congress of Soviets declares a 'Soviet republic': the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic (RSFSR)			<b>1918</b> (continued)	<b>22 MAY 1918</b> Czech Legion overthrows Soviet authorities along the Trans-Siberian Railway				
	<b>21 JANUARY 1918</b> All foreign debts annulled				<b>8 JUNE 1918</b> Czech Legion occupies Samara.				
	<b>23 JANUARY 1918</b> Decree 'On Separation of Church and State'				<b>Formation of the SR-dominated Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly (Komuch)</b>				
	<b>28 JANUARY 1918</b> Ukrainian parliament declares independence, but is not recognised by Soviet Russia				<b>11 JUNE 1918</b> Decree on the formation of Committees of the Poor (kombedy)				
<b>KEY EVENT</b>	<b>1 FEBRUARY 1918</b> Gregorian calendar introduced (1 February becomes 14 February)				<b>14 JUNE 1918</b> Right SRs and Mensheviks expelled from soviets				
	<b>18 FEBRUARY 1918</b> German army resumes offensive against Russia following breakdown of talks at Brest-Litovsk			<b>KEY EVENT</b>	<b>28 JUNE 1918</b> Decree on Nationalisation—beginning of War Communism				
	<b>21 FEBRUARY 1918</b> 'The Socialist Fatherland is in Danger' Decree				<b>JULY 1918</b> Class-based rationing system introduced				
	<b>22 FEBRUARY 1918</b> New treaty terms granted by Germany				<b>9 JULY 1918</b> Left SRs expelled from soviets				
<b>KEY EVENT</b>	<b>23 FEBRUARY 1918</b> Founding of the Red Army				<b>17 JULY 1918</b> Execution of Tsar Nicholas and family at Yekaterinburg				
	<b>3 MARCH 1918</b> Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signed by Sovnarkom				<b>19 JULY 1918</b> Fifth Congress of Soviets ratifies new constitution				
	<b>8 MARCH 1918</b> Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (Bolshevik) changes name to Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) at the Seventh Party Congress			<b>KEY EVENT</b>	<b>2-4 AUGUST 1918</b> American and British troops land at Vladivostok and Archangel				
	<b>9 MARCH 1918</b> Allied troops land at Murmansk				<b>30 AUGUST 1918</b> Assassination of Petrograd Cheka chief Moisei Uritsky				
<b>KEY EVENT</b>	<b>10 MARCH 1918</b> Capital moved from Petrograd to Moscow				<b>SR Fanya Kaplan shoots and seriously wounds Lenin</b>				
	<b>15 MARCH 1918</b> Treaty of Brest-Litovsk ratified by Fourth Congress of Soviets			<b>KEY EVENT</b>	<b>5 SEPTEMBER 1918</b> Decree on Red Terror				
	Left SRs withdraw from Sovnarkom				<b>23 SEPTEMBER 1918</b> The Komuch reorganised into the Provisional All-Russian Government at Omsk				
<b>KEY EVENT</b>	<b>APRIL 1918</b> Formal recognition of State Capitalism as Soviet economic policy				<b>13 NOVEMBER 1918</b> Soviet government renounces obligations of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk				
	<b>13 APRIL 1918</b> General Kornilov killed. Command of the Volunteer Army assumed by General Denikin								

—January 1919  
Grain requisitioning

**1918**  
(continued)

**18 NOVEMBER 1918**

Kolchak overthrows Provisional All-Russian Government at Omsk

**21 NOVEMBER 1918**

Decree introduced effectively banning all private trade

**30 NOVEMBER 1918**

Ban on Mensheviks annulled

**2 DECEMBER 1918**

Committees of the Poor (kombedy) dissolved

**JANUARY 1919**

Grain-requisitioning squads begin prodrazverstka

**KEY EVENT** ➤

**1919**



**FEBRUARY 1919**

Ban on SRs annulled

**2–6 MARCH 1919**

First Congress of the Communist Internationale (Comintern)

**4 MARCH 1919**

Beginning of Kolchak's campaign in Siberia and the Urals

**16 MARCH 1919**

Death of Sverdlov

**11 APRIL 1919**

Decree on 'Forced Labour Camps' formalises introduction of concentration camps by Soviet authorities

**APRIL 1919**

The first subbotnik ('Communist Saturday')

**MAY 1919**

First campaign by Yudenich against Petrograd

		<b>21 January 1924</b>
		Death of Lenin
	<b>1 March 1921</b>	
Kronstadt rebellion		
	<b>8–16 March 1921</b>	
Tenth Congress of Communist Party		
	<b>15 MAY 1919</b>	
(continued)	Sovnarkom instructs State Bank to increase print runs of bank notes, thereby bringing on hyperinflation	
	<b>4 JUNE 1919</b>	
	Beginning of Mahkno's Green uprising in Ukraine	
	<b>NOVEMBER 1919</b>	
	Second campaign against Petrograd by Yudenich	
<b>1920</b>	<b>7 FEBRUARY 1920</b>	
	Execution of Admiral Kolchak	
	<b>26 APRIL 1920</b>	
	Invasion of Ukraine by Polish armed forces (start of Polish-Soviet War)	
	<b>AUGUST 1920</b>	
	Outbreak of Green resistance under Antonov in Tambov Province	
	<b>12 OCTOBER 1920</b>	
	Armistice signed between Polish and Soviet governments	
	<b>15 OCTOBER 1920</b>	
	Alexandra Kollontai publishes <i>Communism and the Family</i>	
	<b>14 NOVEMBER 1920</b>	
	Last remnants of White Armies under General Wrangel evacuate from the Crimea	
<b>1921</b>	<b>FEBRUARY 1921</b>	
	Mass strikes in Moscow and Petrograd	
	<b>22 FEBRUARY 1921</b>	
	State Planning Committee (Gosplan) established	
<b>KEY EVENT</b>	<b>1 MARCH 1921</b>	
	Kronstadt sailors call for new socialist government and 'Soviets without Communists'	
	<b>7 MARCH 1921</b>	
	Launch of Red Army assault on Kronstadt	
	<b>8–16 MARCH 1921</b>	
	Tenth Congress of Communist Party NEP introduced	
<b>KEY EVENT</b>	<b>17 MARCH 1921</b>	
	Red Army captures Kronstadt	
	<b>18 MARCH 1921</b>	
	Treaty of Riga between Poland and Soviet Russia	
	<b>JUNE–JULY 1921</b>	
	Disastrous harvest leads to severe famine	
	<b>1921</b>	
(continued)	<b>24 AUGUST 1921</b>	
	Execution of poet Nikolai Gumilev	
	<b>OCTOBER 1921</b>	
	Emigration of author Maxim Gorky	
	<b>1922</b>	
	<b>6 FEBRUARY 1922</b>	
	Cheka renamed the GPU	
	<b>26 FEBRUARY 1922</b>	
	Orthodox Church resists confiscation of Church valuables to fund famine relief	
	<b>16 MARCH 1922</b>	
	Trade agreement negotiated with Great Britain	
	<b>3 APRIL 1922</b>	
	Stalin appointed General Secretary	
	<b>MAY–SEPTEMBER 1922</b>	
	Repression and deportation of Soviet intellectuals	
	<b>26 MAY 1922</b>	
	Lenin's first stroke	
	<b>6 JUNE 1922</b>	
	Start of SR 'show trials'	
	<b>23 SEPTEMBER 1922</b>	
	RSFSR reorganised into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)	
	<b>15 DECEMBER 1922</b>	
	Lenin's second stroke	
	<b>25 DECEMBER 1922</b>	
	Lenin dictates his 'Testament'	
	<b>1923</b>	
	<b>4 JANUARY 1923</b>	
	Lenin recommends Stalin's removal from General Secretary post	
	<b>10 MARCH 1923</b>	
	Lenin's third stroke	
	<b>17–25 APRIL 1923</b>	
	Trotsky analyses the 'scissors crisis' phenomenon	
	<b>6 JULY 1923</b>	
	GPU renamed the OGPU	
	<b>21 JANUARY 1924</b>	
<b>KEY EVENT</b>	Death of Lenin	
	<b>26 JANUARY 1924</b>	
	Petrograd renamed Leningrad	
	<b>27 JANUARY 1924</b>	
	Leningrad founded	
<b>1924</b>		

# THE NEW REGIME

## (OCTOBER 1917–APRIL 1918)

Historian William Chamberlin argues that, 'The holding of power by the Bolsheviks was a far greater achievement than the taking of it'. Following the tumultuous events of October 1917, the new Soviet government quickly gained control of most major cities in Russia. Lenin and his comrades resisted pressure from other socialist parties to form a coalition government, and instead embarked on their grand vision to create the 'towering edifice' of socialism.

The Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom) inundated Russia with its new decrees, which endorsed many popular sentiments, including:

- workers' control
- peace with Germany
- women's rights
- agrarian revolution in the villages.

In its first few months, Soviet rule was also challenged by social unrest, economic breakdown, military crises and internal party disagreements. Crime and political opposition prompted the government to institute the Cheka, led by 'Iron Felix' Dzerzhinsky.

When the Bolsheviks seized power in October, many critics scoffed at their audacity, and believed that the new government would last maybe a few months. Yet by 1918 the October revolutionaries were still in government and had brought considerable changes to Russia. Lenin described these early months of Sovnarkom rule as a 'triumphant march of Soviet power'.

### KEY QUESTIONS

- What were the initial challenges faced by the Sovnarkom?
- How did the new regime consolidate its power?
- How did Bolshevik ideals influence the new society?
- Why was the Cheka formed? How and why did its authority increase?
- What revolutionary changes emerged as a consequence of the new decrees?
- To what extent was State Capitalism an effective economic policy?

***'Much has been left in the world that must be destroyed by fire and iron.'***

—Vladimir Lenin

### KEY EVENTS

—29 October 1917

Union of Russian Railroad Workers (Vikzhel) demands formation of coalition socialist government

—14 November 1917

'Workers' Control' Decree

—22 November 1917

Criminal justice system abolished and replaced by People's Courts

—28 November 1917

Kadet party banned and its leaders arrested

—5 December 1917

Decree on 'Marriage'

—7 December 1917

Cheka created

—9–10 December 1917

Left SRs enter Sovnarkom

—14 December 1917

Banks, stock companies and financial institutions nationalised

—23 January 1918

Decree 'On Separation of Church and State'

—1 February 1918

Gregorian calendar introduced (1 February becomes 14 February)

—21 February 1918

'The Socialist Fatherland is in Danger' Decree

—April 1918

Formal recognition of State Capitalism as Soviet economic policy

# CHAPTER 8



Source 8.01 *The Resolute Brothers* by Alexander Apsit, 1918.

# SOVNARKOM: INITIAL CHALLENGES

**Leon Trotsky:** 'If you do not succeed in barring the path to drunken excess, all you will have left in the way of defenses will be the armoured cars. Remember this, each day of drunkenness brings the other side closer to victory and us to the old slavery.'

The new Bolshevik government faced a range of immediate problems when it came to power.

- Russia's civil servants went on strike in protest over the October 'coup'.
- Trotsky and Kollontai arrived for work at their respective ministries to be greeted with laughter and a mass walk-out by staff.
- Keys to offices and safes were hidden, records were destroyed, desks and cupboards emptied.
- Secretarial staff chose to stay at home rather than go to work.
- Employees of the State Bank refused to hand over any money to Sovnarkom officials.<sup>1</sup>

It was not until 20 November 1917—with the help of armed Red Guards—that the Bolsheviks gained access to the money in the State Bank. And it was not just white-collar workers who objected to the new Bolshevik government. The Union of Russian Railroad Workers (*Vikzhel*) was led by Mensheviks and SRs who threatened to cut off all deliveries of supplies to Petrograd unless negotiations to form a coalition socialist government were forthcoming.

A number of moderate Bolsheviks, such as Kamenev and Zinoviev, supported *Vikzhel*'s concerns and entered into talks with other political groups.<sup>2</sup> But Lenin and Trotsky dismissed the value of these discussions—although they did agree that negotiations might stall their opponents. When it became clear that Lenin would not compromise on a Bolshevik–Menshevik–SR coalition, five leading Bolsheviks, including Zinoviev and Kamenev, resigned from the Central Committee in protest.<sup>3</sup>

Before seizing power in October, Lenin had not considered how the Bolsheviks might govern or deal with practical problems. Plans for the day-to-day running of the government and the roles different institutions might play had been unclear. Few Bolsheviks had any experience in practical economics, law, military matters or business—after all, they were revolutionaries, not politicians.<sup>4</sup>

Lenin explained to the new Commissar of Finance why he was chosen for the job: 'You are not much of a financier, but you are a man of action'.<sup>5</sup> Once they had seized power, Lenin told his Bolsheviks that they should wait and see what challenges arose, then respond accordingly.

Many Bolsheviks believed that an international socialist revolution was inevitable. And they expected that the creation of a new socialist society in Russia—supported by revolution elsewhere—would be much easier than it turned out to be. When he became Commissar of Foreign Affairs, Trotsky remarked, 'What sort of diplomatic work will we be doing anyway? I shall issue a few revolutionary decrees to the peoples, then shut up shop'.<sup>6</sup>

## ACTIVITY



### EXTENDED RESPONSE

Explain how class conflict encouraged popular participation and support for the revolution in October–November 1917. Use evidence to support your response.

## VIOLENCE AND DISORDER

The fall of the Provisional Government led to a general breakdown of law and order. The situation had been getting steadily worse since the February Revolution, but the post-revolution anarchy was another level altogether.

The massive wine cellars of the Winter Palace were ransacked and there was much looting, despite efforts of Sovnarkom officials to maintain order around seized governmental buildings. Wine riots or 'drink *pogroms*'—as they were known at the time—were ferocious. Mobs raided the cellars of well-off people and vicious fighting broke out among the intoxicated participants. Some looters drank themselves to death.

Even when officials had collections of wine and liquor destroyed and the contents poured into the street, crowds gathered to drink the alcohol from the gutter.<sup>7</sup> Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko, one of three commissars in charge of military affairs, recalled the chaos:

### The wine riots

A wild and unexampled orgy spread over Petrograd ... We tried to stop them by walling up the entrances. The crowd penetrated through the windows, forced out the bars and grabbed the stocks. An attempt was made to flood the cellars with water. The fire brigade sent to do this themselves got drunk ... The whole city was infected by the drinking madness.

**pogrom** an organised, violent attack on a minority group (particularly Jews). In this context, the term was used to emphasise the destructive and mindless nature of the drunken riots



Maxim Gorky, renowned author and editor of the newspaper *Novaia Zhizn* (New Life), had warned on 18 October that if the Bolsheviks seized power, 'All the dark instincts of the crowd irritated by the disintegration of life and by the lies and filth of politics will flare up and fume, poisoning us with anger, hate and revenge'.<sup>8</sup> He described the mood following the October Revolution as not one of celebratory release, but 'a storm of dark passions':

### Maxim Gorky on the mood following the October Revolution

... a storm of dark passions; the past has laid bare before us its depths and shows how repulsively deformed man is; a blizzard of greed, hatred and vengeance rages about us; a wild beast, enraged by long captivity and worn out by centuries of torment, has opened wide its vengeful jaws and in triumph roars out its rancour and malice.

◀ **Source 8.02** Cited in Tariq Ali and Phil Evans, *Trotsky For Beginners* (London: Writers and Readers Publishing, 1980), 81.

◀ **Source 8.03** Pogrom of wine shop by Ivan Vladimirov, circa 1917.



↑ Maxim Gorky.

◀ **Source 8.04** Maxim Gorky, *Untimely Thoughts: Essays on Revolution, Culture and the Bolsheviks 1917–1918* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 116.

## ACTIVITY



### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Describe three immediate challenges faced by Sovnarkom.
- 2 Which union tried to pressure the Bolsheviks into a coalition with other socialist parties?
- 3 Why were the drink pogroms a significant concern for the soviet government?
- 4 What was the 'dualism' in Bolshevik ideas in the early days of the new regime?

### HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Compare different perspectives of the violent and destructive behaviour of the masses following the October Revolution. Discuss why these accounts might differ so much in the way they describe the immediate consequences of the Revolution.

Other writers saw something exciting and awe-inspiring in the brutality of revolutionary violence. In his poem 'The Twelve', Aleksandr Blok mythologised the exploits of a group of Bolshevik soldiers roaming the streets of Petrograd and intimidating citizens: 'Put your shutters up, I say—there'll be broken locks today! Open your cellars: quick, run down ...! The scum of the earth are hitting the town!'<sup>9</sup>

Brutal and excessive street violence was a feature of life on the streets of Russia's cities after the October Revolution. Mobs handed out vigilante justice, and lynched suspected criminals. Crimes such as looting, robbery and physical assault were common, as was murdering members of the bourgeoisie in the street.

The Bolsheviks did not have the power to stop this violence, but nor did they discourage it. Popular violence had a purpose in terrorising class enemies. Proletarian attacks on symbols and people of wealth and privilege were given explicit approval by the Bolsheviks and justified through the language of class conflict. Trotsky claimed that, 'There is nothing immoral in the proletariat finishing off a class that is collapsing—that is its right'.<sup>10</sup>

## AUTHORITY AND LIBERTY

One way to understand the nature of the new regime was that there was a 'dualism' in Bolshevik thought: it was both authoritarian and libertarian.<sup>11</sup> Lenin and his comrades believed that a strong, centralised government was needed to bring order to Russia's shattered economy, and to formalise the 'dictatorship of the Proletariat' over the 'exploiters'.

However, the Bolsheviks also felt that the masses should be encouraged to participate in the revolutionary process; to be awakened to a sense of liberty and excitement in smashing the old world and building the new. In the words of Lenin, it was essential 'to imbue [inspire] the oppressed and the working people with confidence in their own strength'.<sup>12</sup>

In the chaotic weeks that followed the toppling of the Provisional Government, the idea that the proletariat should 'loot the looters' appealed to the hungry, war-ravaged lower classes. Bolshevik propaganda posters promoted these ideas. It was easy for people to blame their hardships on capitalist '**burzhooi** spiders' (bourgeois exploiters) and 'enemies of the people'. In this way a war on privilege became a key ideal of the revolution, and the masses were encouraged to take matters into their own hands to achieve this.

However, the Bolsheviks were not anarchists. They did not call for a total end to law and order or the destruction of property useful for the creation of a socialist economy. In late 1917, Lenin told one delegation of workers: 'You are the power: do all you want to do, take all you want. We shall support you, but take care of production, see that production is useful.'<sup>13</sup> The ideals of empowerment and mass-revolutionary participation went hand-in-hand with discipline and coercion in the early months of Soviet rule.<sup>14</sup>

**burzhooi** working-class slang and derogatory term for *bourgeois*. Was used to describe people formerly of wealth and privilege

## ACTIVITY

### CREATIVE RESPONSE

In a small group, act out a conversation between some of the following characters about the chaos following the fall of the Provisional Government:

- a pro-Bolshevik worker
- a Bolshevik commissar
- a drunk soldier
- a middle-class businessman
- a pro-Menshevik railway worker
- a clerk at the State Bank.

### DISCUSSION

In small groups discuss how each of the following were a challenge for the new regime in consolidating its power:

- the civil servants' strike
- street violence and 'drink pogroms'
- Bolshevik inexperience
- economic challenges
- ideological differences within the party.

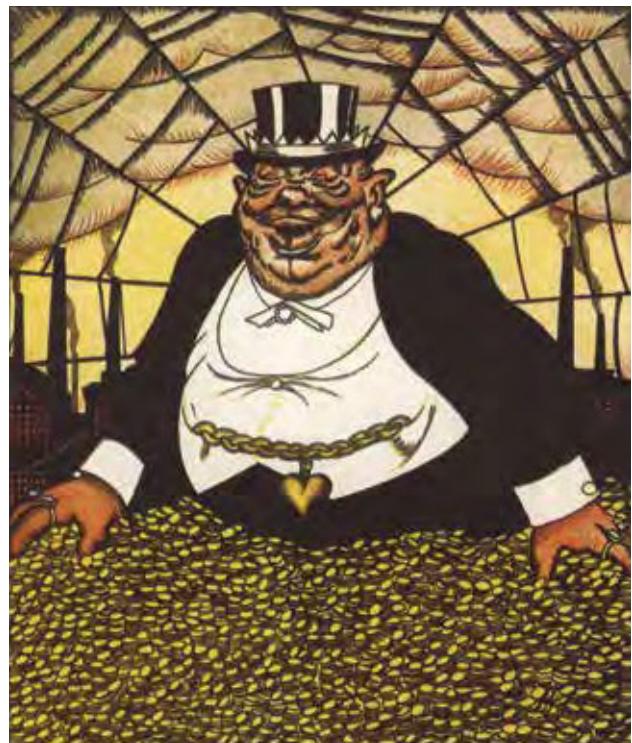
### HISTORICAL SOURCES

Using Sources 8.05 and 8.06 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Using specific details, compare how the sources depict so-called 'enemies of the people'.
- 2 Explain how the Bolsheviks aimed to change popular attitudes toward the bourgeoisie.
- 3 Analyse how the Bolsheviks encouraged popular participation in the early months of the revolutionary regime to achieve their ideals. Use evidence to support your response.



**Source 8.05** *Fly Catcher and Booty*  
by Viktor Deni, 1919.



**Source 8.06** *Capital*, by Viktor Deni, 1919.

# THE CHEKA

KEY DEVELOPMENT

**Felix Dzerzhinsky:** 'Our Revolution is in danger. Do not concern yourselves with the forms of Revolutionary justice. We have no need for justice now.'

Although the Bolsheviks were pleased with popular expressions of class warfare, the impending social disorder of wine riots and mob violence could not be allowed to continue. Similarly, those who undermined the effectiveness of the new government—such as Petrograd's civil servants and State Bank employees—were not to be tolerated.

Lenin argued that it was necessary for the Soviet government to form its own political police force to investigate and expose these 'counter-revolutionary' and 'criminal' activities. In early December 1917, Lenin outlined his concerns: 'The bourgeoisie ... are bribing the outcast and degraded elements of society and plying them with drink to use them in riots ... Urgent measures are necessary to fight the counter-revolutionaries and saboteurs.'<sup>15</sup>

On 7 December 1917, the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution, Speculation and Sabotage was founded. Known as the **Cheka**—from the Russian abbreviation of its title ('Ch-K')—this 'extraordinary commission' was seen as a temporary emergency measure.

The Cheka was given quite modest powers; the publication of lists of 'enemies of the people' and confiscation of ration cards were suggested as its most severe sanctions. It was initially an organisation for investigating rather than punishing. The first **Chekists** were only authorised to conduct searches and make inquiries.

The job of heading the Cheka was given to a Polish Bolshevik named Felix Dzerzhinsky. Dzerzhinsky was a logical choice for this trusted position—he was a member of the Military Revolutionary Committee, and head of security for the Bolsheviks at their Smolny Institute headquarters. His reputation for toughness and inscrutability earned him the nickname 'Iron Felix'.

The Cheka was founded with a staff of just twenty-three people. For some weeks, Dzerzhinsky carried all his files in a single briefcase and wrote out his orders by hand because he had no typist. The secretary who was finally appointed had to double as an investigator.

Faced with rising opposition and perceived political danger, the Cheka soon obtained the powers of arrest and imprisonment—and, eventually, execution. A January 1918 assassination attempt on Lenin—plus several bomb scares at the Smolny Institute—led the Bolshevik leaders to call for a strengthened and more efficient political police.

The expansion of the Cheka's powers was further encouraged by the threat of German invasion following the breakdown of negotiations at Brest-Litovsk in February 1918. The threat of German invasion prompted the release of an emergency decree on 21 February: 'The Socialist Fatherland is in Danger!' Drafted by Lenin, the decree declared: 'Enemy agents, profiteers, marauders, hooligans, counter-revolutionary agitators and German spies, are to be summarily shot'.<sup>16</sup>

The execution or imprisonment of these 'enemies' was arbitrary—they did not have to be brought to trial. Few leading Bolsheviks had any doubts about using violence to safeguard the survival of the revolutionary regime.



↑ Felix Dzerzhinsky—commonly known as 'Iron Felix'.

**Cheka** the Soviet political police, headed by Felix Dzerzhinsky; also called 'Vecheika' or 'Tcheka'

**Chekist** member of the Cheka

## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 What challenges to the new regime influenced the formation of the Cheka?
- 2 Outline the initial powers and size of the Cheka.
- 3 Who was appointed to head the Cheka? Why was this person seen as a 'logical choice' for this role?
- 4 What factors influenced the expansion of the Cheka in early 1918?

Historian Alter Litvin argues that ‘... the Bolshevik leadership had created an extreme situation, and they saw a way out in the organization of a powerful punitive institution, capable of terrifying and terrorizing the population’.<sup>17</sup>

However, historians have debated whether the evolution of the Cheka into a formidable weapon of state-sanctioned coercion was intentional or whether it unfolded of its own accord. The fearsome Cheka of the Civil War period had yet to emerge—but its foundations were being laid in the weeks following the October Revolution.

## NEW DECREES KEY DEVELOPMENT

**Leon Trotsky:** ‘We, the Soviets of Workers’, Soldiers’ and Peasants’ Deputies, are going to try an experiment unique in history; we are going to found a power which will have no other aim but to satisfy the needs of the soldiers, workers and peasants.’

The early initiatives of the Soviet government had two aims:

- ensuring a continuation of power
- instituting radical social and economic change.

The Bolsheviks were determined to prove they were a government of revolutionary action—unlike the Provisional Government. In support of such a view, American journalist John Reed described the Bolsheviks as ‘the only people in Russia who had a definite program of action while the others talked for eight long months’.<sup>18</sup>

### Extract from Arthur Ransome’s report for the *Daily News*, 29 December 1917

I arrived in Petrograd to find that the reports of disorder appearing in the English press are based mainly on wilful misrepresentation by the opposition newspapers here. The city is more orderly than it had been for some months before the Bolsheviks took control. For the first time since the Revolution the Government in Russia is based on real force. People may not like the Bolsheviks, but they obey them with startling alacrity [quickness]. The ... Government is extremely efficient, energetic and decisive, though faced by the noisy opposition of the privileged classes, who, though quite unable to replace this Government by one of their own, are doing all that they can to shake it by means of sabotage and libel.

Just as the spontaneous revolutionary ‘excesses’ of the masses were praised by leading Bolsheviks, the early Sovnarkom decrees were—in part—aimed at encouraging popular participation in the revolution. Assessing the new decrees, British historian Robert Service argues that, ‘They were designed to inspire, to excite and to instigate’.<sup>19</sup>

Lenin saw the early laws of the new government as explicitly agitational: ‘The purpose of a decree is to teach practical steps to the hundreds, thousands, and millions of people who heed the voice of the Soviet government. This is a trial in practical action.’<sup>20</sup>

The Bolsheviks and their sympathisers, such as US journalist John Reed, believed that a new world was in the making and that each new decree was a step towards realising this goal. It was clearly an exhilarating experience. Upon coming to power, Lenin proclaimed, ‘Yes, we shall destroy everything and on the ruins we shall build our temple!'<sup>21</sup>

However, it would be wrong to say that the Bolsheviks set out to destroy everything. Russia’s royal palaces were carefully guarded, with certain national treasures to be

### ACTIVITY

#### DISCUSSION

In small groups compare the Cheka, as it was during the period December 1917–March 1918, to the tsarist Okhrana. In your discussion, evaluate the continuity and change between the old and new regimes in this regard.

 **Source 8.07** Cited in Harvey Pitcher, *Witnesses of the Russian Revolution* (London: Pimlico, 2001), 266.

### ACTIVITY

#### HISTORICAL SOURCES

Using Source 8.07 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Outline how the source describes the political situation in Petrograd in late 1917.
- 2 Explain how the Bolsheviks consolidated power in late 1917 and early 1918.
- 3 Analyse how the new decrees and other early actions of the Soviet government reflected an intent to fulfil its revolutionary ideals. Use evidence to support your response.

### The Appeal of the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment, December 1917

Preserve the pictures, statues and buildings—they are the embodiment of the spiritual power of yourselves and your predecessors ... Do not touch a single stone, protect the monuments, buildings, old things and documents—they are your own history and pride. Remember that all this makes up the soil on which your new people's art is rising.

↑ **Source 8.08** Cited in Victor Vinogradov, *A Reader on the History of the USSR 1917–1937* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1981), 69.

preserved as museums for future generations. On hearing that St Basil's Cathedral in Red Square had been damaged during the fight to gain power in Moscow, the Commissar for Enlightenment, Anatoli Lunacharsky, burst into tears and offered his resignation.

## PEASANTS, PRESS AND INDUSTRIAL WORKERS

Lenin was serious when he said, 'we will turn Russia upside down'.<sup>22</sup> The Council of People's Commissars released no less than 116 decrees on various topics over the coming months.

On 27 October 1917, a decree was passed giving the peasantry the right to seize the land of the gentry and distribute the estates how they wished. Although the peasants had been carrying out land seizures for months prior to October, the new Land Decree gave legal sanction to what had been occurring. More importantly, it allowed the Bolsheviks to project an image of supporting the peasantry and delivering on a key promise of the revolution.

A Press Decree was issued on the same day, banning publication of newspapers belonging to political groups who represented the 'bourgeoisie'—that is, the Kadets. On 29 October, workers were guaranteed an eight-hour day by decree. On 14 November, the Workers' Control Decree gave industrial labourers the right to apply to the government to form self-management committees in their factories. These committees were to regulate rates of pay, hiring and dismissals, and take measures to ensure production continued.

## ETHNIC MINORITIES

A decree promising the right to national self-determination—or independence—to various ethnic minorities was passed on 2 November. The first country to take up the offer was Finland, which declared its independence on 17 November.

Lenin and his Commissar of Nationalities, Josef Stalin, hoped to see the establishment of revolutionary Soviet republics throughout the former Russian Empire. They believed that these republics would be reabsorbed into a multinational socialist state that would eventually stretch across the whole European continent.

Whether or not the Bolsheviks expected other nations—such as Poland or the Ukraine—to seek permanent independence is another question entirely, as is the degree to which they were able to halt such actions. However, they did not grant independence to countries that had regimes hostile to the Bolsheviks.

## FURTHER DECREES

On 24 November the criminal justice system and old judiciary were scrapped and replaced by People's Courts in which 'revolutionary justice' was summarily handed out by elected judges. These judges did not have any formal legal training; they were instead guided by their 'revolutionary consciousness'.

The new decrees covered a broad range of issues.

- Reforms in women's rights were introduced.
- Women were guaranteed equal property rights and marriage was made a civil rather than church affair.

- Homosexuality was decriminalised and openly gay men, such as Georgy Chicherin, served in government.<sup>23</sup>
- All banks, stock companies and financial institutions were nationalised and foreign debts were annulled.
- The Russian alphabet was reformed, with redundant letters done away with.
- As a prelude to a formal peace treaty, an armistice with Germany was signed in early December 1917.
- The armed forces underwent ‘democratisation’, whereby officers were elected by their troops. Formal ranks and saluting were abolished on 16 December.
- After 1 February 1918, the Julian calendar was replaced by the Gregorian calendar, which was 13 days ahead, bringing Russia into line with the rest of the world.

**ACTIVITY****CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING**

Create a table showing the **date** and **description** of the key decrees issued by the Council of People's Commissars by the end of 1917.

## STATE CAPITALISM ◀ KEY DEVELOPMENT

**Vladimir Lenin:** 'The resistance of the capitalists and high-ranking employees will be smashed. Not a single person will be deprived of his property except under the special state law proclaiming the nationalisation of the banks and syndicates ... Apart from the strictest accounting and control, apart from levying the set taxes in full the government has no intention of introducing any other measure.'

The Bolsheviks inherited a collapsing economy. Administration of the economy had virtually ceased by the time they seized power in October. Food and fuel shortages were critical, and production was in danger of grinding to a halt.

Bolshevik agitation had certainly inflamed the shortages under the Provisional Government. Historian Alec Nove describes how the Bolsheviks ‘tried to make things worse, since they were unconcerned with an orderly land settlement, industrial production or the military situation. They sought to reap the whirlwind. They contributed to the breakdown but did not cause it.’<sup>24</sup>

A key to understanding the significance and outcomes of 1917 is recognising the social revolution that emerged in response to social tensions and extreme economic disorder. As the Provisional Government’s authority broke down, workers, soldiers and peasants took measures to have some control over their living conditions:

- workers joined together in their factories and attempted to regulate production
- soldiers formed their own revolutionary committees
- peasants seized and redistributed land.

Once they had brought down the Provisional Government, the Bolsheviks sought to impose policies that would bring Russia’s economic chaos under control.

Although all Bolsheviks agreed that moves towards a socialist economy should be undertaken, just how soon and to what extent these ideals should be implemented was a matter for debate.

Party theorists, such as Nikolai Bukharin, argued for an immediate and comprehensive socialist economic program. After April 1918 Lenin proposed a more pragmatic approach that came to be known as ‘State Capitalism’:

- the government would exercise tight control over key industries
- the government would have a monopoly on trade
- financial policy would be directed through a state-owned bank.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

During the state capitalism period, shortages of raw materials led to workers stealing tools and materials to make items that could be readily bartered for food, such as cigarette lighters, kerosene lamps and candlesticks.

## STATE CAPITALISM

### 'STATE' (SOCIALIST)

Government control and ownership of some industries

Centralised banking

Economy overseen by economic department (Vesenkha)

Workers' Control supervises management

### 'CAPITALISM'

Most businesses and industries retain old managers and bosses as 'bourgeois experts'

'Structures' and 'technique' of free market remains. No significant change in economic foundations

Government has a 'monopoly' in some sectors but free market remains

*Lenin saw this approach as a 'transitional' phase of development from capitalism to socialism.*

Most existing economic enterprises were to remain under the direction of their previous owners and managers, supervised by Workers' Control. Lenin insisted that the expertise of 'bourgeois specialists' was necessary in this transitional phase of socialism. Lenin pictured a semi-capitalist economy, regulated and held accountable by a socialist government for the benefit of all Soviet citizens.

On 2 December 1917, a central body to coordinate economic activity was set up: the Supreme Council of the National Economy (*Vesenkha*). This Sovnarkom department was seen as playing a supervisory role—managing and coordinating workers' committees and company management boards. Against Bukharin's criticisms, Lenin argued that by using the achievements and structures put in place by capitalism in the interests of socialism, they would be taking steps towards a full socialist society.

**Vesenkha** Supreme Council of the National Economy; government body that regulated and managed the economy under the Bolsheviks

→ **Source 8.09** Vladimir Lenin, 'The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It,' in *Selected Works II* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), 112–113.

### Lenin on State Capitalism

... state monopoly capitalism inevitably and unavoidably implies a step, or several steps, towards Socialism! For if a large capitalist enterprise becomes a monopoly, it means it serves the whole nation. If it has become a state monopoly, it means the state ... directs the whole enterprise. In whose interests? ... in the interest of the revolutionary democracy—and that will be a step towards Socialism ... Socialism is nothing but state-capitalist monopoly which has been turned in the interest of the whole people and has therefore ceased to be capitalist monopoly.

Lenin's compromise in response to calls for a total socialist economy and full proletariat control of industry was to encourage workers' supervision of production. When they had learned to manage economic affairs as well as capitalist factory owners, then workers could fully take over and run their factories.

## CHALLENGES FOR STATE CAPITALISM

### ACTIVITY

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 What were the main features of State Capitalism?
- 2 What justifications did Lenin make for State Capitalism?
- 3 To what extent was State Capitalism successful?

However, Lenin's ideal of State Capitalism was undermined by deepening social and economic turmoil. Workers' committees feared the total collapse of production, and urged the government to take ownership and regulation of more factories.

Workers forced the matter by taking control of their workplaces from the owners without getting official approval. The extent of these 'nationalisations from below' was reflected in the cities of Moscow and Petrograd, where for every factory formally nationalised under the Workers' Control Decree, four more were seized without government permission.

Lenin had called for a mixed economy, partly run by 'bourgeois specialists', but the proletariat was pushing the government away from this ideal. Lenin was a keen believer in discipline and centralised authority, and would soon institute a far more militarised and state-directed economy.

# CHAPTER 8 REVIEW

## KEY SUMMARY POINTS

- The Sovnarkom was initially confronted by a range of challenges. These included wine riots, strikes and internal disagreement over whether to allow other socialist parties into government.
- Popular expressions of class anger were endorsed by the Soviet government.
- A political police force—called the Cheka—was founded under the leadership of Dzerzhinsky.
- The new decrees imposed a new socialist order and encouraged mass participation in the revolutionary process.
- State Capitalism—which was a mix of capitalist and socialist approaches—was implemented to stabilise and improve the economy. However, production continued to decline and workers undermined the policy.

## ACTIVITY

### QUOTATION BANK

Collate a list of short quotes from the period October 1917–March 1918 that show different historical perspectives. Write a short comment about what each quote suggests about Bolshevik ideology, different attitudes toward the new society, the nature of the challenges Sovnarkom faced, and emerging changes or continuities. Continue to add to the 'bank' as you read the chapters ahead.

### HISTORICAL SOURCES

#### Robert Service

Sovnarkom decrees did not lay down a legal framework. Law meant infinitely less to Lenin, a former lawyer, than the cause of the Revolution. Sovnarkom was offering only broad guidelines for action to workers, soldiers and peasants. The aim was to inform, energize, excite and activate 'the masses'. It did not matter if mistakes were made. The only way to avoid a blunder was to avoid doing anything.

↑ **Source 8.10** Robert Service, *A History of Twentieth-Century Russia* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 85.

Using Sources 8.10 and 8.11 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- Outline how the Sovnarkom and its leaders brought revolutionary changes to Russia between October 1917 and March 1918.
- Explain the challenges the Sovnarkom faced in implementing its revolutionary ideals and consolidating its power.
- Evaluate the extent to which the revolution had resulted in continuities and changes in Russian society by March 1918. Use evidence to support your response.



↑ **Source 8.11:** Comrade Lenin Sweeps the World Clean of Filth by Viktor Deni, 1920.



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SECTION B CONSEQUENCES OF REVOLUTION

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# DEMOCRACY AND DIPLOMACY

## (JANUARY–MARCH 1918)

*'The dissolution of the Constituent Assembly by the Soviet Government means a complete and frank liquidation of the idea of democracy by the idea of dictatorship.'*

—Vladimir Lenin

The so-called 'triumphant march of Soviet power' led Lenin to declare in March 1918 that the 'civil war' was won. Many Russians hoped that a new socialist society, even a new world, was being created.

However, by early 1918 it was clear that the social revolution that ordinary people had wanted and the political vision of the Bolsheviks were drifting apart. The economy continued to break down and a more centralised economic policy was emerging. Many critics—shocked by the cruelty unleashed by the Bolshevik revolution—voiced their concerns about the violent nature of the new regime. The drift towards authoritarian rule was shown by the fate of the Constituent Assembly. Russia's first attempt to decide its political system by popular election was dispersed by the Bolsheviks, who questioned its legitimacy.

Then there was the question of peace with Germany. Although Russia had negotiated a ceasefire with the Central Powers soon after October 1917, the German armed forces were still the biggest challenge Sovnarkom had to face.

Lenin's 'triumphant march' came to a grinding halt after the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The subsequent loss of fertile grain-producing areas and valuable mining regions worsened the economic situation—which was already dire. The peace treaty with Germany caused a rift in the Bolshevik Party and the Left SRs withdrew from Sovnarkom in protest.

Worldwide socialist revolution failed to emerge in support of the October Revolution. Instead, the fate of the Constituent Assembly and the humiliating, punishing terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk would lead to a full civil war.

### KEY QUESTIONS

- How was the Constituent Assembly a challenge to the new regime?
- How did the Bolsheviks justify the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly?
- Why did Sovnarkom leaders and factions disagree over the issue of peace with Germany?
- What were the consequences of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk?
- How did Trotsky and Lenin influence the issue of peace?

### KEY EVENTS

#### —5–6 January 1918

Constituent Assembly convened, but dissolved after one day

#### —18 February 1918

German army resumes offensive against Russia following breakdown of talks at Brest-Litovsk

#### —21 February 1918

'The Socialist Fatherland is in Danger' Decree

#### —22 February 1918

New treaty terms granted by German government

#### —3 March 1918

Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signed by Sovnarkom

#### —10 March 1918

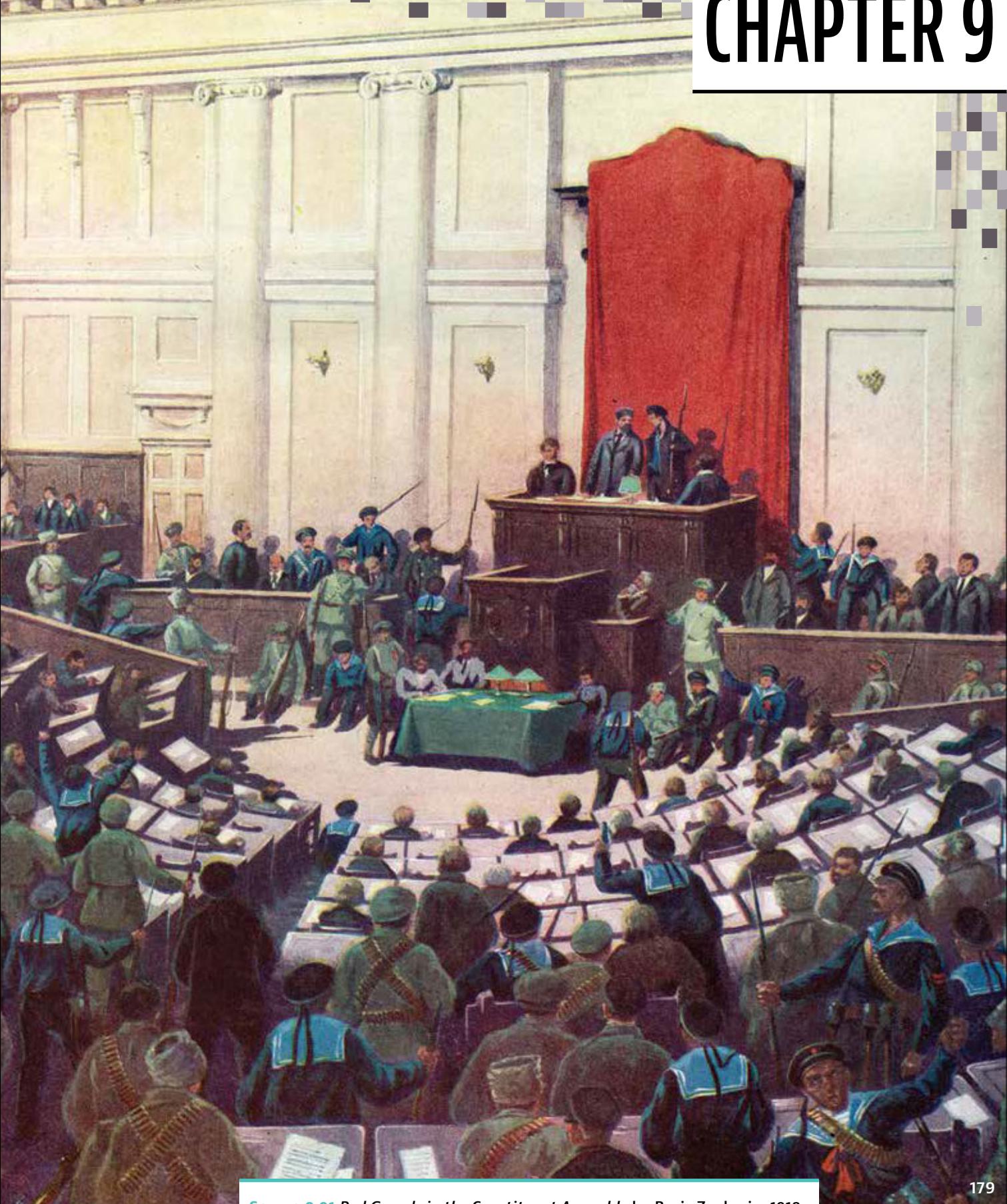
Capital moved from Petrograd to Moscow

#### —15 March 1918

Treaty of Brest-Litovsk ratified by Fourth Congress of Soviets.

Left SRs withdraw from Sovnarkom

# CHAPTER 9



Source 9.01 *Red Guards in the Constituent Assembly* by Boris Zvykorin, 1918.

# DISSOLUTION OF THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

**Vladimir Lenin:** 'Naturally, the interests of this Revolution stand higher than the formal rights of the Constituent Assembly.'

Elections for the Constituent Assembly were initially proposed for 17 September 1917, but were put back until 12 November. This delay was fatal for the Provisional Government, as Bolshevik agitators were able to argue that only a Soviet government would guarantee the election and meeting of the Assembly.

Having seized power, the Bolsheviks now faced a dilemma in the Constituent Assembly.

- How should they react to the election results?
- What if they lost?
- Should they surrender the reins of government?

Realising that the Bolsheviks lacked support among the peasantry—most of whom preferred the SRs—Lenin argued in favour of delaying the elections. Others in the party disagreed, and Lenin's proposal was overruled by Sverdlov, chairman of the Soviet Executive Committee.

Voting began on 12 November and was completed three days later. Votes were tallied throughout December, and 5 January 1918 was set aside for the opening of the assembly.

**Source 9.02** (top) A child's drawing showing street fighting in Moscow, 1918.

**Source 9.03** (bottom) A child's drawing showing Red Guards in a truck, 1918.



## ELECTION RESULTS

After counting, it was revealed that the Bolsheviks had won only 24 per cent of the vote (175 seats), whereas the SRs had 52 per cent of the vote (370 out of 707 seats), mainly from the peasant vote.<sup>1</sup>

The Bolsheviks were disappointed they did not gain greater support for their October uprising, but they were not entirely discouraged. They had gained a majority of votes in the towns and cities, and among the troops at the front—so they had won the proletarian vote. This was important for the party that styled itself as the 'vanguard' of the proletariat.

According to Lenin, 'Only scoundrels and imbeciles can think that the proletariat must win a majority of votes in elections'.<sup>2</sup> Winning the vote of the workers and soldiers was considered of greater significance than an electoral majority based on votes from the countryside. Lenin argued that, 'the town cannot be equal to the country ... the town inevitably leads the country'.<sup>3</sup>

Lenin also claimed that the elections—which were held only two weeks after the October Revolution—had gone ahead before the Bolsheviks were well known throughout Russia. He also pointed out that voters did not know that the SR Party had split, and that many voting lists made no distinction between Left and Right SR candidates. (After some hesitation, the Left SRs had agreed to support the Bolsheviks and had joined the Sovnarkom government on 12 December—so the Bolsheviks argued that some SR votes effectively belonged to them.)

Lenin made his thoughts on the Constituent Assembly known—even before it had met. To him, its importance had been overtaken by events that had taken place since

October. Lenin declared, 'The toiling masses have become convinced by their experience that bourgeois parliamentarianism is outdated; that it is completely incompatible with the construction of Socialism'.<sup>4</sup>

To Lenin, revolutionary Soviet democracy was a 'higher' form of democracy than 'bourgeois **parliamentarianism**'. Anything less than Soviet power would be 'a retrograde [backwards] step and would cause a collapse of the entire October Workers' and Peasants' Revolution'.<sup>5</sup> The Constituent Assembly was therefore expected to recognise and endorse the changes that had been made since the October Revolution—but it was not to make decisions on questions of political power.

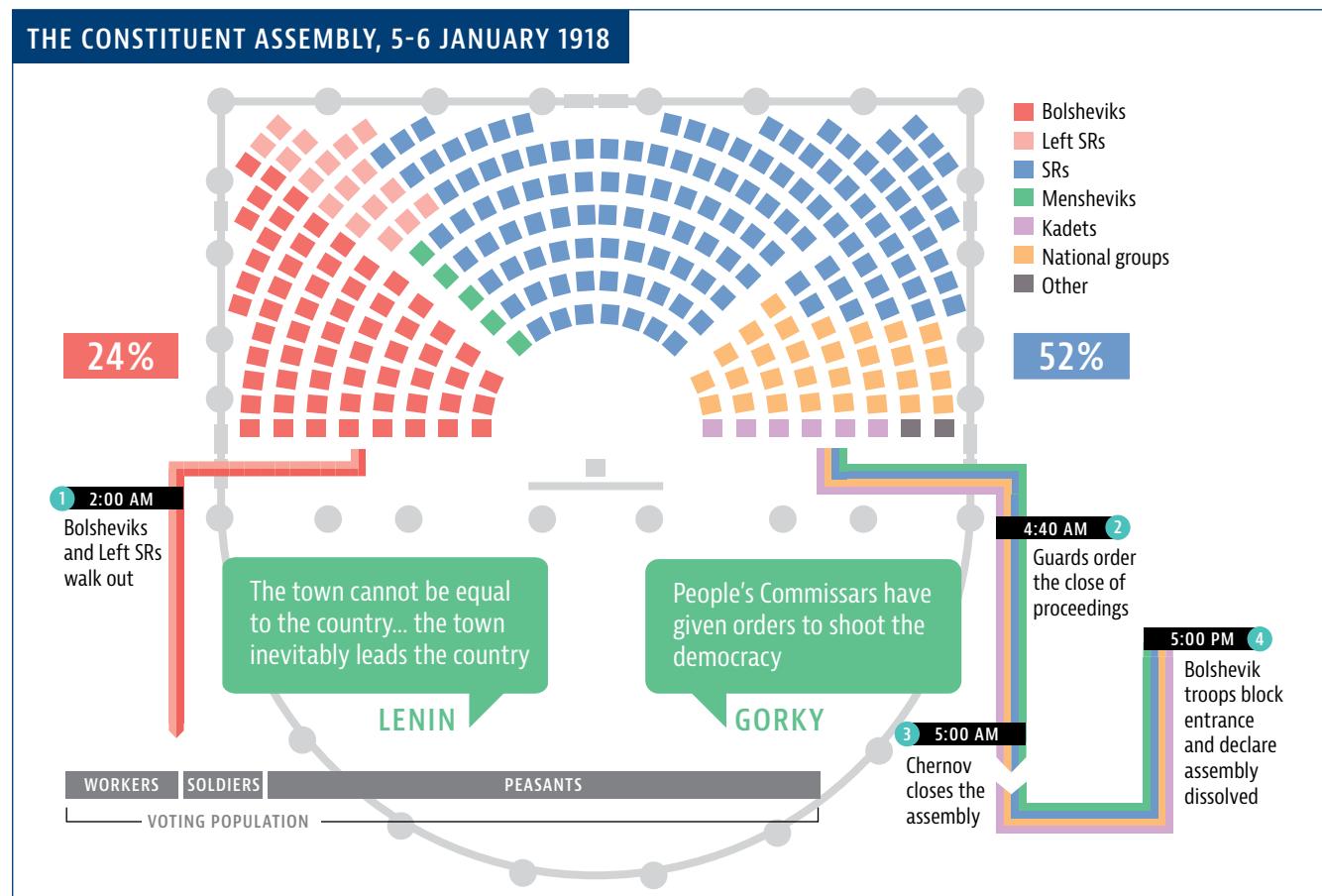
**parliamentarianism** a system of government in which the ruling authority is dependent on the direct or indirect support of an elected body, usually with law-making powers or influence (often called a parliament)

## THE ASSEMBLY CONVENES

On 5 January, martial law was declared in Petrograd, and Sovnarkom authorities issued a ban on large public gatherings. Pro-Bolshevik troops were brought into the city. The headline for *Pravda* read: 'Today the Hyenas of the Capital and their hirelings want to seize power from Soviet hands'.<sup>6</sup>

It was clear that a showdown was on the cards. That morning a protest march in favour of the Constituent Assembly—largely made up of white-collar employees—was dispersed by machine-gun fire. A Bolshevik leaflet denounced the protesters as 'enemies of the people'.

At around 4.00 pm, delegates to the Constituent Assembly gathered at the Tauride Palace for the first opening session. The Bolsheviks and Left SRs sat on the left; the Mensheviks, Right SRs and other groups sat at the centre and right of the room.



Sverdlov opened the meeting, then SR leader Viktor Chernov was elected chairman. There was heckling, cheering, whistling, foot-stomping and applause—as well as a notable air of tension and hostility throughout the proceedings.

One of the first speakers was Sverdlov. He read out the Bolsheviks' Declaration of the Rights of the Toilers and Exploited People, which had been previously approved by the Soviet Executive Committee and published on 4 January in Bolshevik newspapers. Drafted by Lenin, the declaration called for the Constituent Assembly to approve the new decrees given by Sovnarkom since the October insurrection. According to the declaration, 'the Constituent Assembly considers that its own task is confined to establishing the fundamental principles of the socialist reconstruction of society'.<sup>7</sup>

The Menshevik and Right SR delegates—who together held a majority in the Assembly—made clear their disapproval of Sverdlov's speech. Tsereteli, a prominent Menshevik, gave a rousing condemnation of the October seizure of power, and said that most of the delegates would not recognise Lenin's Council of People's Commissars. Debate raged back and forth into the night.

## DISSOLUTION OF THE ASSEMBLY

Following a pre-arranged signal from Lenin, at around 2.00 am the Bolshevik delegates denounced the meeting and staged a walk-out. They were soon followed by the Left SRs. Red Guards and Kronstadt sailors stayed behind to intimidate the delegates who stayed on. Some sailors had been drinking and found it very amusing to aim their guns at the Menshevik speakers.

Meanwhile, the assembly passed decrees calling for:

- fair and equitable distribution of land among the peasantry
- democratic peace with Germany
- declaration of a republic.

At 4.40 am the head guard at the Tauride Palace ordered Chernov to close proceedings for the night as the guards were 'too tired'.

Chernov kept the assembly open for another twenty minutes before sailors and Red Guards started hurrying the delegates from the palace, shoving them with their rifle butts. This went against Lenin's instructions, as he had told the guards that the assembly should not be dispersed forcibly, but rather delegates should be permitted to talk as long as they liked and then go home; after this, they should not be allowed back in.<sup>8</sup> Before bringing the meeting to a close, Chernov announced that the assembly would reconvene later that day at 5.00 pm.

However, when the delegates arrived just before 5.00 pm, Tauride Palace was locked, and guarded by Bolshevik troops who presented them with a decree declaring the Constituent Assembly dissolved.

There was little the delegates could do but disperse and consider how they might respond to the end of Russia's first and last democratic Constituent Assembly. The assembly was an ideal highly valued by moderate opposition groups. In despair, Maxim Gorky wrote, 'Rivers of blood have been spilled on the sacrificial altar of this sacred idea, and now the "People's Commissars" have given orders to shoot the democracy'.<sup>9</sup>

### ACTIVITY

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 When did the elections to the Constituent Assembly begin?
- 2 How many seats were won by the SRs?
- 3 How many seats were won by the Bolsheviks?
- 4 Give two or more reasons why Lenin was not discouraged by the results of the Constituent Assembly.
- 5 When did the Constituent Assembly convene?
- 6 What instructions did Lenin give regarding the closure of the assembly?

# SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

Leon Trotsky freely admitted to the use of violence in ending the Constituent Assembly: 'Lenin's theoretical considerations went hand in hand with sharpshooters'.<sup>10</sup> Lenin had also made it clear that force was to be employed, advising his followers to, 'Trust in the mood, but don't forget your rifles'.<sup>11</sup> Some historians have argued that the ease with which the 'problem' of the Constituent Assembly was solved proved a valuable lesson for the Bolsheviks: violent intimidation worked well when dealing with political opponents.

## Richard Pipes on the Constituent Assembly

The machine gun became for them [the Bolsheviks] the principal instrument of political persuasion. The unrestrained brutality with which they henceforth ruled Russia stemmed in large measure from the knowledge, gained on January 5, that they could use it with impunity.

Yet the Bolsheviks' actions towards the Constituent Assembly were largely consistent with their political outlook and revolutionary mentality. Having successfully seized power by force, it would have seemed nonsensical to Lenin to accept the result of a democratic election—especially one he deemed unrepresentative.

According to historian Ron Suny: 'Revolution was not like an election campaign in which the party that gains a majority gains the upper hand; rather it was like a military campaign in which the side that can mobilise the greatest physical strength in the most sensitive places wins the day'.<sup>12</sup> Lenin proclaimed, 'We will not exchange our rifles for a ballot!'<sup>13</sup>

Although a group of mainly middle-class white-collar workers had protested in support of the assembly on the morning of 5 January, there was little public protest over its closure. Victor Serge recalled, 'The dissolution of the Constituent Assembly made a great sensation abroad. In Russia, it passed almost unnoticed'.<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, the SR Nikolai Sviatitsky explained the fate of the Constituent Assembly as 'a consequence of the indifference with which the people responded to our dissolution, which permitted Lenin to dismiss us with a wave of his hand: "Let them just go home!"'.<sup>15</sup>

The deep political division between the moderate delegates to the assembly and the advocates for Soviet power meant that any compromise or agreement was unlikely. As historian Steve Smith argues, 'Realistically, it is hard to believe that the Constituent Assembly could have provided stable government, for political conflict was now immeasurably more inflamed than it had been in summer 1917'.<sup>16</sup>

Other historians have questioned why the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly went largely unchallenged by ordinary people. Richard Pipes sees the 'surprising indifference' towards the closing of the Constituent Assembly as evidence that Russia 'lacked a sense of national cohesion capable of inspiring the population to give up immediate and personal interests for the sake of the common good'.<sup>17</sup>

Arguably, workers were preoccupied with securing enough food and fuel for their families, while the peasantry saw the assembly as a 'distant thing in the city', according to Figes.<sup>18</sup> Conflicts between political parties were of little interest to peasants, who were largely unwilling to risk their newly-gained social autonomy by supporting the Right SRs.<sup>19</sup>

 **Source 9.04** Richard Pipes, *A Concise History of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 165.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Working-class Russians often included rude and colourful insults when they wrote letters to government officials. A mild example was when one soldier wrote to Lenin in early January 1918: 'Bastard! What the hell are you doing? How long are you going to keep on degrading the Russian people?!'

 Leon Trotsky.



## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Quote or paraphrase what each of the following interpretations or perspectives said regarding the closure of the Constituent Assembly:

- Maxim Gorky
- Leon Trotsky
- Richard Pipes
- Vladimir Lenin
- Ron Suny
- Victor Serge
- Steve Smith
- Mark Steinberg
- Oliver Radkey

Mark Steinberg asserts that many ordinary people were not indifferent about the Constituent Assembly. It is just that they were more concerned with bringing revolutionary changes into the spheres of everyday life—factory floor, military barracks, trench and village—than they were with creating political institutions.<sup>20</sup> Following this logic, the Constituent Assembly was irrelevant as long as the Soviet government endorsed practical and immediate actions.

Historians have also looked back at the meaning of the SR electoral victory. The ‘cohesiveness’ of the SR’s majority is seen by historian Oliver Radkey as ‘much softer’ than often thought.<sup>21</sup> The peasantry’s true loyalty to the SRs was not binding, and the elections also showed that the Bolsheviks had strong popular support.

It is also worth taking a closer look at peasant voting patterns. In many communities, the elections were not held as a secret ballot. So although voter turn-out was high, peasants tended to vote together as a ‘bloc’ for the same party—which followed the tradition of a mir-style communal debate. Many workers, peasants and soldiers saw the soviets as a more accurate representation of their personal understanding of ‘democracy’, regardless of Leninist rhetoric.

‘Democracy’—in the working-class sense of the word—was a socialist political authority that excluded the ‘bourgeoisie’ from power in a way that the Constituent Assembly did not. Many people did not see the Constituent Assembly as a viable alternative to Soviet power.

However, some working-class Russians were indignant at the actions of the Bolsheviks. For example, an anonymous letter to Trotsky (Source 9.05) criticised the armed response to the demonstration held in support of the Constituent Assembly on 5 January 1918.

→ **Source 9.05** Mark Steinberg, *Voices of Revolution*, 1917 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 281.

### Anonymous letter to Trotsky, January 1918

To Citizen Trotsky

I am sending you a New Year’s greeting from the whole Russian people. God damn you to hell! What did the worker-demonstrators who were marching peacefully today down Petrograd’s streets ever do to you? Why did you fire on them? ... Who do you think you are? Where did you come from? Bandits! Know this: Before three months are out you will break your neck! ... You have disarmed all the citizens and left them without any way of defending themselves against the bandits, who you send to rob and kill innocent “persons”! Vengeance is at hand, though! Soon, very soon, you will see that God is still alive and will not forget his own! Murderers and thieves, you broke your promise to the people. You are stealing the people’s money, you want to get a sackful [sackful]. So know this! The very first one the Germans will hang will be Ulyanov-Lenin and the second will be his secretary that yid [Jew] Bronstein-Trotsky. The Russian people have no wish to be under the yoke of the yids. This shall never be! ... Prison and death on a pillar of shame—that will be your fate in 1918. These are not empty words ... You are not the people’s chosen. You are impostors. You deserve to be hanged, state criminals.

## ACTIVITY

### HISTORICAL SOURCES

Using Source 9.05 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Outline the complaints critics had of Lenin and Trotsky’s leadership by January 1918.
- 2 Analyse the extent to which the Constituent Assembly posed a challenge to the new regime in consolidating its power. Use evidence and details from the source to support your response.

Constitutional questions had already been under discussion among Soviet authorities around the time of the Constituent Assembly, and discussion continued soon after its closure. On 8 January 1918, at the Third All-Russian Congress of Soviets, calls had been made for drafting of a new constitution to outline:

- the aspirations of the revolutionary government
- the structure of the Soviet state
- the rights afforded to its citizens.

A commission chaired by Sverdlov had various draft constitutions drawn up before a final version was accepted on 19 July 1918. With the ratification of this constitution, the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic (RSFSR) formally came into being.

## THE TREATY OF BREST-LITOVSK KEY DEVELOPMENT

**Vladimir Lenin:** ‘Intolerably severe are the terms of peace. Nevertheless, history will claim its own ... Let us set to work to organise, organise and organise. Despite all trials, the future is ours.’

In September 1917, Lenin had written to his party comrades, telling them that ‘to secure a truce at present means to conquer the *whole world*'.<sup>22</sup> Lenin had long been an advocate of pulling Russia out of World War I—a conflict that he described as a ‘bourgeois imperialist’ war that should be turned into a ‘civil war’.

Lenin argued that Russia’s soldiers, either peasants or workers in uniform, had been tricked into fighting their German and Austrian fellows—when they really should have been acting together to overthrow the capitalist governments that used them as cannon fodder to further imperialist expansion.

Lenin’s ideas had gathered momentum as the Provisional Government lurched from crisis to crisis and radical socialist parties grew in influence. The Bolsheviks’ Decree on Peace was met with widespread approval among workers, soldiers and peasants, so realising the ideal of ‘peace’ became a key factor that underpinned the legitimacy of the Bolshevik government.

Consolidating the gains of the October Revolution was of primary importance to Lenin. Obtaining a peace treaty would allow Russia’s socialist revolution time to develop and strengthen, and to inspire and set off socialist revolutions elsewhere.

Yet Russia’s ability to continue the war was shaky, regardless of Bolshevik policy. The armed forces had lost the will to fight. Strong anti-war sentiment brought the army to the brink of collapse as thousands of soldiers deserted the trenches.

The Bolsheviks were well aware that the Decree on Peace was merely a call for peace, not an actual treaty or ceasefire. Lenin felt that a formal peace treaty with Germany needed to be made immediately—and at any cost. As a revolutionary Marxist, Lenin’s loyalty towards Russia as a nation was limited. ‘I spit on Russia’, he reportedly told one Social Democrat. ‘This is merely one phase through which we must pass on the way to a world revolution.’<sup>23</sup>

### ACTIVITY

#### EXTENDED RESPONSE

Write an extended response on the following topics.

- Explain how the new regime responded to the challenge of the Constituent Assembly. Use evidence to support your response.
- Explain why the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly went mostly unchallenged by workers, peasants and soldiers. Use evidence to support your response.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

The Soviet delegation to Brest-Litovsk talks included a worker, a sailor, a soldier, a peasant and a woman—all symbolic of the new egalitarian social order. However, the Bolshevik officials had forgotten to include a peasant delegate, so they invited an old farmer they found walking the streets of Petrograd to catch the train to Brest-Litovsk with them.

**Source 9.06** The Soviet delegation at Brest-Litovsk.



# THE QUESTION OF PEACE OR WAR

Although an initial ceasefire between Russia and the Central Powers was negotiated on 2 December 1917, the party did not adopt Lenin's call for an immediate peace on any terms. The Bolshevik leadership were divided about signing a peace treaty.

**Left Communists** radical wing of Bolshevik party that called for non-cooperation with Germany during negotiations over peace treaty; allied with Left SRs

One faction of the Bolsheviks, led by Nikolai Bukharin, became known as the **Left Communists** and was supported in its stance by the Left SRs. The Left Communists believed that the revolution would be best served by fighting a 'revolutionary war' with Germany by refusing to give in to any demands—as any peace treaty would be an endorsement of German imperialism.

The Soviet Republic had no effective army, but Bukharin argued that a German invasion would raise the 'revolutionary consciousness' of the proletariat, and allow Russia to wage a successful guerrilla campaign. Such a war, Bukharin believed, would bring about the eventual defeat of Germany and ultimately launch socialist revolution elsewhere.

Lenin was not impressed by the Left Communists' arguments and accused them of being like irresponsible children. For Lenin, the first task for the party was to consolidate the October Revolution, not making grand revolutionary gestures that posed a serious threat to the stability of the new regime.

As Lenin saw it, it was foolish to risk the survival of Russia's socialist revolution on the off-chance that a revolution might break out in Germany. He argued that, 'Germany is still only pregnant with revolution; and a quite healthy child has been born to us—a socialist republic which we may kill if we begin a war'.<sup>24</sup> Russia's peasants and workers were in no mood to fight a war—revolutionary or otherwise. The correct policy, in Lenin's mind, was 'immediate peace'. Lenin was given unwavering support from Sverdlov and Stalin. Stalin reinforced Lenin's view when he noted that, 'There is no revolutionary movement in the West. There are no facts; there is only a possibility, and with possibilities we cannot reckon'.<sup>25</sup>

## THE QUESTION OF 'PEACE' OR 'WAR'

The issue of when, how and if a peace treaty should be signed with the Germans was fiercely debated by the Soviet government. Lenin, Bukharin and Trotsky championed the three main positions.\*



**Lenin:** Immediate peace! Russia has had a socialist revolution—the first in the world—and this must be safeguarded at all costs. The Russian soldiers will no longer fight and if the Germans invade Soviet power will be overthrown!



**Bukharin:** To sign a treaty with Germany would mean giving in to a capitalist and imperialist power! If the Germans invade, a 'revolutionary war' will unfold that will soon spark a new socialist uprising in Germany. To compromise now means to betray the international revolution!



**Trotsky:** By protracted negotiation and appeals directly to the German workers and soldiers two things are gained: time for Soviet Russia to improve its position and, hopefully, time for a revolution in Germany to develop. We should cease fighting but not agree to any formal treaty. Neither peace, nor war!

\* The views of Lenin, Bukharin and Trotsky presented above are NOT direct quotes and are instead creatively paraphrased; however, the ideas are historically accurate.

Leon Trotsky offered a third view that bridged the rival positions of Lenin and Bukharin. As the Commissar of Foreign Affairs, Trotsky led the delegation that negotiated with the German High Command at the town of Brest-Litovsk in Poland throughout late December, and into January and February.

Trotsky pursued a policy that he described as ‘neither peace, nor war’.<sup>26</sup>

His negotiating tactics included:

- prolonging discussions
- pretending he was about to accept peace terms, then rejecting them and calling for further negotiation
- giving theatrical, long-winded and often contradictory speeches
- doing his best to confuse proceedings.

At the same time, Bolshevik agitators went to considerable effort to spread propaganda among German troops stationed along the Eastern Front. Russian soldiers fraternised with their German counterparts, and urged them to resist orders given by their officers and turn their ‘imperialist war into a civil war’.

Trotsky also used the unconventional strategy of addressing his calls for a fair, equitable peace to the German public as well as to the German government. In late January 1918, German workers went on strike to protest for an immediate peace with Russia without *annexations* or *indemnities*.

Trotsky believed his tactics were paying off and viewed developments at Brest-Litovsk as a spectacular vindication of revolutionary diplomacy.<sup>27</sup> He was convinced that if he could delay the negotiations just a little longer, socialist revolution would be sure to break out in Germany. Negotiations would then be of an entirely different nature.

## THE GERMANS RESPOND

At first the German negotiators were perplexed by Trotsky’s tactics, then they grew increasingly frustrated. Field Marshal Hindenburg was clearly annoyed: ‘Trotsky degraded the conference-table to the level of a tub-thumper’s street corner’.<sup>28</sup> The German army was the superior military force, but the Bolsheviks were acting like they had won the war. It did not make any sense to the Germans—losers did not get to dictate their own peace terms!

German frustrations came to a head in early February, when the Bolsheviks were presented with an ultimatum: accept the peace treaty terms on offer or hostilities will resume. Trotsky then baffled the Germans by announcing that Russia was pulling out of the war, but would not sign the German peace treaty.

It was an action that went against all customary international diplomacy. ‘Unheard of!’ exclaimed General Max Hoffman.<sup>29</sup> The German High Command was initially surprised, but soon called Trotsky’s bluff—on 18 February 1918, they sent 700,000 troops into Russian territory. The German army met no resistance and General Hoffman noted the ease with which the Germans conquered Soviet territory:

### General Hoffman

*It is the most comical war I have ever known—it is almost entirely carried on by rail and motorcar. We put a handful of infantrymen with machine guns ... on to a train and push them off to the next station; they take it, make prisoners of the Bolsheviks, pick up few more troops and go on. This proceeding has, at any rate, the charm of novelty.*

### ACTIVITY

#### EXTENDED RESPONSE

Write an extended response on the following topic:

‘Explain how disagreement among the Bolsheviks hindered their ability to respond to challenges.’ Use evidence to support your response.

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Match the following perspectives on the question of peace or war with the correct leader:

- Lenin
- Trotsky
- Bukharin

Neither peace, nor war
------------------------

No peace, revolutionary war
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Immediate peace
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**annexation** taking over land and attaching it to territory already held  
**indemnities** imposing compensation or reparation payments; when one country compensates another for damage caused in wartime

## ACTIVITY



### CREATIVE RESPONSE

Read about the views of Lenin, Bukharin and Trotsky on whether to sign a peace treaty with Germany. Write a script detailing a conversation between the three men.

How does each put forward his position and respond to criticisms? What rhetorical techniques are used?

Perform the script for your class. (Extra points for characterisation and props!)

### DID YOU KNOW?

Bolsheviks or Communists?  
Although the name of the party was formally changed at the Seventh Party Congress, the terms Bolshevik and Communist are interchangeable and the older name 'Bolshevik' remained in common use.

The Soviet government was thrown into disarray. Soviet officials were afraid that Germans might capture the government so, on 12 March, the capital of Russia was moved from Petrograd to Moscow, where officials set up residence in the Kremlin.

The debate over whether to relent to the Germans or prepare for a revolutionary partisan war continued to rage. This debate, according to Rabinowitch, was the most profound crisis within the party during Lenin's years as head of state.<sup>30</sup> Bukharin wanted to fight, while Lenin urged for peace as the survival of the revolutionary government was clearly at stake. Lenin threatened to resign unless his proposals were met and the debates among the Bolsheviks, which he called 'revolutionary phrasemongering',<sup>31</sup> ceased immediately.

## CONSEQUENCES OF THE TREATY

Meanwhile, the Russians were faced with an imminent German invasion and had an army incapable of staging an effective defence. Lenin's view dominated: it was better to negotiate for peace to save the revolution than to fight the Germans.

On 19 February 1918, a message was sent to Berlin expressing the Soviet government's willingness to sign a peace treaty. Meanwhile, German troops continued to advance. A new treaty was presented on 22 February, with harsher terms than the treaty offered on 5 January. On 3 March 1918, the Sovnarkom accepted Germany's demands and signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The terms of the treaty were severe.

- Thirty-four per cent of Russia's European population was taken out of Soviet control, amounting to approximately 62 million people.
- Russia was to give up 32 per cent of its farmland, including the Ukraine, which was one of the country's major sources of grain—the so-called 'bread basket'.
- German forces gained control of Poland and the Baltic regions of Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia.
- Germany was to be paid 3 billion roubles in war reparations.
- Russia lost 89 per cent of its iron-ore and coal reserves, as well as 54 per cent of its industrial enterprises and 26 per cent of its railways.<sup>32</sup>

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was a bitter pill to swallow.

For Russian nationalists it was an absolute disaster: two centuries of expansion by the Russian Empire was lost at the stroke of a pen. National humiliation fostered resentment among groups who had been organising opposition to the Bolsheviks, namely former tsarist generals and members of the now-banned Kadets.

The Bolsheviks and Left SRs also suffered setbacks in their revolutionary agenda after the treaty.

- Direct revolutionary propaganda against the German and Austrian governments must stop.
- Withdrawal of Russian troops from Latvia, Estonia and the Ukraine meant the end of newly formed Soviet authorities in Kiev and other major Baltic cities.
- German forces overthrew the workers' soviets and installed conservative puppet regimes in their place.

Trotsky refused to put his signature to the peace treaty. He resigned as Commissar of Foreign Affairs and took up the position of Commissar of War. The Left Communists continued to agitate for the rejection of the peace terms through their newspaper *Communist*.

# NIKOLAI BUKHARIN, 1888–1938

Nikolai Bukharin was the youngest of the leading Bolsheviks, and the Communist Party's top Marxist theoretician. Lenin said Bukharin was the most valuable theorist and most popular member of the party.

Like Trotsky, Bukharin was in New York during the February Revolution. On his return to Russia, he rose to prominence in the Bolsheviks' Moscow organisation.

After the October Revolution, Bukharin was editor of *Pravda* and became associated with the more radical Left Communist wing of the party. He advocated a revolutionary war against German imperialism and, along with his Left Communist and Left SR comrades, campaigned for the rejection of all peace terms with Germany during and after the Brest-Litovsk negotiations.

Bukharin was an influential member of the Central Committee and made important analyses of social policy and economics. One of his most important works was a widely-circulated guide called *The ABC of Communism*.

One of Bukharin's theories was that a severe downturn in production was bound to emerge from a proletarian revolution, because such a revolution would destroy the apparatus of the bourgeois state. For Bukharin, this was a necessary phase of the revolutionary process and would eventually result in a prosperous socialist state—he described it as 'breaking an egg to obtain an omelette'.<sup>33</sup>

At first Bukharin was a staunch supporter of **War Communism**, but later emerged as the most prominent defender of the moderate New Economic Policy (NEP). After Lenin's death, Bukharin continued to promote gradualist economics.

He was appointed to the **Politburo** in 1924 and became head of the **Comintern** in 1926. Bukharin remained outside the initial power struggle between Trotsky and the **triumvirate** of Stalin, Kamenev and Zinoviev.

After late 1925 Bukharin was aligned with Stalin and the Right against the United Opposition of Kamenev, Zinoviev and Trotsky. He spent the mid-to-late 1920s at the peak of political power, until he fell out with Stalin after expressing concern about enforced collectivisation.

Bukharin said that Stalin was an 'unprincipled intriguer' who at a moment's notice would 'change his theories in order to get rid of someone'.<sup>34</sup> These were prophetic words—in 1929 Bukharin was expelled from the Politburo for factionalism, then executed in 1938 during the Great Purge. Historian Stephen Cohen argues that the intelligent and comparatively moderate Bukharin was a missed opportunity for the Communist Party.<sup>35</sup>



↑ Nikolai Bukharin.

**War Communism** series of harsh, centralised economic measures adopted during the Civil War: seizing private businesses; nationalising industry; forcible removal of surplus grain from peasants

**Politburo** political bureau of the Bolshevik Central Committee

**Comintern** short for Communist International, and also known as Third International. An organisation set up by the Bolsheviks in 1919 to promote Communist party organisations worldwide

**triumvirate** group of three that wields power and influence. In a Russian context it usually refers to Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev

At the Seventh Party Congress on 6–8 March, Lenin campaigned hard for formal ratification of the peace treaty. He also delivered a scathing attack on his unruly comrades.

→ **Source 9.08** Vladimir Lenin, 'A Serious Lesson and a Serious Responsibility,' in *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, first published in *Pravda* no. 42, 6 March 1918 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 79–84.

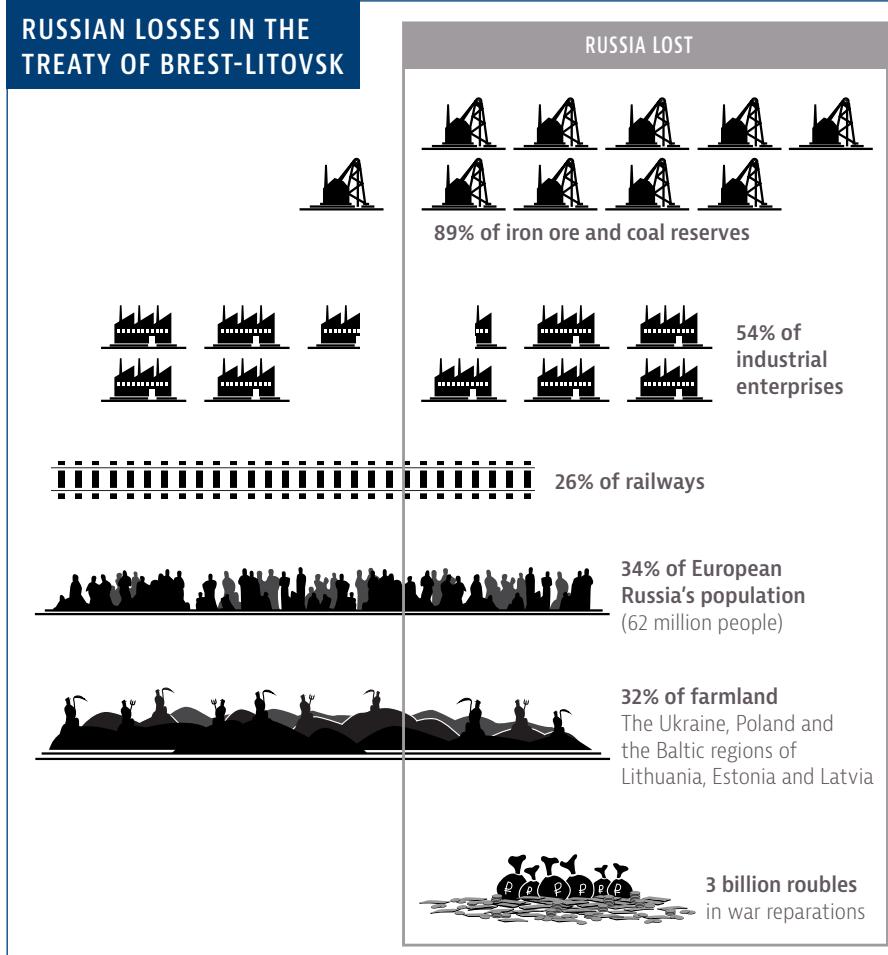
### Lenin

Facts are stubborn things. And the facts show that Bukharin denied the possibility of a German attack and sowed illusions which actually, against his wishes, helped the German imperialists ... That is the essence of revolutionary phrasemongering ... if the new terms are worse, more distressful and humiliating than the bad, distressing and humiliating Brest terms, it is our pseudo-'Lefts,' Bukharin ... and Co., who are guilty ... It is a fact you cannot escape, wriggle as you will. You were offered the Brest terms, and you replied by blustering and swaggering, which led to worse terms. That is a fact. And you cannot escape the responsibility for it ... Down with blustering!

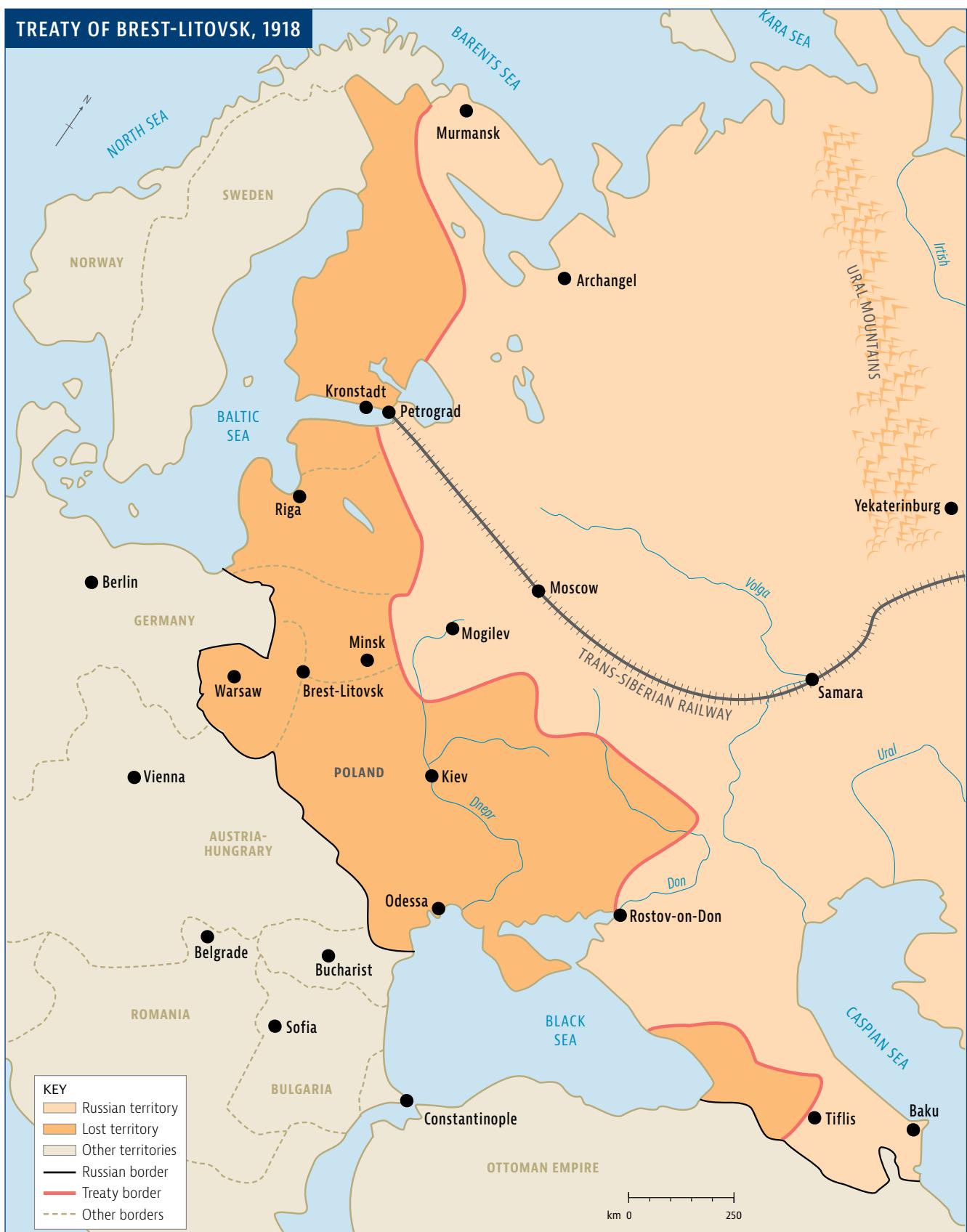
Lenin was effectively telling critics of the treaty to toughen up and pull their heads in. The severe terms imposed at Brest-Litovsk were the direct result of posturing by the Left Communists and the failure to agree to the earlier terms that were offered. From Lenin's point of view, it was now time to stop bickering and get on with the job of building socialism.

The Party Congress agreed and gave its approval to the treaty, which was given final ratification on 15 March by the Fourth Congress of Soviets. Debate at the Congress was kept under tight rein by Soviet Chairman Sverdlov.

→ **Source 9.09** Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891–1924* (Sydney: Pimlico, 1996).



## Source 9.10



# THE END OF COALITION GOVERNMENT

However, the Left SRs did not change their minds about the treaty, and voiced their protest on 19 March 1918 by resigning from the Sovnarkom.

The Bolsheviks—who at the Seventh Party Congress had changed their name to the All-Russian Communist Party—were no longer partners in a coalition socialist government: they were now leaders of a one-party dictatorship.

The signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk had a far greater impact than just being an economic blow and political humiliation to the Soviet regime. However, Germany surrendered on 11 November 1918, unable to maintain its war efforts after the USA entered World War I and renewed the Allied campaign.

Two days later, the Communists renounced the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk—and regained much of the territory they had lost. Lenin's insistence that Sovnarkom accept the humiliating treaty had paid off, and his reputation as the party's wise and eminent leader grew.

## ACTIVITY



### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 How many troops were involved in Germany's offensive against Russia in February 1918?
- 2 On 12 March 1918, the Russian capital was moved from Petrograd to where?
- 3 How did Lenin describe the continued debates and disagreements over the peace treaty?
- 4 When did Russia accept and sign the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk?
- 5 For each of the following consequences of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, note the specific statistics of loss:
  - population
  - territory
  - reparations
  - mining resources
  - railways
- 6 How did the Left SRs react to the treaty?

### EXTENDED RESPONSE

Explain how the consequences of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk created challenges for the Soviet regime. Use evidence to support your response.

### GROUP TASK

- 1 In pairs or threes, paraphrase or briefly summarise the justifications or logic behind the positions of Lenin, Bukharin and Trotsky on the question of peace.
- 2 Taking the persona of a Bolshevik or Left SR, argue in favour of the position you find most convincing.
- 3 In your group, discuss why the debate over a peace treaty with Germany presented such a profound challenge to Lenin as a revolutionary leader.

# CHAPTER 9 REVIEW

## KEY SUMMARY POINTS

- After some debate, the Sovnarkom allowed the elections for the Constituent Assembly to proceed.
- The result was an electoral victory for the SRs (370 seats), whereas the Bolsheviks received roughly a quarter of the votes (175 seats).
- Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders went to considerable effort to downplay the SR majority, reasoning that the Bolsheviks had more votes from workers and soldiers, and that the Constituent Assembly was 'outdated' by the emergence of Soviet power.
- After meeting for one day, the assembly was dissolved by pro-Bolshevik soldiers.
- There was little popular protest when the Constituent Assembly was dissolved.
- The issue of securing a peace with Germany was a contentious issue among different leaders and factions of Sovnarkom, and this caused tensions in the government.
- Trotsky led negotiations at Brest-Litovsk and pursued the approach of 'no peace, no war'.
- After protracted and tense talks, the German military invaded Russian territory and forced the Soviet government to sign an even harsher treaty.
- The terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk were severe and humiliating for Russia.
- The Left SRs refused to ratify the treaty and left the Sovnarkom in protest.

## ACTIVITY

### ESSAY

Write a 600–800-word essay on one of the topics below. Your essay should include an introduction, paragraphs supported by relevant evidence from primary sources and historical interpretations, and a conclusion.

- 'The reality of governing led the Bolsheviks to compromise their revolutionary vision.' To what extent do you agree?
- 'While many observers expected the Soviet regime to last no longer than a few weeks, the Bolsheviks formed an effective government.' How did the Bolsheviks remain in power after October 1917?
- 'Lenin was the driving force behind key policies and developments in the new society.' To what extent do you agree?
- 'External challenges, such as international pressure and political opposition, significantly influenced the new regime.' Explain the consequences of these influences for Soviet Russia.

### CREATIVE RESPONSE

Imagine you are a Bolshevik worker-activist, a soldier, a Menshevik, a Left SR, a middle-class lawyer or a peasant farmer living in Russia in early 1918. Write a letter to Bolshevik newspaper *Pravda*, or give a speech to your class, which outlines your views on the closure of the Constituent Assembly, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk or another key event from the era.



# CIVIL WAR

(MAY 1918–1921)

***'We are fighting to settle the question of whether the homes, palaces, cities, sun, and heavens will belong to the people who live by their labour, to the workers, peasants, and the poor, or whether they belong to the bourgeoisie.'***

—Leon Trotsky

Lenin and his comrades were keen to turn the 'imperialist war' (World War I) into a 'civil war'. Yet what kind of civil war did they foresee? For the Bolsheviks, 'civil war' and 'class war' were interchangeable terms—a civil war was the extension of class warfare by the revolutionary state. As Trotsky put it, 'Soviet authority is organised civil war'.

By March 1918, Lenin had announced that this civil war was nearing an end. However, his triumph was short-lived because a full Civil War—in the sense of a large-scale military conflict—was what the Bolsheviks soon got. The magnitude of the Russian Civil War was far greater than Lenin expected.

Under the leadership of Trotsky, the Bolsheviks raised a professional military force of 5 million men and went to war. With its numerous protagonists and complex war fronts, the Civil War posed enormous challenges for the new regime. However, with more unified purpose, better leadership and geographical advantages, the Red Army emerged victorious. Despite the triumph over the forces of capitalist imperialism and counter-revolution—a so-called 'ring of fire'—the victory came at great cost. Soviet Russia was brought to the brink of collapse, emerging from its years of conflict, as Lenin put it, 'like a man beaten within an inch of his life'.<sup>1</sup>

## KEY QUESTIONS

- What developments led to the outbreak of the Russian Civil War by mid-1918?
- How did the White Armies and foreign forces challenge the Soviet government?
- What factors led the Red Army to victory in the Civil War?
- What was Trotsky's role during the Civil War?

## KEY EVENTS

- 23 February 1918  
Founding of the Red Army
- 22 May 1918  
Czech Legion overthrows Soviet authorities along the Trans-Siberian Railway
- 8 June 1918  
Formation of the SR-dominated Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly (Komuch)
- 2–4 August 1918  
American and British troops land at Vladivostok and Archangel
- 4 March 1919  
Beginning of Kolchak's campaign in Siberia and the Urals
- May 1919  
First campaign by Yudenich against Petrograd
- 4 June 1919  
Beginning of Makhno's Green uprising in Ukraine
- November 1919  
Second campaign against Petrograd by Yudenich
- 7 February 1920  
Execution of Admiral Kolchak
- 26 April 1920  
Invasion of Ukraine by Polish forces (start of Polish-Soviet War)
- August 1920  
Outbreak of Green resistance under Antonov in Tambov Province
- 12 October 1920  
Armistice signed between Polish and Soviet governments
- 14 November 1920  
Last remnants of White armies under General Wrangel evacuate from the Crimea

# CHAPTER 10

Р. С. Ф. С. Р.



Source 10.01 *Did You Volunteer?* by Dmitry Moor, 1920.



Source 10.02 Red Army soldiers.

# BEGINNINGS OF CIVIL WAR

KEY DEVELOPMENT

Vladimir Lenin: 'Peace—this is a slogan of philistines and priests. The proletarian slogan must be: Civil War!'

Military opposition to the new regime emerged soon after the October 1917 uprising. The Bolsheviks gained control over Petrograd with surprising ease, but it was a different story elsewhere.

Streetfighting continued for more than a week in Moscow before Bolshevik forces finally prevailed on 2 November. Kerensky, who had fled the Winter Palace, managed to rouse the support of Cossack troops under General Krasnov, who captured the towns of Gatchina and Tsarskoe Selo before preparing to march on the capital.

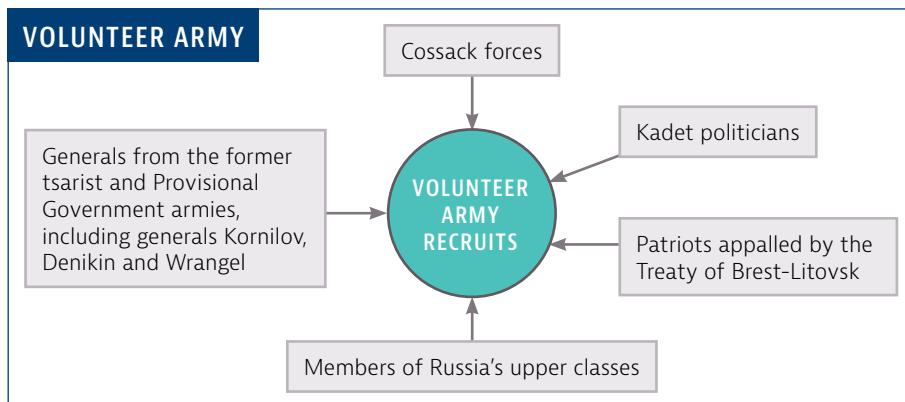
On 30 October, Military Commissars Nikolai Krylenko, Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko and Pavel Dybenko led Red Guards and Kronstadt sailors in a fierce fight at the Battle of Pulkovo Heights for the defence of 'Red' Petrograd. Krasnov's Cossacks were surprised by the determination of the Bolshevik forces, and were resoundingly defeated.

An uprising by trainee officers, which was meant to coincide with Krasnov's assault, was launched a day before the battle and was also overcome by Red Guards. Kerensky narrowly avoided being handed over to the Bolsheviks by a disaffected Cossack officer. He disguised himself in driving goggles and a sailor's uniform and went into hiding. He eventually fled overseas, settling in the United States.

The success of Soviet forces at Pulkovo Heights and Moscow was an important gain for the October revolutionaries. The likelihood of the Provisional Government reclaiming power came to an end. Many Bolsheviks no longer felt any need to maintain negotiations over a coalition socialist government, which groups such as *Vikzhel* (the Union of Russian Railroad Workers) had been pressuring them to do.

The new regime survived the initial onslaught of counter-revolution. Soviet power was triumphant. However, the Cossack regions of the Don, the Kuban and the Ukraine remained hostile to the Bolshevik government.

As early as December 1917, General Alekseev had been recruiting a 'Volunteer Army' of former tsarist officers, and set about planning a campaign to liberate the northern cities. Based at Rostov-on-Don in the Ukraine, all kinds of soldiers and supporters rallied to this Volunteer Army under the emerging banner of 'White' resistance to the Bolshevik 'Reds'.



## CZECH LEGION

The spark that set off more extensive resistance against the new regime came from an unexpected source.

Following the end of hostilities on the Eastern Front, a large group of Czech soldiers—about 40,000 well-armed men—were granted permission to cross Russia by rail to Vladivostok in the Far East. The troops of this Czech Legion, as they were known, had hoped to board ships to France. There they would serve on the Western Front against Germany before returning to their homeland.

As they travelled the Trans-Siberian Railway during the summer of 1918, hostilities broke out between the Czech Legion and provincial soviets. Local authorities felt antagonised by the presence of such a large group of armed men, and attacked the trains carrying the Czech soldiers. On their part, the Czechs were angered by orders issued by central Bolshevik authorities demanding that they disarm.

From 22 May 1918 onwards, the Legion responded by defeating local military forces and overthrowing regional soviet authorities. The Czech Legion helped to establish a new SR-led government on 8 June 1918 at the town of Samara on the Volga River, called the Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly (or *Komuch*).

The Komuch formed a 'People's Army'. With support from the Czech Legion, the People's Army rapidly advanced against soviet authorities in central Siberia, and in August 1918 captured Kazan. The Czech Legion continued to travel back and forth along the Trans-Siberian Railway, overthrowing Soviet forces as they went. Their actions provided the incentive for other groups to organise mass armed opposition to the Soviet regime.



**Source 10.03** Czech troops at machine guns atop an armoured train on the Trans-Siberian Railway. Defying Trotsky's orders to disarm, Czech forces captured the railway during the Russian Civil War.

**Komuch** Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly; largely SR-led revolutionary government based in Siberia

## WHITE ARMIES

**General Anton Denikin:** 'I shall not fight for any particular form of government. I am fighting only for Russia.'

On 23 February 1918, Commissar of War Leon Trotsky founded the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army. The forces that opposed the Soviet regime came to be known as the *White armies*. The Whites were an assortment of groups who opposed the new regime for different reasons, but were united by their hatred of the Bolsheviks. They included:

- monarchists who hoped to reinstate the Romanov dynasty
- patriots who resented the losses of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk
- people who wanted a republic based on a restored Constituent Assembly
- refugees forced to flee because of their social class
- minority groups, such as Cossacks, who wanted greater autonomy in their home regions
- political leaders ousted by Bolsheviks.

The Russian Civil War was very complex. It was a war of movement with rapidly changing fronts, completely different to the static trench warfare of World War I. The forces in armed opposition to the Bolsheviks also changed over time.

**Foreign interventionist** forces and armies from neighbouring countries also played a role. The Civil War was further complicated by peasant armies—called the *Greens*—which supported neither the Reds nor the Whites.

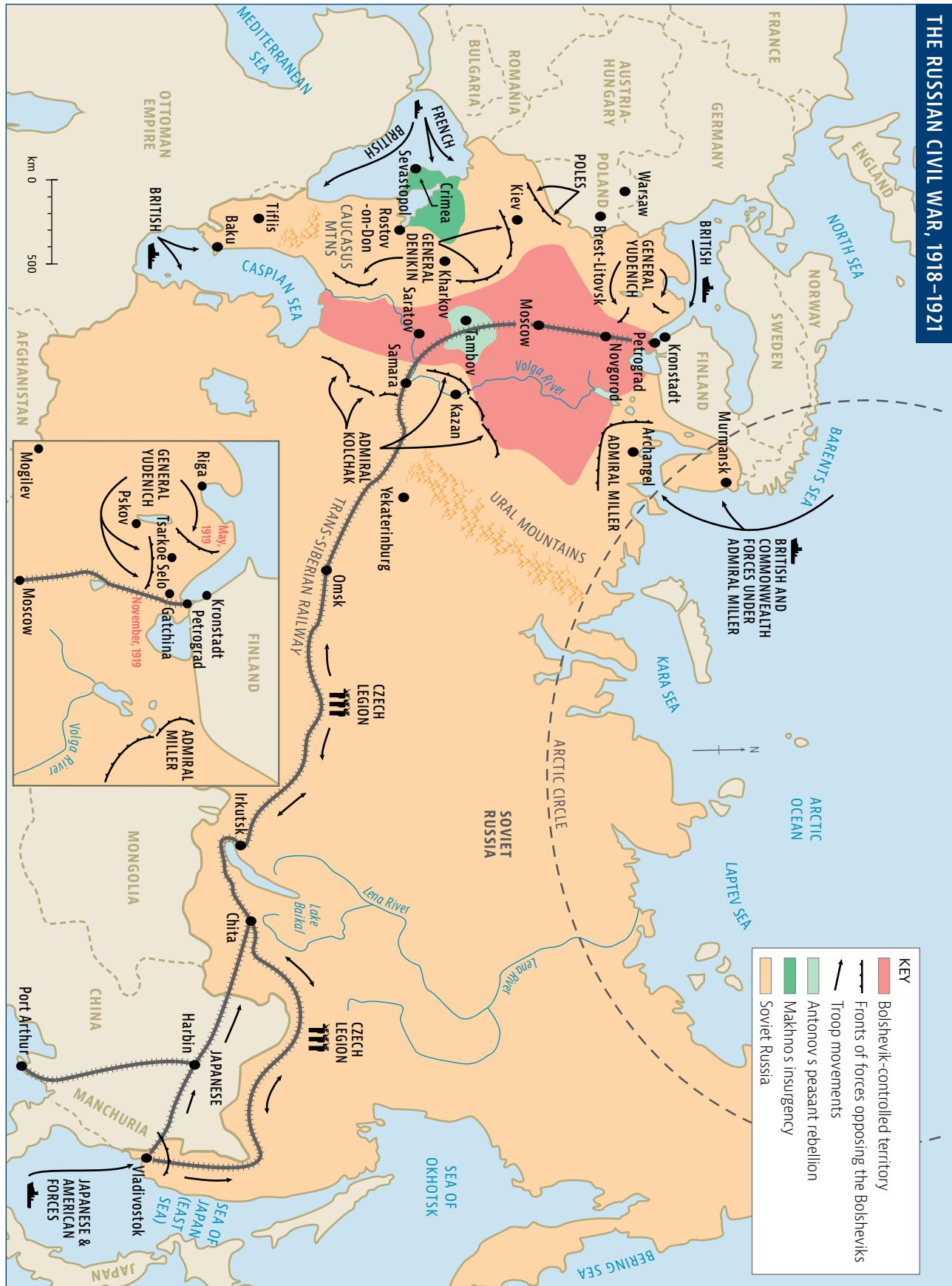
**White armies** counter-revolutionary armed forces opposed to the Bolsheviks in the Civil War. Comprised a disparate group of Kadets, dispossessed landowners and factory owners, monarchists and devout members of the Orthodox Church

**Foreign interventionist** foreign armed forces involved in the Russian Civil War, namely Britain, France, the USA and Japan

**Greens/Green armies** peasant insurgent armies that fought against both Red and White armies in the Russian Civil War

## THE RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR, 1918–1921

↓ Source 10.04



By late 1918, four distinct groups had emerged that threatened the communist regime: the Armed Forces of South Russia (AFSR); Kolchak's Siberian forces; the North-Western Army; foreign interventionists.

## THE ARMED FORCES OF SOUTH RUSSIA

The largest of the White armies was called the Armed Forces of South Russia (AFSR). It was stationed in southern Russia around the Ukraine, Caucasus, Kuban and Don regions. General Denikin was supreme commander of the AFSR, and he led the Whites during most of their major Civil War campaigns.

In the years 1918–1920, Denikin's forces threatened Soviet Russia from the south, and in November 1919 came within 300 kilometres of Moscow. However, the AFSR were overstretched and outnumbered—they were forced to retreat and were defeated by early 1920.

## KOLCHAK'S SIBERIAN FORCES

In late September 1918, the Komuch was reorganised into the Provisional All-Russian Government, and based in Omsk, Siberia. It was the only attempt at a civilian-led anti-Bolshevik government. It lasted just eight weeks before being overthrown in a coup by its war minister, Admiral Kolchak.

Kolchak was recognised as the head of the White movement and declared himself 'Supreme Ruler of the Russian State'. From March 1919 onwards, the White Army menaced the communist regime from the east.

However, Kolchak was a poor military commander. Despite having some important victories during the White Army's early campaigns, counter-offensives by the Red Army forced Kolchak to retreat back along the Trans-Siberian Railway. He was executed on 7 February 1920.

## THE NORTH-WESTERN ARMY

In October 1918, a small White army formed in the Baltic region of Estonia, led by General Yudenich. The North-Western Army launched two campaigns against Petrograd in May and November 1919. Their November offensive reached the suburbs of Petrograd before being turned back following Trotsky's arrival and intervention.

Yudenich and his army—which numbered only 14,400 men at its peak—were disarmed and interned in Estonia in late November 1918. Yudenich was briefly arrested by Estonian authorities before emigrating in 1920.

ADMIRAL KOLCHAK



## FOREIGN INTERVENTIONISTS

The Germans were only the first of many foreign powers to send troops to Russia after 1918.

- British and Commonwealth troops took control of northern port cities Murmansk and Archangel in March 1918.
- Japanese forces landed at Vladivostok in the Far East in April 1918.
- US and British troops joined the Japanese forces in August 1918.

## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 The actions of which military group travelling along the Trans-Siberian Railway triggered further armed resistance to the Soviet government?
- 2 Who was the Commissar of War?
- 3 Who commanded the Armed Forces of South Russia (AFSR)?
- 4 Which White army leader declared himself 'Supreme Ruler of the Russian State'?
- 5 Who commanded the North-Western White Army? Why were its campaigns significant?
- 6 Which nations were involved as foreign interventionist forces during the Russian Civil War?

- Britain occupied the oilfields of Baku in Azerbaijan.
- British and French navies supported Denikin's forces around the Black Sea port cities.

As well as sending troops to various outlying regions, Britain, France and the United States gave extensive financial support to the Whites, along with rifles, ammunition and uniforms.

Foreign interventionist forces were involved, directly and indirectly, for a range of reasons.

- The Allies were keen to support any group that promised to re-enter the war with Germany after the Bolsheviks signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.
- Japan had territorial ambitions, sending 70,000 soldiers into eastern Siberia by November 1918.
- The US troops in the east were there to keep the Japanese in check, and to protect the Trans-Siberian Railway.

Ideology also played a part. Bolshevism was a creed that preached international socialist revolution and the inevitable downfall of capitalist governments everywhere. Britain's War Minister Winston Churchill spoke of the need to 'strangle Bolshevism at birth'.<sup>2</sup> Sovnarkom had also nationalised numerous foreign-owned industries and cancelled foreign loans worth millions of roubles that had been granted to the tsar and Provisional Government.

The involvement of foreign interventionist forces reinforced the Communists' belief that they were fighting not only 'bourgeois' White Guards, but also 'capitalist imperialist invaders'.

However, although the support of foreign powers boosted the White armies and discouraged the advance of Communist forces towards the West, years of fighting in World War I had wearied the Allied troops. As Communist forces triumphed, the various foreign powers slowly withdrew their troops.

→ **Source 10.05** Vladimir Lenin, 'Comrade Workers, Onward to Fight the Last Decisive Fight!' in *Selected Works: Volume II* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1947), 354–355.

### Lénine sur les forces interventionnistes étrangères en 1918

The Soviet Republic is surrounded by enemies. But it will defeat its enemies, both external and internal. A rising spirit is already perceptible among the working-class masses which will ensure victory. We already see how frequent the sparks and flashes of the revolutionary conflagration [extensive fires] in Western Europe have become, inspiring us with the assurance that the triumph of the international working-class revolution is not far off.

The external foe of the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic at the present moment is British, French, American and Japanese imperialism. This foe is attacking Russia; it is filching our territory ... This enemy is attacking peaceable Russia with the ferocity and voracity of the Germans in February, the only difference being that the British and Japanese are out not only to seize and plunder Russian territory but also to overthrow the Soviet government so as to 'restore the front', i.e., once more to draw Russia into the imperialist (or, more simply, the robber) war between England and Germany.

The British and Japanese capitalists want to restore the power of the landlords and capitalists in Russia in order to share with them the booty plundered in the war; they want to enslave the Russian workers and peasantry to British and French capital, to squeeze out of them interest on the billions advanced in loans and to quench the fire of Socialist revolution which has broken out in our country and which is threatening to spread all over the world.



← **Source 10.06** Sacrifice to the International, a White movement Russian revolution poster, 1918.

### ACTIVITY

#### ANNOTATED MAP

Annotate a map illustrating the forces opposed to the Bolsheviks during the Civil War period. Your map should identify and explain the location of the opposition forces, the leaders or key individuals involved, when this opposition threatened the Bolsheviks, and any other relevant details. Topics to include:

- Alexander Kerensky and General Krasnov
- Czech Legion
- Komuch and the Provisional All-Russian Government
- Volunteer Army (AFSR)
- Kolchak's Siberian Army
- North-Western Army
- Foreign interventionists
- Poland
- Green armies.

### ACTIVITY

#### HISTORICAL SOURCES

Using Sources 10.05 and 10.06 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Compare how the sources depict the protagonists of the Russian Civil War.
- 2 Outline how foreign powers intervened during the Russian Civil War.
- 3 Explain how the Whites justified their war against the Soviet government.
- 4 Analyse how the Russian Civil War challenged the new regime. Use evidence to support your response.

↓ Josef Pilsudski.

## THE SOVIET-POLISH WAR

**Marshal Josef Pilsudski:** 'My impression of Bolshevik behaviour is that peace is out of the question ... Our army is ready.'

During the chaos that marked the beginning of the Civil War, Poland declared its independence from Russia—and in April 1920 sought to expand its territory by invading the Ukraine.

Many former generals—including Brusilov—offered their services to the Red Army now that Russia was truly under attack by a foreign power. Polish forces captured Kiev, but were pushed back by the Red Army which, in turn, launched a counter-attack that came within striking distance of Warsaw.

The initial success of the Polish campaign raised hopes among leading Communists that the invasion might be the first step in an advance that could spark off revolution in Germany—and perhaps even in England. It was time to switch from defence to offence!





Commander of the Red forces, General Mikhail Tukhachevsky, claimed that 'across the corpse of White Poland lies the path to world conflagration. We shall bring happiness and peace to the toilers of humanity on our bayonets.'<sup>3</sup> Karl Radek likewise proclaimed, 'We were always for revolutionary war. The bayonet is an essential necessity for introducing communism.'<sup>4</sup>

Lenin expected Polish workers to welcome the Red Army as their fellow 'proletarian liberators'—but that was not the case. The Poles saw the Red Army as invaders, and threw themselves into a heroic and successful counter-offensive under Marshal Josef Pilsudski.<sup>5</sup> On the brink of defeat, Polish forces rallied and surrounded the overstretched and overconfident Red Army. Following the Battle of Warsaw on 12–25 August, the Red Army was routed and forced to retreat.

#### Source 10.07

## TREATY OF RIGA

### ACTIVITY

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- What did the Communists hope the invasion of Poland would inspire?
- Who commanded the Polish forces during the Polish-Soviet War?
- Which battle was a decisive turning point in the war? Why?
- What was the long-term significance of the Treaty of Riga for the communist government?
- How did Lenin describe the Green armies?

The success of the Polish army under Pilsudski's command forced the Communists to negotiate an armistice with Poland in October 1920, and agree to the ratification of formal peace settlement on 18 March 1921.

The Treaty of Riga granted Poland 30 million in gold roubles, large tracts of Ukrainian and Belorussian territory, and considerable material for the construction of railways. Furthermore, Poland's eastern border was secured.

The Treaty of Riga also enabled the Soviets to stop fighting Poland and deal instead with other pressing short-term concerns, including:

- the March 1921 Kronstadt Rebellion
- peasant revolts in Ukraine
- defeating the last of the White forces, led by General Wrangel.

'I thought it wiser to come to terms with the enemy', Lenin explained, 'the temporary sacrifice of a hard peace appeared to me preferable to a continuation of the war ... We had to make peace'.<sup>6</sup>

In the long-term, the Soviet-Polish War changed the outlook of Communist foreign policy from direct revolutionary assault to a more cautious approach. Historian A.J.P. Taylor argues that, 'After the treaty of Riga, Soviet Russia retreated ... Unavowedly and almost unconsciously, the Soviet leaders abandoned the cause of international revolution'.<sup>7</sup>

## GREEN FORCES

During the Civil War, peasant insurgents—known as Green armies—rose up in armed resistance in several regions against both the White and Red armies.

Throughout much of 1919–1920, a large group of guerrilla fighters led by the anarchist Nestor Makhno held the south-east of the Ukraine. Makhno's group was notorious for its daring cavalry attacks. Until mid-1921, the central province of Tambov was a virtual no-go area for Bolshevik authorities because of an army of 40,000 *partisans* led by former SR Aleksandr Antonov.

By 1920, the revolts in the countryside had become so bad that Lenin remarked that peasant insurgents were 'far more dangerous than all the Denikins, Yudeniches and Kolchaks put together'.<sup>8</sup>

British historian Geoffrey Swain suggests that the SR Siberian governments set up in opposition to the Bolshevik regime—the Komuch and later Provisional All-Russian Government—may also be considered part of the Green movement.<sup>9</sup> The emergence of Green forces—in addition to the brief reign of the Komuch and SR Provisional Government in Siberia—indicates that the Civil War was not a straightforward Red versus White conflict: it was also a battle between different claims to be the true revolution.

**partisans** ordinary people, rather than soldiers, who join together to fight enemy soldiers occupying their country or region

### DID YOU KNOW?

The Red Guards and Red Army should not be confused. Red Guards were workers' militias formed during the 1917 Kornilov revolt. They played an important role in securing Soviet power during the October Days of 1917. The Red Army was the professional armed force of the Soviet regime, and was founded in February 1918.

## RED ARMY SUCCESS IN CIVIL WAR: KEY FACTORS

**Leon Trotsky:** 'The Soviet republic must have an army that can fight battles and win.'

The combined forces opposed to the Communist regime were formidable. 'Soviet Russia found herself in a ring of fire', according to historian Boris Ponomarev.<sup>10</sup> However, by the end of 1920 the Red Army had won a decisive victory. This victory was not an inevitable outcome, and the threats faced by the Communists were very real. Thousands of men lost their lives, and vast areas of territory were outside Soviet control for a number of years.

Although the reasons for the Communist victory are complex, the success of the Red Army can be attributed to a number of key factors: geography; ideology; Trotsky's leadership; White Army weaknesses.

### KEY FACTORS IN RED ARMY SUCCESS

Geography

Ideology

Trotsky's leadership

White Army weaknesses

## GEOGRAPHY

The Bolsheviks controlled central European Russia. This meant that Red forces had a much larger population from which to draw recruits. There were roughly 70 million people in Soviet Russia, compared to an average of 8 to 10 million people in White-held areas. The Communists also had a much more ethnically consistent population to govern.

The Soviets held the major cities of Moscow and Petrograd, which meant they had the key factories, as well as access to the tsarist and Provisional Governments' ammunition supplies. Also, having control of European Russia meant having control of a very extensive railway system. The Civil War was a war of movement, in which

### DID YOU KNOW?

The design of the Red Army's uniform, with its distinctive peaked woollen cap, came about through a competition sponsored by Trotsky.



↑ **Source 10.08** Young Red Army men were steeled in the battles of the Civil War.

**kulak** peasant or farm owner who was rich enough to employ workers or lease out land. Russian word for 'fist'

effective use of trains and cavalry played a key role. The Red Army had easier access to supplies, as well as the ability to deploy troops more quickly. They could transfer troops from front to front and deal with one enemy force at a time—or at least not all at once.

By contrast, the White armies were geographically scattered and had supply problems. This resulted in few coordinated attacks and irregular communication between White commanders.

## IDEOLOGY

The Bolsheviks and their Red Army shared a more united sense of purpose and political vision than their opponents.<sup>11</sup> As revolutionary Marxists, Lenin and his comrades felt that history was on their side—and that the eventual triumph of communism was inevitable.

The Bolsheviks made effective use of propaganda in depicting the conflict as both:

- a class war against the capitalist bourgeoisie and exploitative *kulaks*
- a patriotic defence of the socialist fatherland against imperialist foreign invaders.

Purpose-built propaganda trains toured the countryside and talented artists were employed to design eye-catching posters explaining the ideals of the communist regime. The Reds drew heavily upon the rhetoric of class struggle and the promise of an equitable socialist society that was to be born following the communist victory. However, desertion was a problem for both forces—tens of thousands of soldiers escaped from the Red Army during the course of the Civil War, and an even greater number of soldiers escaped from the Whites.

## TROTSKY'S LEADERSHIP

As Commissar of War, Leon Trotsky played a fundamental role in shaping the Red Army into a formidable military force. By the end of 1918 the Red Army had 500,000 men, but over the next two years, Trotsky organised the Bolsheviks' rag-tag Red Guards into a professional army of 5 million men.



Trotsky was ruthless in his determination to achieve a communist victory, and imposed harsh discipline on the Red Army. The death penalty was introduced for a range of offences. Sometimes Chekists with machine guns were stationed behind advancing troops, ready to shoot anyone who retreated.

Red Army soldiers swore a ‘socialist oath’ of loyalty in which they promised ‘strictly and undeviatingly to observe revolutionary discipline and unquestionably to fulfil all the orders of the commanders ... If ... I break this, my solemn pledge, may general contempt be my lot and may the strong hand of revolutionary law punish me’.<sup>12</sup>

Trotsky had a controversial tactic of recruiting former tsarist officers as ‘military experts’. Officers who were not willing to join the Red Army were sometimes ‘convinced’ when their families were held hostage, while those who refused to serve were imprisoned in concentration camps.

Trotsky ensured that officers carried out his commands by attaching a political commissar to each commanding officer. The political commissar:

- carried out propaganda work among rank-and-file soldiers
- supervised commanding officers
- ensured that orders from above were carried out effectively.

Thus, through a combination of brutal measures and stern discipline, the Red Army was fashioned into a tough, dedicated fighting organisation.

However, the Red Army did not grow to be a professional force by threat alone. Trotsky was quick to praise and reward those who performed their duties admirably. He was tactful and polite towards the military experts who served the Reds. Trotsky hoped to put former tsarist officers at ease and foster a sense of loyalty and accomplishment in the new revolutionary army. He argued that a military expert ‘has the right to be respected, and shall be respected in the ranks of the Red Army’.<sup>13</sup>

Trotsky also recognised the importance of decisive leadership, and raced from front to front in a special armoured train. Trotsky’s train was manned by military commissars in black leather uniforms, and a crack team of specialists that included engineers, medical personnel, machine gunners and snipers. The train had its own library, electricity generator and radio station. There was also a printing press for publishing a small newspaper called *On the Road*. Stores of tobacco, boots and food were kept on board for soldiers in need of a morale boost. On several occasions, Trotsky’s presence at a battlefield galvanised hesitant troops into action and victory.

Trotsky was a brilliant speaker and an inspiring leader, and he commanded respect from those around him. He was ruthless, determined and extremely hardworking—and he expected the same level of dedication from his officers and commissars. Trotsky was also notoriously arrogant, and had little time for those he considered intellectually inferior. Many communists found Trotsky impossible to work with. The head of the French military mission to Russia during the Civil War described Trotsky as a ‘son of a bitch, but the greatest Jew since Jesus’.<sup>14</sup>

## DID YOU KNOW?

Trotsky warned that when failures occurred in the Red Army, punishment would be handed out ‘first to the commissar, then the officer’. If a regiment retreated without permission, Trotsky would order the execution of its commander, the political commissar and up to one out of ten regular troops randomly selected from the ranks.

 **Source 10.10** Propaganda poster showing Trotsky as St George. He is shown fighting a dragon-like serpent that represents bourgeois-capitalist counter-revolution.

## ACTIVITY

### HISTORICAL SOURCES

Using Source 10.10 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Identify and annotate the symbols or features of the source that convey a positive view of Trotsky’s leadership.
- 2 Explain how Trotsky influenced and changed the new society.
- 3 Evaluate relative strengths and weaknesses of the Red and White armies in determining the outcome of the Civil War. Use evidence to support your response.



# LEON TROTSKY (LEV BRONSTEIN), 1879–1940



KEY INDIVIDUAL

Lev Bronstein was born in 1879 to a Ukrainian Jewish family. He was educated in the bustling city of Odessa, where he was drawn to revolutionary politics. The young Bronstein was soon involved in organising workers' unions and the distribution of political pamphlets, for which he was arrested and exiled to Siberia in 1898.

During his exile, he took the pseudonym Leon Trotsky (from the name of one of his prison guards). By 1902 he had escaped, and was living in exile abroad. In London he met leading Marxists—such as Lenin and Martov—and contributed to the SD journal *Iskra* (The Spark). Trotsky was a lone wolf in Marxist circles, and refused to join either the Bolshevik or Menshevik factions of the SDs. Instead, he was loosely affiliated with the small Mezhraionka or Inter-District Group.

Trotsky returned to Russia after Bloody Sunday, where he helped establish the St Petersburg Soviet and act as its chairman. When the soviet was dispersed in December 1905, Trotsky was arrested and sentenced to Siberian exile. He eventually escaped, and made his way to London, then to Vienna, where he contributed to the journal *Pravda* (Truth). He also spent time in Switzerland, France and Spain.

Trotsky made many important contributions to the development of Marxist ideology, and popularised the theory of Permanent Revolution. According to Trotsky, Russia's developmental contradictions made it both ripe for revolution and capable of continuing its revolution from the bourgeois-democratic stage to the proletarian-socialist revolution. World revolution was central to the success of this development.

At the time of the February Revolution, Trotsky was living in New York, but by May 1917 he had made his way back to Russia. He was elected to the Petrograd Soviet and joined the Bolsheviks on the eve of the July Days. His skill as an organiser, writer and public speaker made him a valued member of the Bolshevik movement.

After the Bolsheviks gained majorities in the September soviet elections, Trotsky was voted Chairman of the Petrograd Soviet, and he used this authority to form the **Milrevcom**. He went on to play a key role in the October Revolution, where he directed the campaign to seize the city and topple the Provisional Government.

Trotsky's first position in Sovnarkom was as Commissar of Foreign Affairs. In this role he represented the Soviet government during peace talks with Germany at Brest-Litovsk. At the peace talks, Trotsky used his infamous tactic of pursuing 'neither peace, nor war', as he hoped that a delay in negotiations would allow international revolutions to develop. However, his gamble did not pay off—and the German offensive of February 1918 forced the Sovnarkom to accept a humiliating treaty.

Trotsky refused to sign the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty. Instead, he resigned his position, and took up a new role as Commissar of War. As organiser of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, Trotsky used controversial tactics—but he ultimately led the Communists to victory. He also held a seat on the Communist Party Central Committee and Politburo.

↑ Leon Trotsky.

**Milrevcom** the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet

Trotsky was committed to ensuring the survival of the Bolshevik regime at all costs, and:

- he shrugged off appeals to form a coalition socialist government
- he gave wholehearted backing to the Red Terror
- he proposed the extension of militarised workplaces during War Communism
- he offered no compromise to the Kronstadt sailors in March 1921.

Trotsky was an inspiration to many people in the party—but he also had many enemies. As Lenin grew ill after 1922, Trotsky was politically outmanoeuvred by Stalin. He was on medical leave at a resort on the Black Sea coast when he learned of Lenin's death, and was unable to attend his funeral.

In 1926 Trotsky joined forces with Zinoviev and Kamenev—who had previously been his rivals—but they were unable to separate Stalin from his growing power base. Trotsky was:

- expelled from the Politburo in 1926
- expelled from the party in 1927
- exiled from the USSR in 1929.

He sought asylum in Turkey, France and Norway. By 1937, he was living in a guarded compound in Mexico City. In August 1940, a Stalinist agent named Ramon Mercader gained Trotsky's trust—and then murdered him with an ice-pick.

◀ Leon Trotsky, mugshot from 1905.



### DID YOU KNOW?

A British diplomat based in Moscow once said of Trotsky: 'He strikes me as a man who would willingly die for Russia, provided there was a big enough audience to see him do it'. During the Civil War, Trotsky was accompanied on his train by a film cameraman, a photographer and two secretaries who were there to record his exploits for future generations.

### KEY POINTS

- Contributed to the development of Marxist writings and theory, particularly the concept of Permanent Revolution.
- Served as Chairman of the St Petersburg Soviet during the 1905 Revolution.
- Joined the Bolsheviks in mid-1917 and in September became Chairman of the Petrograd Soviet.
- Organised and directed the October Revolution.
- Had significant influence in the new regime, first as Commissar for Foreign Affairs, then as Commissar of War.
- A leading figure in the Communist Central Committee, Trotsky influenced a range of policies and developments, including War Communism and the Red Terror.
- Fell from influence after Lenin's death, and was eventually exiled from the Soviet Union.

◀ Leon Trotsky, c. 1930s.



## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Write a sentence or two explaining the significance of the factors below that contributed to the Red victory in the Russian Civil War:

- geography
- ideology
- Trotsky
- strengths of the Red Army
- weaknesses of the White Armies.

## WHITE ARMY WEAKNESSES

Historian Steve Smith argues that, 'a White victory was never beyond the realm of possibility'.<sup>15</sup> The Whites had ready access to food and their soldiers were better fed. Despite this, their effectiveness was undermined by the lack of a coordinated strategy. In 1919, both Denikin and Kolchak launched campaigns that threatened Moscow—however, they did so five months apart.

As the Civil War dragged on, the White generals also had trouble motivating their troops and maintaining discipline. Corruption was rife among the lower officer ranks, while Cossack cavalrymen were reluctant to fight outside their homelands. Some White generals were drunk for days on end. Denikin complained, 'I can do nothing with my army. I am glad when it carries out my combat orders'.<sup>16</sup>



→ **Source 10.11** General Denikin and staff.

Disagreements developed within and between White armies. The broad range of aims held by the Whites created obvious problems, as they were split between:

- restoration of the monarchy
- support for the Constituent Assembly
- faith in the virtues of military dictatorship.

The only ideal uniting the Whites was their opposition to the Bolsheviks and their fervent nationalism.<sup>17</sup> Denikin observed that, 'If I raise the republican flag, I lose half my volunteers, and if I raise the monarchist flag, I lose the other half. But we have to save Russia'.<sup>18</sup>

The most explicit ideal that the Whites were able to articulate was the slogan 'Russia shall be great, united, undivided!'<sup>19</sup> This hardly inspired enthusiasm among the peasantry or urban workers. The Whites lacked a supportive population base from the outset, and were unable to gain the backing of the whole Russian populace. They refused to recognise the importance of propaganda until late in the war, and did not effectively counter the messages spread by the Reds.

Both Kolchak and Denikin concentrated on military matters, and neglected the formation of an effective governmental administration in the areas under their control. The Whites often restored the rights of the landlords and brutally punished the peasants or workers suspected of assisting the Reds. Ultimately they did not offer themselves as a good alternative to the Bolsheviks. 'Soviet power' kept its allure—despite the massive gulf between the ideals of the Bolshevik regime and reality.

### DID YOU KNOW?

A popular Siberian song from 1919 said of Kolchak's army: 'Uniform, British; boot, French; bayonet, Japanese; ruler, Omsk'.

# CHAPTER 10 REVIEW

## KEY SUMMARY POINTS

- The early period of military opposition to the new regime was conquered by March 1918. However, by mid-1918 a large-scale Civil War had unfolded.
- The forces opposed to the Bolsheviks were known as the Whites, whereas the Communist forces were the Red Army. Peasant guerrilla armies were called the Greens.
- Foreign powers assisted the White armies, while Soviet Russia also fought a war with Poland in 1920.
- The White armies posed a significant threat to the Sovnarkom; however, a range of factors led to a Red victory by 1920: geography, ideology, the nature of the Red Army and its leadership, and problems within the White forces.
- Trotsky's leadership played a significant role in the defeat of the Whites.

## ACTIVITY

### SUMMARY

Write a one-page summary of the reasons for the Red Army's success in the Civil War. Include a range of specific evidence such as dates, short quotes and statistics.

### CREATIVE RESPONSE

Using the stylistic forms and aesthetics of the era, create your own propaganda response that illustrates a significant aspect of the Russian Civil War. Suitable forms could include a political poster, poem, marching song, short film, radio broadcast, dramatic skit or a speech.

### EXTENDED RESPONSES

Write an extended response on one or more of the topics below. Your response should have a clear topic sentence, use a range of points, be supported by evidence, and end with a brief summative sentence.

- Outline the contribution made by Leon Trotsky to Soviet victory in the Civil War.
- Explain how the White armies challenged the Soviet government.
- How did the conflicts with foreign forces—including Poland— influence the Bolshevik government?
- Explain how the Red Army achieved its victory in the Civil War.
- Outline how the Civil War was not simply a Red versus White conflict.
- Explain the role of ideology in shaping the mindset of different groups during the Civil War era.



# IMAGERY AND SYMBOLISM IN THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

The Russian Revolution saw a dramatic increase in the production and distribution of visual propaganda. The political poster was a direct, potent and effective means to get ideas across in a society where literacy was low. The Bolshevik regime was particularly good with visual imagery, and some Bolshevik posters have become iconic images of the revolutionary era.

Here is a brief introduction to some of the key imagery and symbolism typically used in the art of the Russian Revolution.

## BLACKSMITHS AND METAL WORKERS

Blacksmiths and metal workers were usually shown wearing protective leather aprons and using a hammer and an anvil. Metal workers were seen as representing the proletariat: they were icons of the revolution. The use of metal workers in visual propaganda symbolised the importance and role of workers in the revolution.



## PEASANTS

Peasants were the largest of Russia's social groups. Men were usually shown dressed in a traditional tunic, high boots and with a long beard. Women were shown with a long skirt and a headscarf. As a key revolutionary class, peasants were often depicted alongside industrial workers, listening to someone giving a revolutionary message or engaged in farm work. They would usually be shown holding a farm tool.



## CHAINS

Chains represent how working people were oppressed by imperialism, capitalism and the old ruling classes. Images commonly showed chains being broken—particularly by industrial workers. The *Communist Manifesto* reminds workers that 'you have nothing to lose but your chains'.

## THE BOURGEOISIE



Capitalist businessmen were shown as fat—and therefore greedy—and often wearing expensive suits and top hats, and either with a gold watch chain or a fistful of gold. They often had faces like demons, which was a way to dehumanise them—that is, separate them from the human race. Other 'former people', such as priests, were similarly depicted as exploiters. Webs and pictures of spiders suggested to viewers that these people were dangerous and that their behaviour was 'parasitic'.

## SYMBOLS OF THE OLD REGIME



Symbols of Russia's tsarist past included the double-headed eagle, crowns, thrones and the Russian Orthodox Cross.

## DRAGONS AND BEASTS

The 'monstrousness' of capitalism and imperialism was depicted by fearsome beastly creatures with dragon-like features. Often revolutionary leaders, working people or Communist soldiers were shown valiantly fighting these beasts.



## SPIDERS AND WEBS

The bourgeois or *burzooi* were commonly depicted near spider webs to suggest that they preyed on working people.



## INDUSTRY AND FACTORIES

Factories were the foundations of the socialist economy, so factories with smoke coming out of their chimneys were used to show the resources and modern industry that the new society was creating.

## RISING SUN

The sun was symbolic of warmth, light, a new day and enlightenment. A rising sun often featured in positive depictions of Soviet society.



## SOLDIERS AND SAILORS

Soldiers and sailors played key roles in a number of iconic events: the February Revolution, the October Revolution and the Civil War. They were usually shown in uniform and holding rifles, and sometimes in crowd scenes such as storming the Winter Palace, the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets or welcoming Lenin at the Finland Station. Red Army soldiers and cavalry are common sights in posters that have Civil War themes.



## WOMEN

As the Sovnarkom government explicitly tried to address women's rights, posters were produced to celebrate International Women's Day and the contribution women were making to the new society. Women might be depicted working alongside men, or feature in crowds of revolutionary masses.



## REVOLUTIONARY CROWDS (MASSES)



Many representations feature crowd scenes of workers, peasants, soldiers or sailors. Crowd scenes symbolise the ideal of a 'people's revolution', and mass support for the revolutionary regime. Some depictions show the suffering experienced under the Old Regime, while others show working people battling a symbol of imperialist capitalism, such as chains or a fearsome beast. Masses of people would also be shown in depictions of events such as the storming of the Winter Palace to suggest popular involvement in the revolution.

## WARRIOR AND KNIGHTS



Rather than a realistic depiction of Communists fighting the forces of counter-revolution, heroic figures from the past were used, such as

knights or brave warriors. Trotsky was often shown as St George fighting the dragon of counter-revolution. These more traditional depictions appealed to ordinary people and the cultural references were easily understood.

## HAMMER AND SICKLE



The hammer and sickle is the symbol of the Communist Party and the Soviet Union. It represented the alliance of workers (the hammer) and peasants (the sickle).

## RED



Red is a very symbolic colour. Red flags are historically associated with socialism, as they symbolise the blood of workers who have given their lives in revolutionary struggles. Blood is also vital for life. The Russian word for red is *krasnyy*, which means beautiful, honourable and good. For example, Moscow's Red Square is not red in colour, and its name actually pre-dates the Communist regime.

## BOLSEVIKS CARICATURED WITH ASIATIC OR JEWISH FEATURES



White propaganda often used anti-Semitic elements in its depictions of Bolsheviks and revolutionary leaders, especially Trotsky. Groups that were opposed to the Bolsheviks tried to stir up popular hatred of the new regime by suggesting that its leaders were not 'Russian'—that is, 'they' were not like 'us'.

## REVOLUTIONARY LEADERS



Lenin features prominently in revolutionary propaganda. He was often shown speaking to crowds while making certain iconic gestures, such as one hand raised forward while the other hand holds his jacket lapel. He would often be depicted at key events, such as arriving at the Finland Station or at Soviet Congress. Other times his image was shown much larger than life size and in front of a thriving factory.

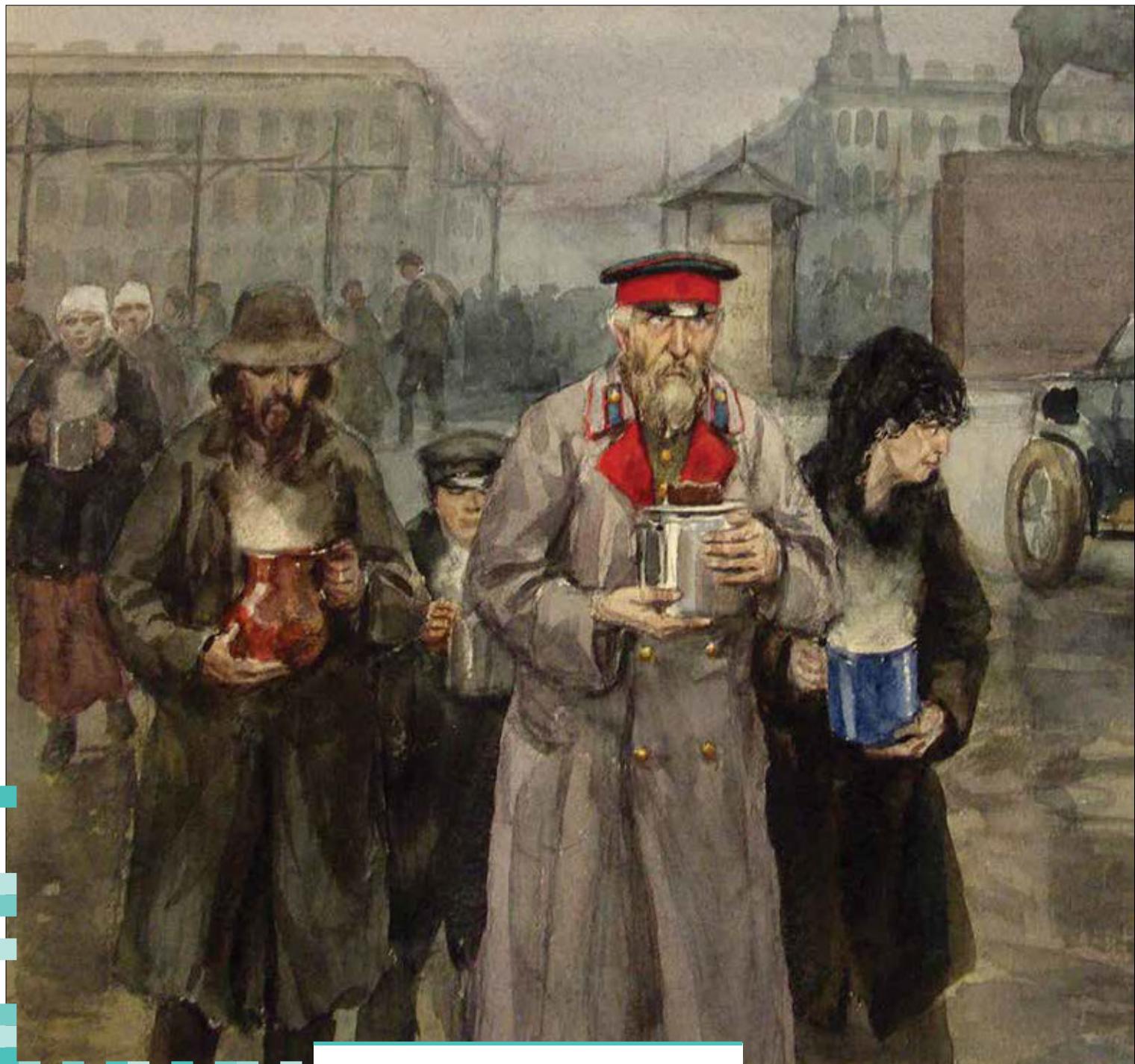
## COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY LEADERS



Opponents of the new regime were depicted with silly faces and fat bodies, and were often shown holding hands with capitalists, priests or foreign imperialists. White army generals were commonly treated this way.

# CLASS WAR: TERROR AND WAR COMMUNISM

(MARCH 1918–1921)



Source 11.01 *The Former* by Ivan Vladimirov, 1919.

# CHAPTER 11

**'If we are guilty of anything, then it is of being too humane, too kind in regards to the monstrous, traitorous representatives of the bourgeois-imperialist order.'**

—Vladimir Lenin

## KEY EVENTS

### —11 June 1918

Decree on the formation of Committees of the Poor (kombedy)

### —14 June 1918

Right SRs and Mensheviks expelled from soviets

### —28 June 1918

Decree on Nationalisation—beginning of War Communism

### —July 1918

Class-based rationing system introduced

### —17 July 1918

Execution of Tsar Nicholas and family

### —30 August 1918

SR Fanya Kaplan shoots and seriously wounds Lenin

### —5 September 1918

Decree on Red Terror

### —21 November 1918

Decree introduced effectively banning all private trade

### —January 1919

Grain-requisitioning squads begin prodravverstka

### —April 1919

The first subbotnik ('Communist Saturday')

### —15 May 1919

Sovnarkom instructs the State Bank to increase print runs of bank notes, thereby bringing on hyperinflation

The Civil War was a profoundly formative experience for the Communists. During this bitter and bloody conflict, revolutionary zeal and emergency measures combined to produce new policies and practices that fundamentally altered the nature of Soviet institutions. The Communist Party became more militarised and evolved a highly centralised political structure.

A range of economic policies called War Communism responded to both Communist ideology and the wartime emergency. In this way, the Soviet regime harnessed 'everything for the front' to feed and equip the Red Army, and achieve a so-called socialist economy.

The Civil War was also a class war. In response to internal pressures, ideological beliefs and external threats, the Cheka grew exponentially, and instituted a fearsome Red Terror. So, too, the White armies unleashed their own brutal measures.

Life was cheap during the Civil War: if you did not work, you did not eat—and even those who did work got very little. 'The cities were hives of the starving', wrote historian Victor Serge. The Communists did not understand the nature of social relations in the countryside, and thought that grain shortages were caused by rich peasants (kulaks) hoarding their harvests. The Communists therefore forced the peasants to hand over their 'hoarded' grain—which resulted in famine, disease and the breakdown of society.

## KEY QUESTIONS

- What were the causes, justifications and nature of the Red Terror? To what extent did these represent a fulfillment or compromise of revolutionary ideals?
- How did the White Terror challenge the new regime?
- What were the consequences of terror?
- What led to the introduction of War Communism? What were its essential policies?
- How did the Civil War shape the nature of the new regime?
- What were the consequences of War Communism for a range of social groups?

# TEROR

◀ KEY DEVELOPMENT

**Felix Dzerzhinsky:** 'The public and the press misunderstand the character and tasks of our commission. They imagine the struggle waged against Counter Revolution to be on the plane of normal state life, and consequently they wail about courts of law, about guarantees, about inquiries, investigators etc. ... We stand for organised terror—this should be frankly stated.'

The Bolsheviks did much to provoke resistance to their regime. The Cheka played a vital role in crushing that resistance and ensuring that further opposition was discouraged. Historian Richard Pipes sees the repression of all real and potential opponents as the main reason the Bolsheviks created the Cheka: 'the "Red Terror" was not a reluctant response to the actions of others but a ... measure designed to nip in the bud any thoughts of resistance to the dictatorship'.<sup>1</sup>

Yet the Cheka's purpose extended far beyond its role as an agency of state coercion. Historians have debated to what extent the terror was driven by circumstances, counter-revolutionary threats and ideological considerations. The violence of the Civil War—both Red and White—was complex in both its origin and development.

By March 1918, the Cheka had moved to its Lubyanka headquarters in Moscow. Under the leadership of 'Iron Felix' Dzerzhinsky, it had grown to a staff of over 1000 and had its own military Combat Detachment. However, it was not well organised or centrally controlled.

In the early months of Bolshevik rule, local Cheka authorities—like other Soviet bodies—had considerable autonomy, which is why historian Orlando Figes argues that Red Terror developed in response to popular pressure. Russia's privileged classes were the target of much hatred and violence during the Civil War period. Denunciations by ordinary members of the community, in both countryside and urban centres, influenced who was targeted by the provincial Cheka. The Bolshevik authorities endorsed these sentiments, as a 'class war' was an intrinsic ideal of the revolution.

Martyn Latsis—who was one of Dzerzhinsky's deputies—issued these instructions to his officials regarding the interrogation of prisoners: 'First you must ask him to what class he belongs, what his social origin is, his education and profession. These are the questions that must determine the fate of the accused. That is the meaning of the Red Terror'.<sup>2</sup> Another Chekist expressed an even simpler method: 'What purpose is served by all these questions of origins and education? One needs only to go into the kitchen and look into his soup pot. If there is meat in it, then he is an enemy of the people. Stand him up against the wall!'<sup>3</sup>

For all the Communist rhetoric of revolutionary violence and anti-bourgeois sentiment, it was not until after mid-1918 that the Red Terror took on its more organised and fearsome characteristics. In June 1918, Dzerzhinsky warned, 'We stand for organised terror ... The Cheka is obliged to defend the revolution and conquer the enemy even if its sword does by chance sometimes fall on the heads of the innocent'.<sup>4</sup>

On 30 August 1918, Lenin was shot and seriously wounded by an SR named Fanya Kaplan. This shooting made it clear that Bolsheviks were under attack—not only from the White armies, but also from dangerous political terrorists. On the same



↑ 'Iron Felix' Dzerzhinsky.

↓ Source 11.02 *In Basement of Cheka*  
by Ivan Vladimirov, 1919.



## DID YOU KNOW?

Felix Dzerzhinsky's body was reportedly covered in scars from torture received in prison under the tsar. Is this where he learned his torture methods?

day, Moisei Uritsky, the boss of the Petrograd Cheka, was assassinated by a young trainee officer. The SRs had also assassinated Commissar of the Press Moisei Volodarsky on 20 June.

The deaths of Uritsky, Volodarsky and the attempt on Lenin's life were greeted with outrage by the Bolsheviks, and gave them the justification for escalating the Red Terror. One party newspaper, *Krasnaya Gazeta* (The Red Gazette), proclaimed:

### *Krasnaya Gazeta*

Without mercy, 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 and Uritsky ... let there be floods of bourgeois blood—more blood, as much as possible.

The Bolsheviks subsequently launched a war on terror that was to be won by using even greater terror. On 5 September, in Lenin's absence, Sverdlov and Dzerzhinsky directed Sovnarkom to pass a decree entitled 'On Red Terror'. The decree allowed for the creation of concentration camps to imprison 'class enemies' and authorised the Cheka to execute 'anyone involved in White Guard organisations, conspiracies and rebellions'.<sup>5</sup>

However, the attempted assassination of Lenin was not just blamed on SR terrorists, but on the bourgeoisie. Another of Dzerzhinsky's deputies, Yakov Peters, declared: 'The bullet was directed not only against Comrade Lenin but also the working-class as a whole'.<sup>6</sup> Thousands of suspected 'counter-revolutionaries'—many from the middle-and-upper classes—were arrested and put into concentration camps and Cheka jails. Zinoviev ordered the immediate execution of five hundred 'bourgeois' hostages; thousands more were summarily executed without trial in the coming months. Latsis explained, 'We are not waging war against individual persons. We are exterminating the bourgeoisie as a class.'<sup>7</sup>

### Source 11.04 Attempt on Vladimir Lenin's Life, August 30 1918 by M. Sokolov.



◀ **Source 11.03** Cited in Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891–1924* (Sydney: Pimlico, 1996), 630.

### DID YOU KNOW?

On 30 August, Chairman Yakov Sverdlov of the Soviet CEC published an 'Appeal in Connection with the Attempt on the Life of Lenin' that summed up the mood among Communist leaders: 'The working class will answer assassination attempts on its leaders by still greater consolidation of its forces and by ruthless mass terror against all enemies of the Revolution ... Maintain order and organisation! Everybody must remain at their posts! Close ranks!'

### ACTIVITY

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 According to Martyn Latsis, what questions should a Chekist ask a prisoner to determine their guilt?
- 2 According to one Chekist, what should investigators look for in the soup pot of an accused to determine if they were an enemy of the state?
- 3 According to Felix Dzerzhinsky, what did the Cheka 'stand for'?
- 4 What significant development in the Red Terror happened on 30 August 1918?

## METHODS OF TERROR

\* The following bullet points contain graphic descriptions of real violence

- One Cheka executioner liked to shoot his victims bit by bit, starting at the wrist and ending at the head, and take a sniff of cocaine between each shot.
- The Kharkov Cheka preferred the ‘glove trick’, where the hand of a prisoner was held in boiling water until the skin came off ‘like a glove’.
- In Voronezh, prisoners were rolled about in spiked barrels.
- In Tsaritsyn and Kamyshin, Chekists used blunt saws to sever the bones of prisoners.
- In Kiev, pipes filled with rats and sealed at one end were placed against a victim’s stomach and heated up. Desperate to escape, the rats would gnaw into the prisoner’s body.
- White army officers had their epaulets (shoulder insignia) nailed into their shoulders, or were ‘roasted’ against the side of ships’ furnaces.

### DID YOU KNOW?

One executioner with the Moscow Cheka lost his grip on reality after shooting a batch of twenty prisoners. With crazed eyes and gore-spattered uniform, the Chekist turned on the prison commander who had come to inspect his work and screamed, ‘Get your clothes off, you bastard!’ He had to be dragged off his superior officer by fellow Chekists, and taken away to another room to come to his senses.

Sometimes psychological torture could be just as damaging.

- Kiev Chekists sometimes put prisoners into coffins with a rotting corpse, buried them alive, then dug them up 30 minutes later.
- Sometimes a prisoner was brought into the execution room and an empty pistol was fired at their head. The prisoner was then returned to their cell and left to wonder when their ‘real’ execution would occur.

However, for all the sickening and extravagant ways of inflicting pain and death, the most common method of execution was a pistol shot at point blank to the back of the head.

These tortures and executions also brutalised and damaged the Chekists themselves, and quite a few went insane. Cocaine and alcohol abuse was high among members of the Cheka, and a delivery of liquor to the headquarters was usually a sign of upcoming executions.

Most executions were carried out in the privacy of Cheka jails—although that did nothing to diminish the fear they instilled in the Russian public. Lists of those killed were regularly published in newspapers. The Commissar of Justice, Nikolai Krylenko, argued that, ‘We must execute not only the guilty. Execution of the innocent will impress the masses even more.’<sup>8</sup>

➔ Felix Dzerzhinsky.



➔ **Source 11.05** Cited in Donald Rayfield, *Stalin and His Hangmen: An Authoritative Portrait of a Tyrant and Those Who Served Him* (London: Viking, 2004), 76.

## JUSTIFICATIONS FOR TERROR

Dzerzhinsky claimed that, ‘The sooner we get rid of the bourgeoisie, the sooner we will reach socialism’. However, was mass terror, as Dzerzhinsky implied, simply an end in itself? A number of Chekists were mentally unstable and got perverse pleasure from torture and killing. One expressed enthusiasm for his work through poetry.

### Poem by Aleksandr Eiduk, a Chekist

There is no greater joy, not better music  
Than the crunch of broken lives and bones  
This is why when our eyes are languid  
And passion begins to seethe stormily in the breast,  
I want to write on your sentence  
One unquavering thing: ‘Up against the wall! Shoot!’

Men like Latsis and Dzerzhinsky were fanatics and idealists. They considered the task entrusted to them to be of the utmost importance.

### Dzerzhinsky explaining the role of the Cheka

We need to send to the Front—the most dangerous and cruel of Fronts—determined, hard, dedicated comrades ready to do anything in defence of the Revolution. Do not think that I seek forms of revolutionary justice; we are not now in need of justice. It is war now—face to face, a fight to the finish. Life or death!

Dzerzhinsky saw membership of the Cheka as a kind of higher calling: ‘To be a Chekist a man must have a clear mind, a passionate heart, and clean hands. A Chekist must be more honest and trustworthy than the average. He must be as pure as crystal.’<sup>9</sup> Dzerzhinsky saw his role as the unshakable guardian of the revolution. His Chekists were similarly seen as noble crusaders—the so-called ‘sword and flame of the revolution’.

Dzerzhinsky worked eighteen hours a day, seven days a week, and was dedicated to ‘the cause’. He often remained at his unheated Lubyanka office for days on end. Overwhelmed by exhaustion, he commonly slept with just his greatcoat as a blanket. His workload brought on ill-health and was the cause of much worry among other Bolsheviks.

In the worst period of shortages during the Civil War, Dzerzhinsky reprimanded colleagues who brought him a meal of bacon and potatoes rather than horsemeat—which was a common foodstuff in that era. He often lived off bread and mint tea. Historian Chamberlin described Dzerzhinsky as, ‘an old revolutionary of the most unimpeachable idealism’.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, historian Neil Harding argues, ‘There was about him no hint of personal corruption or self-interested abuse of his massive powers’.<sup>11</sup>

However, many rank-and-file Chekists did not adopt Dzerzhinsky’s frugality and virtuous behaviour. Corruption was commonplace in the Cheka. In response, Iron Felix was known to have ordered the execution of Chekists who took bribes, and deducted alimony payments from the salaries of employees who were unfaithful to their wives.

 **Source 11.06** Cited in Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891–1924* (Sydney: Pimlico, 1996), 510.

### DID YOU KNOW?

The character Pasha Antipov in Boris Pasternak’s novel *Doctor Zhivago* had similarities with Iron Felix. Driven by a hatred of those who exploit the poor, and brutalised by his experiences in World War I, Pasha became the dreaded Bolshevik Commissar, Strelnikov (‘the Shooter’). ‘These are apocalyptic times, my dear sir, this is the Last Judgement’, he says to Dr Zhivago. ‘This is a time for angels with flaming swords and winged beasts from the abyss, not for sympathisers and loyal doctors’. This statement echoed Dzerzhinsky’s purist, almost religious commitment to the revolution.

## EXECUTION OF THE TSAR AND HIS FAMILY

On 17 July 1918, Tsar Nicholas and his family were killed by Cheka authorities in the basement of the house in which they were imprisoned at Yekaterinburg in Siberia. At first it was thought that local officials had acted on their own in killing the Romanovs, to make sure the family was not liberated by advancing anti-Bolshevik forces.

However, evidence suggests that Sverdlov—with the blessing of Lenin—had telegraphed an order to the Chekists to go ahead with the executions. The official who directed the Yekaterinburg Cheka was a personal friend of Sverdlov and had been in frequent contact with him before the murders.<sup>12</sup> When Trotsky asked who ordered the executions, Sverdlov replied, ‘We decided it here. Ilyich [Lenin] believed that we should not leave the Whites a live banner to rally around.’<sup>13</sup>



 **Source 11.07** The room where the Russian royal family was murdered.

Trotsky later recognised that the execution of the Romanovs had a deeper message—that there was to be no turning back and no mercy for the enemies of the new regime: ‘The execution of the Tsar and his family was needed not only to frighten, horrify and instil a sense of hopelessness in the enemy, but also to shake up our own ranks, to show that there was no retreating, that ahead lay total victory or total doom’.<sup>14</sup>

In 2000, Tsar Nicholas and his immediate family were made saints of the Russian Orthodox Church.

## DID YOU KNOW?

An example of the sheer callousness of the Red Terror is revealed through a 1919 misunderstanding between Lenin and Dzerzhinsky. During a Sovnarkom meeting, Lenin passed Dzerzhinsky a note asking, 'How many dangerous counter-revolutionaries do we have in prison?' Dzerzhinsky wrote back: 'About 1500'. Lenin drew a quick cross next to the figure, passed back the note, and returned his attention to the meeting. That night, Dzerzhinsky ordered 1500 prisoners from Moscow's Cheka jails to be executed. What Iron Felix had forgotten was that Lenin drew a small cross next to everything he read to show that he had understood and considered it!

## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 When, where and why were Tsar Nicholas and his family executed?
- 2 Describe how Dzerzhinsky explained and justified the work of the Cheka.

### DEBATE OR DISCUSSION

After researching the Red Terror, run a class debate on one of the topics below. Alternatively, consider and discuss the topics in small groups.

- 'Iron Felix and the Cheka were sadistic lunatics.'
- 'The Red Terror proved Bukharin's saying: "You can't make an omelette without breaking a few eggs."
- 'The Bolsheviks had to use terror: it was a weapon of war.'
- 'The Red Terror was the fulfillment of a key revolutionary ideal: class war.'
- 'Ideology played no role in the Red Terror.'

## WHITE TERROR

\* The following bullet points contain graphic descriptions of real violence

- The Whites used railway spikes to nail suspected Communists to trees by their left hand and left foot.
- 'Socialist' workers—or even just trade unionists—were buried up to their necks and ridden over by cavalry.
- Captured Red soldiers had stars carved into their backs, their limbs hacked off, or were buried head-down with the bottom half of their legs exposed.
- Ataman Grigory Semyonov boasted that he had personally tortured 6500 people.
- On hearing that Bolsheviks killed those with clean fingernails and smooth hands, one White commander captured a factory and ordered the execution of any employee with calloused hands.
- General Kornilov instructed his men, 'Take no prisoners! The more terrible the terror, the more victories.'<sup>15</sup>

Pogroms against Jewish communities were a further expression of White Terror. White generals were known to grant their soldiers two or three days leave to loot Jewish homes and businesses at will as a way to 'let off steam'. In the Ukraine 50,000 to 200,000 Jews were murdered, and thousands more were beaten and raped. Bolsheviks of Jewish background captured by the Whites were boiled alive as 'communist soup'.

While Communists persecuted the bourgeoisie because they considered them to be defenders of the old regime, the Whites targeted Jews for all the perceived wrongs of the revolutionary regime. As former Duma deputy and White supporter Vasili Shulgin said, 'They shouted, "Death to the Burzhooi!" and we replied, "Death to the Yids!"'<sup>16</sup>

However, revolutionary fanaticism on its own does not explain the dramatic growth of the Cheka. Dzerzhinsky was in demand as an administrator—he had a reputation as a man who could get the job done.

In 1921 he was made Commissar of Transport and given the task of restoring Russia's crippled rail system. He was later appointed chair of the Supreme Council of the National Economy (Vesenkha) and Commissar of Communication.

Like Dzerzhinsky, the Cheka was seen as versatile, efficient and useful to the new regime. As problems mounted and internal threats increased, many people within the party came to regard the Cheka as indispensable. Lenin gave his full support to Dzerzhinsky's work and overruled any attempts within the party to limit the Cheka. Historian Dmitri Volkogonov argues that, 'Lenin himself was the patron saint of the Cheka'.<sup>17</sup>

### Resolution on 'Current Moment' (17 September 1918), drafted by Grigory Zinoviev

The civil war in Russia is peaking. The necessity of adopting Red Terror in response to White Terror is a reflection of this fact ... The working class must finally implement a dictatorship of steel and settle scores with all its enemies coarsely. Security in the rear must be assured and all forces devoted to the Front ... it is essential to teach male and female workers that they are all employees of the Cheka, that all of us are participants in the great struggle with the counterrevolution.

### DID YOU KNOW?

The Bolsheviks renounced religion. When asked by a delegation of Jews to help his 'fellows', Trotsky—whose real surname was Bronstein, and whose father was Jewish—is reported to have snapped, 'I am not a Jew but an internationalist!' As Moscow's Chief Rabbi once observed, it was the Trotskys of the world who made revolutions, but the Bronsteins who had to live with them.

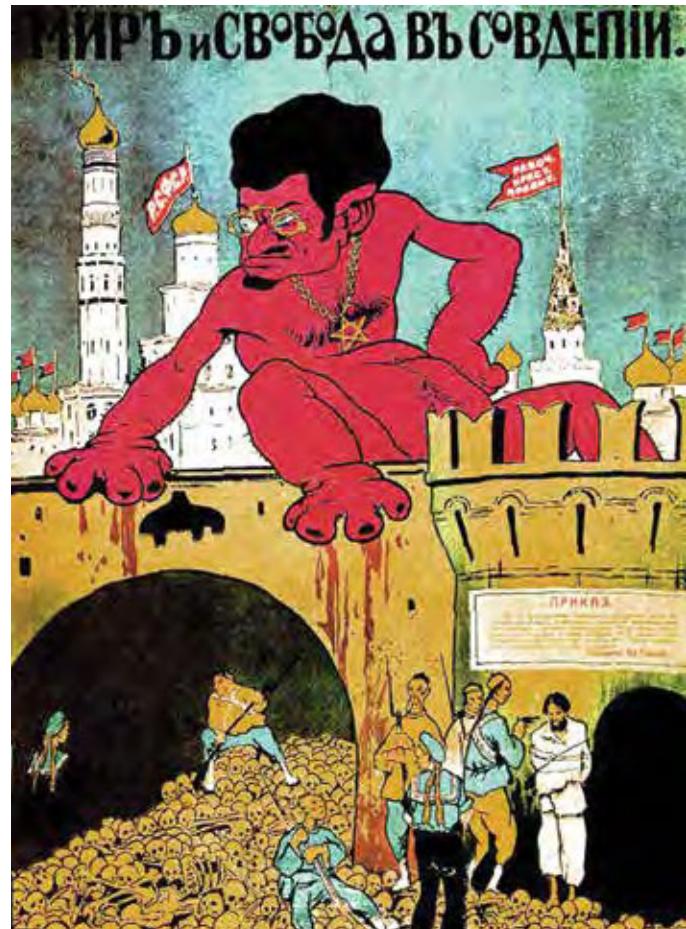
← **Source 11.08** Resolution on 'Current Moment,' adopted by Seventh City Conference of Petrograd Bolsheviks (17 September 1918), drafted by Grigory Zinoviev, cited in Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power*, 342.

### ACTIVITY

#### EVALUATING SOURCES

Using Sources 11.08 and 11.09 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Outline the reasons Red Terror was a 'necessity', according to Source 11.08.
- 1 Identify and annotate the symbols or features of Source 11.09 that convey a negative view of Soviet rule.
- 2 Explain how Red and White forces justified their use of violence during the Civil War.
- 3 Evaluate the impact of Red and White Terror during the Civil War (1918–1920). Use evidence to support your response.



→ **Source 11.09** Peace and Liberty in Sovdepiya. A White propaganda poster from 1919. 'Sovdepiya' was a derogatory slang term roughly translating as 'land of Soviet deputies'.

## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Explain three violent or gruesome tactics used by the Whites.
- 2 Which community was often victimised by the Whites?
- 3 Besides political repression and terror, explain three or more roles played by Dzerzhinsky or the Cheka in the new society.

As a valued tool of the Soviet state, the Cheka took on diverse tasks such as:

- border control
- overseeing labour conscription
- locating and buying fuel
- countering desertions
- uncovering espionage and political dissent
- exposing bribery and corruption
- policing crime
- coordinating epidemic and famine relief.<sup>18</sup>

Ironically, in what could be seen as a mismatch of interests, 'Iron Felix' Dzerzhinsky was the founder of Soviet Russia's largest child welfare agency. Numerous homes for orphans were built from the proceeds of voluntary deductions from Chekists' salaries. Dzerzhinsky once told a fellow Chekist, 'Concern for our children's welfare is one of the best ways to wipe out counter-revolution'.<sup>19</sup>

## WAR AND TERROR

In his comparative history of the French and Russian revolutions, Arno J. Mayer emphasises the interrelationship between terror and the threat of military defeat. Mayer suggests that the fortunes of the Civil War strongly influenced the use of revolutionary violence.

Revolution often provokes counter-revolution—and both forces throw all they have against the other. As Mayer puts it: 'The Furies of revolution are fueled above all by the resistance of the forces and ideas opposed to it'. He goes on to say that, 'the bulk of the terror, and the worst of it, was closely correlated with the fighting between the Reds and Whites. It was much more a part of military operations than of political battles against real or perceived enemies and conspiracies'.<sup>20</sup>

Although the Communists tended towards revolutionary violence, the argument goes that they were responding to the threat of domestic resistance, profound social unrest, foreign intervention and assassinations by SR terrorists—and without these issues, the Red Terror would have been less forceful and less rigid.

However, historians still argue about whether terror was a response to crises and threat or was a product of ideological intolerance. Rather than arguing the merits of circumstances versus intent, historian Peter Holquist calls for a consideration of Bolshevik policies within their 'historical conditions'.<sup>21</sup> The authoritarian state institutions

of the Civil War years can be seen as an extension of trends that existed before the Bolsheviks. The period of 1905 to 1921 was an 'epoch of violence'.

According to Holquist, the Communist mentality and behaviour—as well as the brutality of Red Terror—were a product of 'specific time and place'. During this era of troubles, the extreme means of wartime were considered appropriate to use to get revolutionary results.

## ACTIVITY

### EXTENDED RESPONSES

Write an extended response on one or more of the topics below. Your response should have a clear topic sentence, use a range of points, be supported by evidence, and end with a brief summative sentence.

- Explain the role of the Cheka in achieving or compromising the ideals of the revolution.
- How was the Cheka used by the Communist regime to consolidate its power?
- Outline the impact of the White Terror during the Civil War.
- Explain the contribution and influence of Felix Dzerzhinsky in the new society.

# FELIX DZERZHINSKY, 1877–1926

Felix Dzerzhinsky was a Pole from an aristocratic background who founded and led the Communist political police agencies. He had considered joining the Catholic priesthood, before becoming a Marxist revolutionary. He spent eleven years in tsarist prisons, and served sentences under hard labour—as well as terms of exile in Siberia—for his role in agitating for revolution, particularly as a leading member of the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party and Polish SD groups.

Dzerzhinsky was freed from prison during the February Revolution, and went on to supervise security at the Smolny Institute, where he played an important role in the October Uprising by securing control of Petrograd's telegraph and postal agencies. In December 1917 he was appointed head of the Cheka.

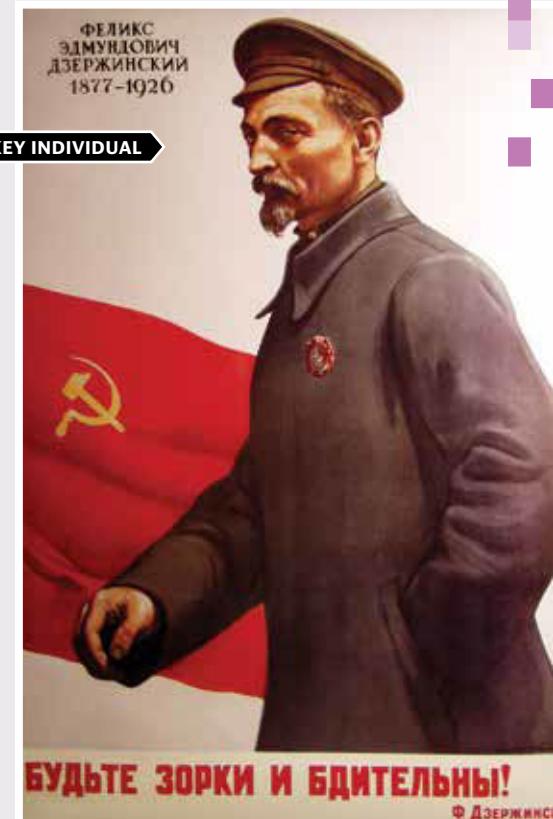
Dzerzhinsky's energy and attention to detail took the Cheka into areas far beyond counter-revolutionary intelligence and terror, and it grew into a multi-dimensional organisation. He was merciless in dealing with 'counter-revolutionaries', and the Cheka was considered of equal importance to the Red Army in winning the Civil War. The victims of Red Terror—casualties of the 'war on the internal front', as the Chekists understood it—amounted to hundreds of thousands of people.

After the Civil War, Dzerzhinsky served as chairman of Vesenka, People's Commissar of Internal Affairs (**NKVD**), and as Commissar of Railways. He remained head of the political police and oversaw the reorganisation of the Cheka into the State Political Directorate (GPU), then into the United State Political Administration (**OGPU**) in the mid-1920s.

Dzerzhinsky died of a heart attack after giving a rousing speech to the Politburo in 1926. At his funeral, Stalin said that Dzerzhinsky's impassioned, seething life could be summed up by a single word: 'burning'. Uncorruptable and holding purist ideals for the Cheka, Dzerzhinsky was revered by the following generations of Soviet secret police agents, who vowed to be 'sharp-eyed and diligent' like him. Despite this, Dzerzhinsky is remembered by many people as a murderous fanatic.

**NKVD** secret police force that took over the work of the OGPU in 1934, including control of the labour camp system

**OGPU** United State Political Administration. Soviet political police that evolved in the 1920s from the Cheka and the GPU. The OGPU favoured surveillance and infiltration rather than mass terror



↑ Source 11.10 Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky (1877–1926): 'Be sharp-eyed and diligent!'

## DID YOU KNOW?

In addition to his leadership of the Cheka and various other commissariats, Dzerzhinsky also found time to be chairman of the Society of Friends of Soviet Cinema.

## KEY POINTS

- A long-serving SD who was imprisoned and tortured under the tsarist regime.
- Contributed to the success of the October seizure of power in 1917. Headed security of the Smolny Institute building.
- Organised and led the Cheka, as well its successors: the GPU and the OGPU.
- Uncorruptible and deeply committed to the revolution, Dzerzhinsky provided much of the rhetoric and justifications for the Red Terror.
- His dedication and talent as an administrator saw him appointed People's Commissar of the Interior, Commissar of Communication, and Commissar of Railways. The Cheka proved itself to be invaluable to the Communist regime.

## WAR COMMUNISM: KEY POLICIES

Nationalisation of industry

Militarised workplaces

Forced labour for  
the bourgeoisie

Abolition of money

Black market trading

State-supplied services

The crusade for bread

Committees of the poor

Requisition squads

# WAR COMMUNISM

KEY DEVELOPMENT

**Vladimir Lenin:** 'Long live civil war in the name of bread, for children and old people, for the workers and the Red Army, in the name of direct and merciless struggle with counter-revolution.'

Stabilising the economy was an increasingly difficult task for the Bolsheviks. State Capitalism was under strain because of:

- shortages of raw materials
- lack of consumer goods
- pressure for increased nationalisation of industry
- declining grain stocks.

This was made worse by the outbreak of the Civil War. A blockade was enforced from mid-1918 until 1921, and trade with other countries stopped. With fuel and food already scarce, the loss of Ukraine—first to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, then because of White Army occupation, and later to peasant uprisings—also denied European Russia its 'breadbasket'. Supplying the cities became unpredictable, as the Red Army took priority in rail deliveries. Even Lenin admitted that, 'to get bread—that is the basis of socialism today'.<sup>22</sup>

The military emergency and failing economy convinced Lenin and other leading Communists that they needed decisive intervention. In the summer of 1918, a range of harsh, centralised economic policies was introduced. These policies, later known as War Communism, originated partly from the need to:

- secure food for the cities
- halt economic breakdown
- focus industrial production on supplying the Red Army.

Trotsky's catchcry was: 'Everything for the front!'<sup>23</sup>.

## NATIONALISATION OF INDUSTRY

A major aspect of War Communism was a dramatic increase in the degree of state control over industry. As 1918 wore on, increasing numbers of factory committees begged Sovnarkom officials to take control of their industries and bring order to the economy. A gradual process of nationalisation had begun.

Faced with economic ruin, many enterprises had already nationalised without waiting for approval from the central authorities. The government issued multiple warnings against workers seizing industries without the approval of Vesenka, but few workers' committees paid any attention. As well as factories nationalising themselves, the Communist regime had the added pressure of mobilising the economy to support the Red Army.

On 28 June 1918, the Decree on Nationalisation was released, which marked the leap into War Communism. The decree announced that the state would take full ownership of all metallurgical, textile, electrical, mining, cement and tanning industries. More enterprises soon followed. By November 1920, Sovnarkom had declared the nationalisation of:

- all factories that employed more than ten workers
- all factories with more than five workers, if they used powered machinery.

Initially, Vesenka had been a supervisory body, but was now the coordinator of a highly centralised economic system. After taking over the means of production and cutting back on private ownership of industry, the regime hoped to bring stability to the economy.

Yet these measures did little to effectively improve economic output, as they were imposed during a time of severe economic and social disruption. Difficulties in supply and distribution were a constant problem. The attempt to nationalise virtually everything led to the emergence of an unwieldy state bureaucracy, with resources and initiative often tangled up in red tape.

Departments and officials argued and held up:

- the distribution of materials
- the supply of additional workers to understaffed industries
- reports on the progress of production.

A further obstruction to economic recovery was the lack of manpower, caused by military conscription and the flight of workers from urban areas to the countryside.

## MILITARISED WORKPLACES

War Communism saw the militarisation of the workplace, as the state attempted to control the labour of all its citizens. The ideal of workers' control was rolled back, not just in the running of industry, but also in the regulation of working hours, day-to-day conditions and the types of work undertaken. Workers were sent to factories where they were most needed. Those who disobeyed were threatened with the loss of food rations and imprisonment.

Towards the end of the Civil War, Trotsky called for battalions of the Red Army to be mobilised into 'labour armies' and used to build roads, unload freight and cut trees. Labour armies had to submit military-style reports on their progress, and were marched to and from their workplaces. In addition:

- longer working hours were introduced in all industries.
- absenteeism was punished with more difficult duties and a reduction in rations.
- strikers were threatened with execution.

'A deserter from labour', according to Trotsky, 'is as contemptible and despicable as a deserter from the battlefield'.<sup>24</sup> Working on weekends was encouraged, and referred to as 'Communist Saturdays' (subbotniki).<sup>25</sup> Workers were obliged to clean up roads or unload trains on their days off. Party activists soon placed great pressure on all workers to participate in this 'voluntary' work.

### KEY GROUP

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Shortages did not apply to everybody. Zinoviev and Radek enjoyed the food and fine clothes available to the Communist elite. In contrast, Lenin, Bukharin and Lunacharsky lived quite modestly, and Dzerzhinsky was notoriously frugal.



**Source 11.11** A Communist **subbotnik**: people worked 'voluntarily' on weekends without remuneration to help rehabilitate the war-ravaged economy.

**subbotnik** voluntary work day on a weekend

## FORCED LABOUR FOR THE BOURGEOISIE

### KEY GROUP

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Under War Communism, mansions were subdivided and filled with the homeless people. The popular slogan was: 'Peace to the Hovels, War to the Palaces!'

From October 1918, the 'privileged' members of society were mobilised for compulsory labour service. These so-called 'former people' included bankers, priests, military officers, factory owners, lawyers, stockbrokers, former tsarist officials and members of aristocratic families. Trotsky told one such group: 'Our grandfathers, great-grandfathers, and fathers all had to clean up the shit and filth of your grandfathers and fathers. Now you are going to do the same thing for us.'<sup>26</sup>



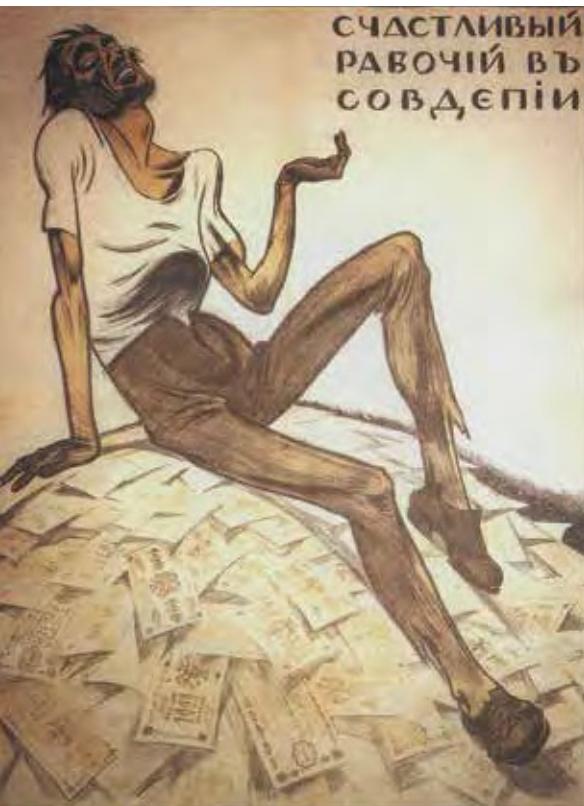
↑ Source 11.12 Russian Clergy on Forced Labor  
by Ivan Vladimirov, 1919.

The bourgeoisie were forced into work gangs, and made to perform jobs such as:

- shovel snow
- clear city streets of rubbish
- dig graves for typhus victims
- clean the communal toilets of government buildings.

These work gangs were under armed guard, and were often humiliated or mocked as they worked. 'Former people' were required by law to register their details with the Cheka so their whereabouts and activities could be recorded.<sup>27</sup> They were also required to keep a special labour book that recorded their compulsory service.

Compulsory labour by the bourgeoisie was welcomed by workers whose hatred of their social betters was an important element of support for the revolutionary regime. However, while ordinary people often went hungry and lived in substandard housing, the Red elite had access to chefs trained in France, and comfortable apartments in the Kremlin. This fostered popular disillusionment with the regime.



↑ Source 11.13 A Happy Worker in Sovdepia, 1919. A White Russian poster showing a pile of bank notes, worthless because of hyperinflation. 'Sovdepia' is a derogatory name for the Soviet state.

**bagmen** speculators who traded goods and food on the black market during War Communism

## ABOLITION OF MONEY

In 1919 Lenin declared that, 'The Communist Party will strive as speedily as possible to introduce the most radical measures to pave the way for the abolition of money'.<sup>28</sup> The party achieved this goal by purposely inducing hyperinflation, which is when a government continues to print money until it became worthless. When money was exchanged between state-run industries it was simply an exercise in bookkeeping, as no cash changed hands. One observer noted that Soviet Russia was a 'country of millionaire paupers'.<sup>29</sup>

After the Communist regime had eliminated reliance on a monetary economy, it aimed to become the sole producer and provider of goods and food. After a decree on 21 November 1918, all private trade was declared illegal, including:

- small business
- peasant markets
- selling of any personal goods for profit.

A government body called the Food Commissariat was the only organisation legally allowed to supply consumer items. It was also allowed to confiscate stocks held by private traders.

## BLACK MARKET TRADING

However, the complete collapse in the value of the rouble and the ban on private trade resulted in a booming black market economy. Bartering (or exchanging) became a way of life for almost all Soviet citizens, and it was the only way city dwellers could get enough food.

Paradoxically, the ban on trading meant that more people were now in private trade than ever before. Trains were crowded with speculators, known as **bagmen**, who travelled from the countryside to the towns

with goods and food that they sold at substantial profits. People flocked to illegal markets to trade for bread and other staple foods.

The authorities periodically launched crackdowns on the markets and arrested anyone caught trading—but consumer demand was so great that the markets generally reopened the next day. Checkpoints were set up on the railways to confiscate any illegally transported goods or food. However, despite the reservations of Soviet authorities and a stream of propaganda denouncing the bagmen as ‘evil exploiters’, the bartering system had to be tolerated. During the years 1918–1919, illegal traders supplied city dwellers with up to 60 per cent of their bread. The percentage was even higher for small provincial towns.

## STATE-SUPPLIED SERVICES

A range of free services was introduced by the government to replace wages that were previously paid in cash, including:

- postal services
- public transport
- medical treatment
- food rations (of dubious quality and quantity).

Payments for rent, lighting and heating were abolished, and cinema and theatre sessions were free. In July 1918, a class-based food-rationing system was introduced, where workers, soldiers and members of the Communist party received considerably more food than the upper classes. Lenin famously declared, ‘He who does not work, neither shall he eat’.<sup>30</sup> In the hierarchy that determined the amount of food a person received, those who lived off ‘capital’—namely the so-called ‘former people’—received very little. Zinoviev spoke of the bourgeoisie receiving just enough bread to remember the smell of it.<sup>31</sup>

## THE CRUSADE FOR BREAD

However, soon the leading concern of Soviet authorities was obtaining enough food so that cities and towns did not starve. Thousands of people perished from starvation and riots broke out in many towns over the lack of available food. It was a desperate crisis that came to dominate the attention of many within the party and the government.

The response of Soviet authorities was to force the peasantry to provide more food, and they embarked on what Lenin called a ‘crusade for bread’.<sup>32</sup> However, although the Bolsheviks had won some support from people in country areas through their Decree on Land, the peasantry were reluctant to hand over their grain. Most of them preferred to feed up their livestock or sell their produce on the black market, usually to bagmen.

Lenin was convinced that the food shortages were because of rich peasants (called kulaks) hoarding *surplus* grain. The solution Lenin proposed was to turn the poorer peasantry against their well-off neighbours. As Sverdlov explained: ‘Only if we are able to split the village into two camps, to arouse there the same class war as in the cities, only then will we achieve in the villages what we have achieved in the cities’.<sup>33</sup>



↑ **Source 11.14** A line outside a butcher’s shop, in a scene from a 1918 child’s drawing.



↑ **Source 11.15** A child’s drawing from 1918 showing a black marketeer.

### DID YOU KNOW?

During the period of hyperinflation, the Communist theorist Yevgeni Preobrazhensky dedicated a book to ‘The printing presses of the Commissariat of Finance—that machine-gun which shot the bourgeois regime in the arse’. Communist economist Larin said this about hyperinflation: ‘Money will lose its significance as treasure and remain what it really is: coloured paper’.

**surplus** excess supply; an amount more than is permitted

## ACTIVITY



### CREATIVE TASK

By late 1918, bread rations in Petrograd were down to 50 grams a day per person. Using a set of kitchen scales and some dense-style bread, make a Civil War-era bread ration. You could include a sardine, one old potato and a small stick of kabana sausage for a really 'luxurious' ration! Bring these to class and discuss how it would feel if this was your main meal of the day.

**kombedy** Committees of the Poor; groups of poor peasants who were to help the government extract grain from kulaks under War Communism

### DID YOU KNOW?

By March 1918, even Lenin admitted that the government had made 'terrible errors' in its policies towards peasants.

**prodrazverstka** forced grain requisitioning by government. Instituted under War Communism after January 1919

## COMMITTEES OF THE POOR

On 11 June 1918, the government announced that Committees of the Poor (or *kombedy*) were to be formed throughout the countryside. The theory was that the poorest of the peasantry would do the Communists' dirty work: the *kombedy* would uncover the surplus grain and livestock held by the kulaks, confiscate it and hand it over to Soviet officials. As a reward, the poorer peasants could keep a percentage of the amount they confiscated.

However, the *kombedy* were largely unsuccessful. Extra grain was received from some areas, but splitting the village into two hostile camps was problematic. In some villages the *kombedy* targeted the middle peasants—which was the group Lenin wanted to win over. The idea was also undermined by self-interest, as confiscated grain was shared out among the poor peasants and not handed over to authorities. The biggest problem was the peasants' sense of communal solidarity. Many were reluctant to turn on each other. Historian Lars Lih argues that, 'instead of splitting the village, [the *kombedy*] united it—in rage and fury against the Bolsheviks'.<sup>34</sup>

By December 1918, the Committees of the Poor were abandoned.

## REQUISITION SQUADS

Meanwhile, Lenin was still convinced that food shortages were because of 'hoarding' by rich peasants. If the people in the countryside would not hand over their grain willingly, then he would have to use force. Lenin wrote to the officials in charge of securing food for the cities: 'For God's sake, use the most energetic and revolutionary measures to send grain, grain and more grain!'<sup>35</sup> It was a matter of life and death—the survival of the proletariat and the Red Army were at stake.

From January 1919, detachments of Cheka agents and armed workers were formed into squads to requisition grain, then sent to the countryside to seize 'hoarded surplus' from whole villages. This policy was known as *prodrazverstka* (food quota seizures). In most cases, squads took all the grain they could find—and left no seeds for peasants to plant. By 1920, all agricultural produce was subject to *prodrazverstka*.



→ **Source 11.16** Requisitioning by Ivan Vladimirov, circa 1919.

The peasantry resented the government's new tactics, and responded by closing ranks. Requisition squads were soon faced with armed resistance. Although requisitioning food did lead to some short-term increases in available supplies, it ultimately led to even less food being available because there was no incentive for farmers to produce more grain than they needed.

Between 1917 and 1921, the amount of land under cultivation dropped by 40 per cent, and harvests were around 37 per cent of the usual yield.

Peasants' resistance to grain requisitioning was also because of the inexperience and ruthlessness of some officials. As one Communist, Zhenia Egorovna, complained, 'the detachments were being badly organized', and were, 'composed of undesirable elements that deserved to be arrested'.<sup>36</sup> However, the desperate need for grain for the cities and the army—as well as a determined stand against 'class enemies' in the middle of the Civil War—meant that harsh measures were continued in the countryside.

## ACTIVITY

### HISTORICAL SOURCES

Using Sources 11.17 and 11.18 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Outline Lenin's attitude to revolutionary violence.
- 2 Explain why harsh measures were a feature of Bolshevik policies during the Civil War.
- 3 Analyse how the lives of peasants were impacted by War Communism.

#### Lenin's instructions regarding kulaks, August 1918

Comrades! The uprising of the five kulak districts should be mercilessly suppressed ... We need to set an example.

1. Hang (hang without fail, so the people 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 ...

Do it in such a way that for hundreds of [kilometres] 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 11.17** Cited in Richard Pipes, *The Unknown Lenin: From the Secret Archive* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 50.

#### Historian Richard Pipes

With the evidence that is currently available it becomes difficult to deny that Lenin was, not an idealist, but a mass murderer, a man who believed that the best way to solve problems—no matter whether real or imaginary—was to kill off the people who caused them. It was he who originated the practice of political and social extermination that in the twentieth century would claim tens of millions of lives.

 **Source 11.18** Richard Pipes, *The Unknown Lenin: From the Secret Archive* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 181.

## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 How did Lenin and Trotsky justify War Communism?
- 2 Write a short explanation of each the features of War Communism below. Include any key policies, organisations or groups in your responses.
  - Nationalisation of industry
  - Militarisation of workplaces
  - Forced labour.
  - Hyperinflation
  - Black market trading
  - State-supplied services
  - Grain supply crisis

## PIPES V. LIH ON LENIN: HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Lenin's telegram regarding kulaks (Source 11.17) came to historians' attention in Richard Pipes' book *The Unknown Lenin: From the Secret Archive* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). Pipes pays particular attention to this source, citing it as a clear example of Lenin's 'utter disregard for human life'. Pipes wrote that he hoped that, 'Those who still idealize Lenin ... will find little comfort in the Lenin documents which are now coming to light'. But not all historians agree. In his book *Lenin* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), Lars Lih offers some further insights into the supposed 'unknown' Lenin.

- In August 1918, the food supply crisis was severe. The tsarist government and the Provisional Governments—both of which had considered compulsory seizures of grain—had both fallen partly because of their ineffective food supply policies. 'The Bolsheviks had to come up with an effective response or they too would join their predecessors in the dustbin of history'.
- The Civil War and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk both meant that crucial grain-producing regions—such as the Ukraine—were cut off from Soviet territory. Lih argues that, 'Under these circumstances any grain-surplus region that remained under Bolshevik control became crucial, and so the Bolsheviks pinned their hopes on provinces like Penza'. (Lenin's telegram about hanging kulaks was directed towards the region of Penza.)
- The immediate issue that Lenin was addressing in his telegram was the killing of five Red Army soldiers and three members of the local soviet. The uprising had since spread to neighbouring villages and was about 45 kilometres from the Civil War front, 'which partly explains Lenin's panicky response'.
- Lenin issued many instructions indicating that bonuses for the delivery of grain should be one of the means of addressing the food-supply crisis. Lenin told a group of officials in August 1918, 'Give out bonuses to counties and villages in the form of equipment, money for schools and hospitals and, in general, predominantly for such aims'. Lenin also argued that there should be extensive public information on why grain was so desperately needed.

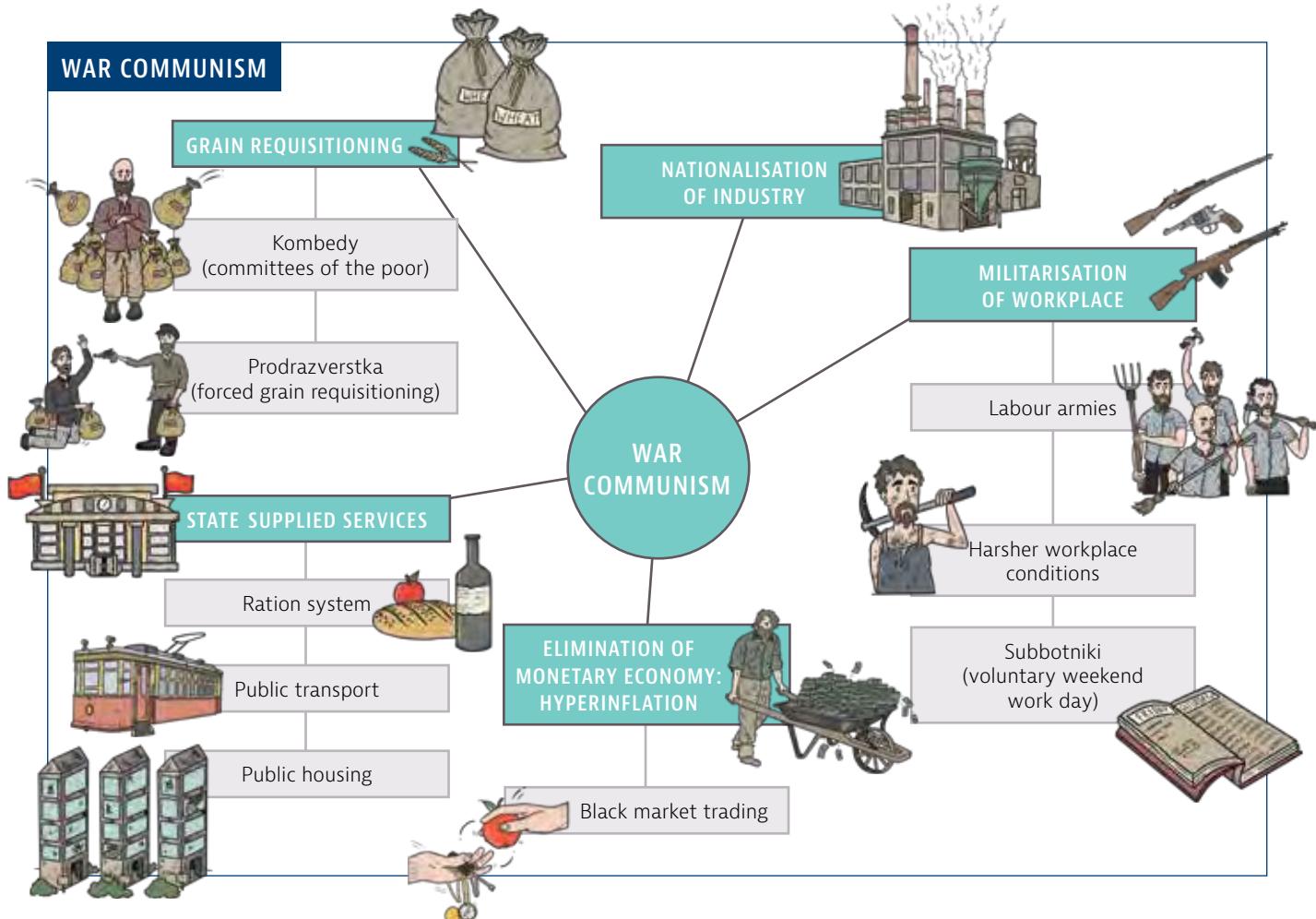
Therefore, according to Lars Lih, putting too strong an emphasis on documents such as the telegram regarding kulaks would be 'seriously misleading'.

## ACTIVITY

### HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Lenin's instructions regarding kulaks (Source 11.17) appeared in Richard Pipes' *The Unknown Lenin* in 1996. Pipes pays close attention to it, as he believes it shows Lenin's disregard for human life. However, Lars Lih argues that the source should not be viewed in isolation. Read Sources 11.16 (Lenin) and 11.17 (Pipes), and the dot points above (Lih) and respond to the following question:

- To what extent does Lih offer a valid critique of Pipes' view of Lenin? Is Lih simply making excuses for Lenin? In three points, argue for or against Lih's view.



## WAR COMMUNISM: INTERPRETATIONS

Some historians argue that although the policies of War Communism were severe, they were necessary because of war and economic collapse. They follow Lenin's retrospective assessment: 'We were forced to resort to "War Communism" by war and ruin'.<sup>37</sup> Historian Lars Lih emphasises the central concern of the food-supply crisis as one of 'the terrible dilemmas of the time of troubles'.<sup>38</sup>

War Communism had obvious practical justifications—but there were also ideological influences. Many people within the party saw War Communism as the first step towards a truly communist society: it represented a more extreme expression of socialist principles and was wholeheartedly welcomed at the time by theorists such as Bukharin.

Although the term 'War Communism' was applied afterwards, observers at the time described the period as one of 'militant' communism. For some historians, the policies demonstrated Bolshevik ideological fanaticism rather than a credible response to the circumstances.<sup>39</sup> War Communism was a flawed experiment, in which socialist ideology was used to determine economic policy. Bernard Pares argues that it was 'not merely war Communism, such as is appropriate to a besieged city, but militant Communism or rather pure Communism, and its failure was self-evident'.<sup>40</sup>

According to historian Richard Pipes, the architects of War Communism were not experts in either economics or business management: 'That such rank amateurs

## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

What were the impacts and consequences of War Communism for the social groups below? Highlight key aspects of their experiences in your responses.

- peasants
- workers
- nobles
- bourgeoisie.

would ... turn upside down the economy of tens of millions, subjecting it to innovations never attempted anywhere ... says something of [their] judgment'.<sup>41</sup>

War Communism was a blend of ideological, economic and militaristic ideas, and was described by historian Alec Nove as 'a siege economy with a communist ideology. A partly organised chaos. Sleepless, leather-jacketed commissars working around the clock in a vain effort to replace the free market.'<sup>42</sup> War Communism was literally communism in response to war.

The period of War Communism was not governed by unified, structured or carefully considered policies. Many decrees were improvised in the face of crisis, and either adjusted according to changing circumstances or not fully implemented. Local officials acted independently and instructions issued by Sovnarkom were at times unclear or contradictory. According to historian Figes, War Communism can also be analysed as a product of the growing divide in economic relations between the countryside and towns.<sup>43</sup> The unreliability of provincial soviet authorities in coordinating grain distribution led to greater centralisation.

## EVERYDAY IMPACTS OF THE CIVIL WAR

**Mikhail Bulgakov:** 'Great and terrible was the year of Our Lord 1918, of the Revolution the second ... but the year 1919 was even more terrible.'

### DID YOU KNOW?

In the early 1920s, a common threat used by everyday Russians was 'I'll turn you into a sausage!' Given the cases of cannibalism in that era, the 'sausage threat' was not a laughing matter.



↑ **Source 11.19** Two small coffins being carried on stretchers to the cemetery in the Volga famine district of Soviet Russia, 1921.

Life for ordinary people was extremely hard during the Civil War. There were chronic shortages of food and fuel, and houses and fences were stripped of their timber to burn in stoves. By 1920, most wages bought less than a fiftieth (2 per cent) of what they bought in 1914.<sup>44</sup> Prices of everyday goods had risen to 6920 times their 1914 levels.<sup>45</sup> As food became critically low, workers deserted factories and fled to rural areas in a desperate search for something to eat. Many still had relatives in the country with whom they could seek shelter.



→ **Source 11.20** Help! by Dmitry Moor, 1921.

The flood of cold and hungry city dwellers to the countryside had immense demographic consequences. By 1920, Petrograd's population had fallen by 70 per cent and Moscow's population by 50 per cent.<sup>46</sup> The 1919 New Year edition of *Pravda* proudly asked, 'Where are the wealthy, the fashionable ladies, the rich restaurants and private mansions, the beautiful entrances, the lying newspapers, all the corrupted "golden life"? All swept away.'<sup>47</sup>

The Soviet press saw some merit in the end of obvious signs of wealth, but critics of the new regime noted that if such a massive demographic upheaval continued, the Bolsheviks would soon be the 'vanguard' of a non-existent class. In 1917, there were 2.6 million workers in Russia, but by 1920 this number had dropped to 1.2 million.<sup>48</sup>

This decrease in the workforce and in the availability of materials caused a dramatic decline in production. Large-scale industrial output fell to 13 per cent of its pre-war level. Steel output was 4 per cent of 1913 levels and iron ore was at 1.5 per cent. Copper production ceased entirely.

## THE GREAT 1921 FAMINE

### KEY DEVELOPMENT

By 1921, grain requisitioning and severe drought combined to produce one of the worst famines of modern times. At least 20 million people were affected—particularly in the Volga region and the Ukraine. Disease also caused millions of deaths during the Civil War. Cartloads of rubbish in Moscow and Petrograd remained uncollected. Sewage systems backed up and burst pipes were left in a state of disrepair. Typhus, cholera and lice were rampant. It is estimated that starvation or disease caused at least 5 million fatalities. Lenin admitted, 'Either the lice will defeat socialism or socialism will defeat the lice'.<sup>49</sup>

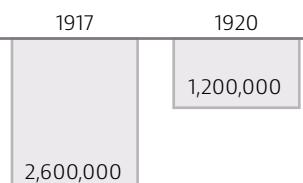
The villagers of some regions ate 'famine bread'—which was made of clay and grass. Thousands of cases of cannibalism were reported. One man arrested for eating human flesh confessed: 'In our village everyone eats human flesh but they hide it. There are several cafeterias in the village—and all of them serve up young children'.<sup>50</sup> There were reports of mothers restraining their children in different corners of a room so they would not eat each other. Family life was severely disrupted, with millions of children orphaned or abandoned. As a result, many fell into prostitution or a life of crime.

The Bolshevik government was reluctantly forced to accept aid from the international community—notably the American Relief Administration (ARA). In addition to supplies of medicine, grain seed and clothing, by 1922 ARA soup kitchens were feeding 10 million Russians per day.

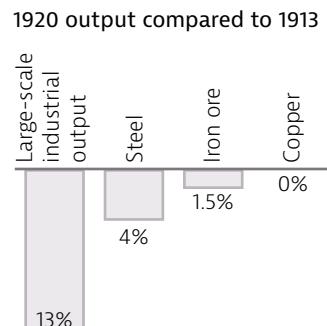
**Source 11.23** Famine by Ivan Vladimirov, 1919.



### DECLINE IN WORKFORCE



### DECLINE IN PRODUCTION



**Source 11.21** Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR 1917–1991* (London: Penguin, 1992), 60.

**Source 11.22** W.H. Chamberlin, *The Russian Revolution 1918–1921* (New York: Universal Library, 1965), 107–108.

### ACTIVITY

#### HISTORICAL SOURCES

Examine the various paintings by Ivan Vladimirov throughout this chapter (Sources 11.01, 11.02, 11.12, 11.16, 11.23 and 11.24) and respond to the following:

- Using details from two or more of these sources and your own knowledge, explain the impact of War Communism on everyday life in Russia.
- Evaluate the extent to which War Communism compromised or achieved the revolutionary ideals of the Soviet government. Use evidence and details from the sources to support your response.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

During the Russian Civil War, food was so scarce that horses, cats and dogs left outside overnight often disappeared. Horsemeat was colloquially known as 'civil war sausage'. Graffiti appeared on the streets of Petrograd that read: 'Down with Lenin and horsemeat! Give us the Tsar and pork!'

## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 By how much did the populations of Petrograd and Moscow decline during the Civil War years?
- 2 Approximately how many people died from starvation or disease in the Civil War era?
- 3 What is 'famine bread'?
- 4 How did peasants respond to the continuation of War Communism from mid-1920?

### DID YOU KNOW?

Lice were abundant during the Civil War. They were a source of discomfort, and would spread contagious disease. When one Red unit had their uniforms disinfected, a layer of what appeared to be grey sand covered the floor of the washrooms to a height of 5 cm. The 'grey sand' was actually dead lice.

Source 11.24 *Looking for Food in a Gutter* by Ivan Vladimirov, 1919.



## PEASANT UNREST

### KEY GROUP

The Communists were victorious in the Civil War, but Russia was torn by social unrest and on the brink of economic ruin. W. H. Chamberlin wrote, 'The realm which the Bolsheviks had conquered bore strong resemblance to a desert'.<sup>51</sup> The situation in the countryside was acutely volatile. From mid-1920, *prodrazverstka* was applied with even greater severity, resulting in an upsurge in peasant unrest, especially in the Tambov region and the Ukraine.

This unrest became a major worry for the Communists, as many areas became ungovernable. The confused nature of peasant political alliances was expressed through slogans such as:

- 'Long Live the Bolsheviks! Death to the Communists!'
- 'Long Live Lenin! Down with Trotsky!'<sup>52</sup>

Trotsky and the Communists were associated with the Civil War; Lenin and the Bolsheviks with 'Peace' and 'Land'. What the peasantry really wanted was freedom and liberty. They hoped that the central authorities would leave them alone—or to at least trade fairly and not seize their grain without proper payment.<sup>53</sup> One peasant wrote to the government: 'We welcome Soviet power, but give us ploughs, harrows and machines and stop seizing our grain, milk, eggs, and meat'.<sup>54</sup> Another lamented that while the revolution had given the peasantry the land that they had desired for so long, the revolutionary government was taking away the fruits of their labour: 'The land belongs to us but the bread belongs to you; the water belongs to us, but the fish to you; the forests are ours but the timber is yours'.

## STRUCTURE AND CULTURE OF THE PARTY-STATE

The Civil War had a profound influence on the political culture of the Communist Party. Faced with a crisis, the new regime relied increasingly on rule by decree and force. The centralised party-state was now seen as the instrument through which socialism would be built.

The success of the Red Army and the effectiveness of the Cheka reinforced such values. The Civil War had seen an influx of military personnel into the party. These men brought with them different values and were generally more willing to accept decisions from above without question: orders were orders. On being appointed Commissar of War, Trotsky had telegraphed Lenin from the front: 'Send me communists who know how to obey'.

There was a sense that the party was now a militarised fellowship of commissars in leather jackets. Many commissars behaved like dictators, as the Civil War had bred a generation of men and women who were quick to reach for their pistols when their authority was questioned or when a crisis needed to be resolved. The Communists were bound together by common values, common threats and a belief that the party hierarchy was always right. During the social upheaval of the Civil War, the Communist party provided a pillar of confident strength for its members. Communist leaders grew accustomed to flexing their political muscle and issuing commands that they expected to be obeyed.

Although the Bolsheviks claimed to have instituted a dictatorship of the proletariat based on 'Soviet' authority, it became increasingly clear as the Civil War progressed that the regime was more of a dictatorship of the party than a dictatorship of workers.

The Bolshevik government Sovnarkom was theoretically subordinate to the Soviet CEC, which was elected at the annual All-Russian Congress of Soviets. Like a parliament, decrees of 'general political significance' were meant to be submitted to the Soviet CEC for ratification and approval. Government commissars could be called before the CEC to explain their policies. They could also theoretically be replaced at its insistence.

## SVERDLOV AND SOVIET CONGRESS

However, the Soviet Congress did not ever block Bolshevik authority. Yakov Sverdlov was the man who made sure this did not happen. Sverdlov was chairman of the Soviet CEC and secretary of the Bolshevik Central Committee, and a brilliant organiser. His imposing personality kept critical debate within the Soviet CEC to a minimum, and he was an expert at manipulating the votes during the annual Soviet Congress.

Not surprisingly, non-Bolshevik Soviet delegates were soon removed from their posts on the Soviet CEC:

- the Mensheviks and SRs were accused of counter-revolutionary activity and expelled on 14 June 1918
- the Left SRs were barred on 9 July 1918.

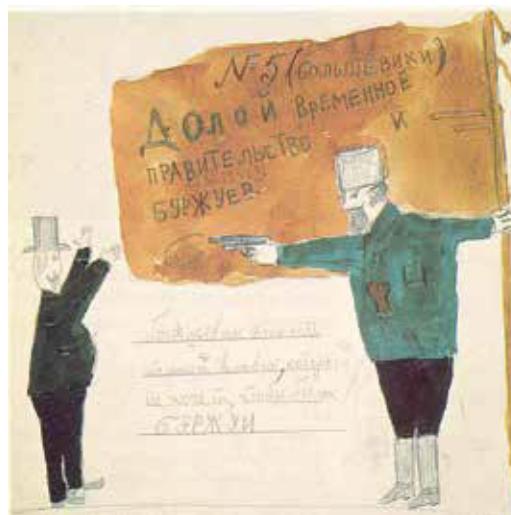
As time went on, legislation was increasingly passed without the approval of the Soviet CEC. Historian Martin McCauley estimates that of the 480 decrees introduced during the first year of the Soviet regime, only sixty-eight were passed on to the Soviet CEC for consideration. And while Sovnarkom met daily, and sometimes even twice a day, the Soviet CEC was called to meet less and less frequently.

In March 1918, Sverdlov argued that the party should take up 'a significant part of the work which has up to now been performed by the soviets'.<sup>55</sup> Since almost all members of the Bolshevik Central Committee held posts in Sovnarkom, which was headed by Lenin, this was arguably an inevitable development. The party's Central Committee formulated resolutions on economic and political strategy, which were then given to Sovnarkom to implement.

Sverdlov died unexpectedly in March 1919. This was a devastating blow to the Bolsheviks. The party apparatus was then restructured into three parts: Secretariat, Politburo and Orgburo.

- The **Secretariat** coordinated paperwork and communication: it was the administrative wing of the party and government.
- The **Orgburo** was the 'organising' body: it made decisions about personnel and delegated tasks to officials.
- The Politburo was a committee of five leading Communists—initially Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky, Kamenev and Nikolai Krestinsky—with the authority to make decisions when there was not time for a full meeting of the Central Committee.

As Lenin explained: 'the Orgburo allocates forces, while the Politburo decides policy'.<sup>56</sup> The Soviet constitution made no reference to the Communist Party; however, the Politburo was the highest decision-making body in Soviet Russia. Hierarchical and centralised authority, with the Communist Politburo at the top, became the basis of governmental rule in the new society.



↑ Source 11.25 'The Bolshevik and the Bourgeois. A Bolshevik is a person who does not want there to be any more burzhooi'. A child's drawing from 1918.



↑ Yakov Sverdlov.

**Secretariat** administrative wing of Bolshevik party and Soviet government

**Orgburo** organisational body of the Bolshevik Central Committee

### ACTIVITY

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 What positions did Sverdlov have in the Communist Party and the Soviet government?
- 2 After Sverdlov's death, what three organisational structures were introduced into the Communist Party apparatus?

## YAKOV SVERDLOV, 1885–1919

Yakov Sverdlov was a leading organiser of the Bolshevik Party, the Central Committee Secretary and Chairman of the All-Russian CEC of the Soviets. He was an active Marxist revolutionary from a young age, and in 1903 he sided with the Bolshevik faction of the SDs. He was arrested and exiled to Siberia on several occasions.

Sverdlov was not very tall, but had a sharp wit and a booming voice, and was considered one of the Bolsheviks' best speakers. He was said to have had a 'filing-cabinet sort of a mind'.<sup>57</sup> His memory for the names and talents of fellow Bolsheviks led Preobrazhensky to remark: 'He knew our party better than anyone else'.<sup>58</sup>

Sverdlov was the leading Bolshevik administrator, and worked closely with Lenin from April 1917 through to the October Revolution. He played an important part in keeping the Central Committee functional in the period of repression after the July Days.

Once the Communists were in power, Sverdlov's efficient administration made sure that the Soviet Congress passed resolutions with minimal fuss, and he was responsible for drafting the first Soviet constitution. Sverdlov was one of only two Bolsheviks—Dzerzhinsky was the other—who had instant access to Lenin. He controlled the day-to-day running of the party, and allowed Lenin and others to deal with the Civil War.

In August 1918, Fanya Kaplan attempted to assassinate Lenin. Until Lenin recovered, Sverdlov chaired Sovnarkom meetings and managed state affairs, and he was the person who ordered Kaplan's execution. He supported Kollontai's initiatives in women's rights, and often conveyed her proposals to the Central Committee.

Lenin once said that Sverdlov was irreplaceable. After Sverdlov's death in 1919 from Spanish flu, the party that had relied so heavily on his organisational skills was restructured into three parts: the Secretariat, Politburo and Orgburo. Lenin was desperate for capable administrators after Sverdlov's death, and turned to Stalin as his new chief of paperwork. If Sverdlov had not died before his time, he would most likely have been first in line for the role of General Secretary—which would have deprived Stalin of his ladder to power.



↑ Yakov Sverdlov.

### COMMUNIST PARTY

#### POLITBURO



- Highest decision-making body of the Communist Party: its inner cabinet.
- Had five to nine members chosen from the Central Committee.
- Discussed policy when there was no time for a meeting of the Central Committee.
- Met daily.

↑ elect

#### CENTRAL COMMITTEE



- Had thirty to forty members elected by the annual Party Congress.
- Voted on and discussed key policies.
- Its resolutions were handed to Sovnarkom to implement.

↑ elect

#### COMMUNIST PARTY CONGRESS



- Delegates were elected from regional party committees.
- Delegates elected the Central Committee.
- Debated important policies, and discussed the general direction of the party.

↑ elect

#### COMMITTEES



- Each region, city and their districts had its own Communist Party committees and organisations.
- Implemented party and government policies.
- Membership of party organisations brought privileges and respectability.

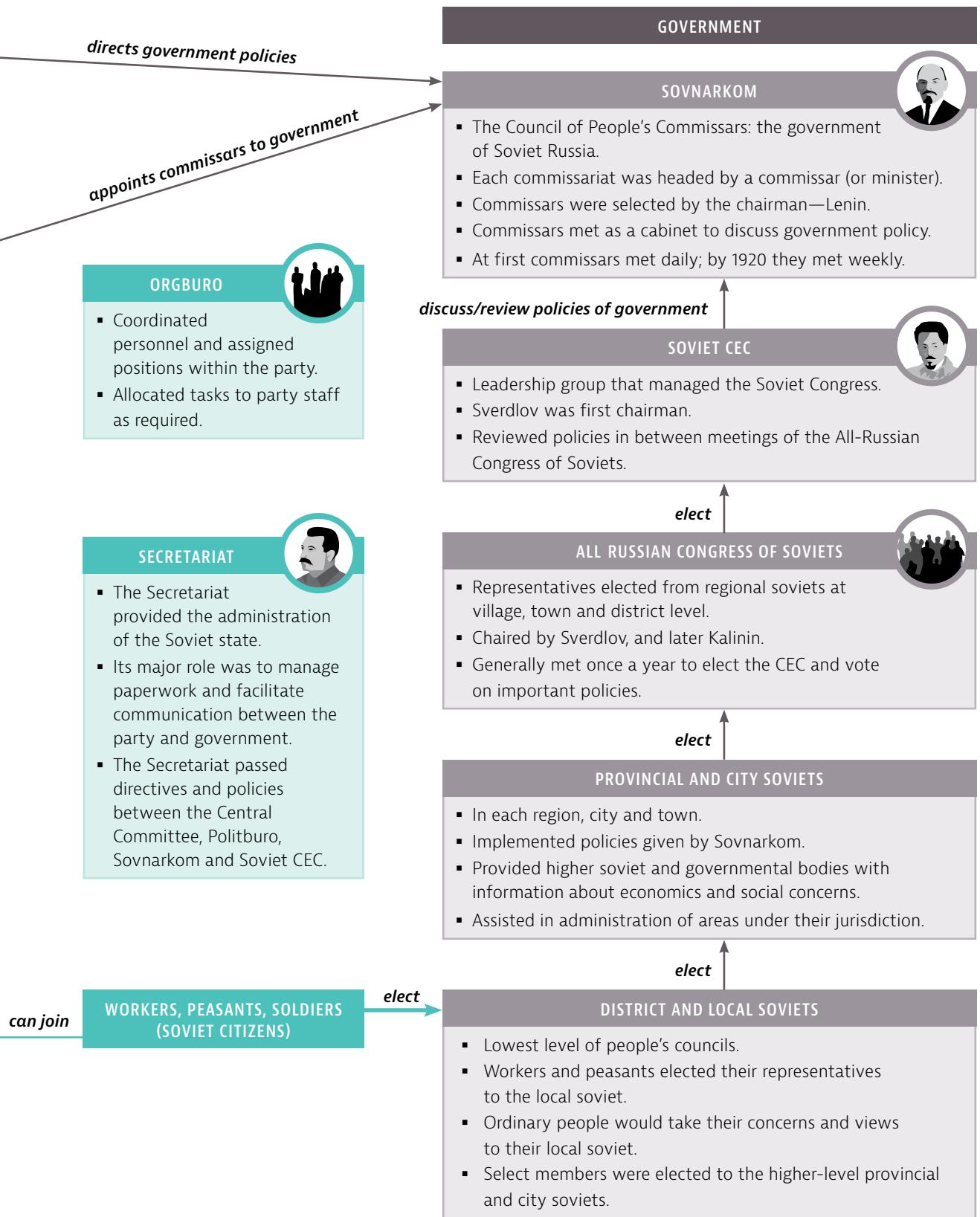
↑ elect and participate in

#### RANK AND FILE PARTY MEMBERS



- Membership open to the military and members of the working classes.
- Gave opportunities for social and career advancement.
- Membership showed commitment to the ideology of the new society.

## COMMUNIST PARTY AND THE GOVERNMENT



## ACTIVITY

### EXTENDED RESPONSES

Write an extended response on one or more of the topics below. Your response should have a clear topic sentence, use a range of points, be supported by evidence, and end with a brief summative sentence.

- Explain the importance of terror as a challenge to the new regime and a method for consolidating its power.
- What challenges for the Sovnarkom emerged as a consequence of War Communism?
- Explain the impact of the Civil War on the Russian Communist Party.
- Explain why the Great Famine unfolded in the years 1921–1922.
- Outline the impact of changing economic and social conditions for ordinary people during the Civil War.

### HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

#### Dmitri Volkogonov

It seems unlikely that the Bolsheviks gave any thought to the fact that giving promise while in opposition is a different thing from fulfilling it in government. On every point—peace, land, liberty, Constituent Assembly, freedom of the press and all the rest—their promises rapidly changed into coercion, limitation, alteration, a different ‘reading’ or an outright denial. Even the land, which they did give, they made undesirable by confiscating everything it produced.

◀ **Source 11.26** Dmitri Volkogonov, *Lenin: A New Biography* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 135.

#### Peter Kenez

The Bolsheviks attempted to carry out extremely ambitious plans, but they possessed very little power; the gap between intentions and reality was extraordinarily wide. In a peculiar way the very weakness of the Party at a time of anarchy encouraged utopian thinking. It made little sense to be ‘realistic’ when no realistic solutions seemed available. The period of the civil war was a utopian period, when the Bolsheviks attempted fanciful schemes, undertaken with high hopes, but usually with little result.

◀ **Source 11.27** Peter Kenez, *A History of the Soviet Union from the Beginning to the End* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 49.

Using Sources 11.26 and 11.27 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Compare how Volkogonov and Kenez explain the intentions of the new regime.
- 2 Evaluate the extent to which the Communist regime fulfilled or compromised its revolutionary ideals.



### DISCUSSION

Read about the Russian Civil War and discuss the following questions.

- What was the purpose of terror in the Russian Civil War? Was it a reaction to events occurring in Russia?
- What role did political ideology play in both the Red Terror and the White Terror?
- What were some of the interesting or disturbing moments in the Civil War?
- What would family life have been like during the Civil War?

# CHAPTER 11 REVIEW

## KEY SUMMARY POINTS

- From mid-1918, the Soviet regime began a campaign of Red Terror in response to the Civil War, threats by opposition parties and ideological beliefs.
- The Whites unleashed their own terror campaign against Bolsheviks, workers and Jews.
- Both Red Terror and White Terror resulted in acts of brutal violence and thousands of deaths. Tsar Nicholas and his family were among those killed.
- Dzerzhinsky, head of the Cheka, played a significant role in justifying and directing Red Terror.
- In mid-1918, War Communism was introduced. This was a range of authoritarian and centralised policies aimed at gearing the economy towards the war effort and bringing socialist principles into use.
- War Communism had dire consequences for most social groups: bourgeoisie were forced to do hard labour; workplaces of the proletariat were militarised; peasants had their grain seized by squads sent out to requisition food.
- Shortages of fuel and food, along with poor sanitary conditions, made life during the Civil War very hard for many people: disease was rampant, and there was a terrible famine in 1921.
- An authoritarian, one-party state emerged during the Civil War, and the culture of the Bolshevik Party became militarised.

## ACTIVITY

### ESSAY

Write a 600–800 word-essay on one of the following topics. Your essay should include an introduction, paragraphs supported by relevant evidence from primary sources and historical interpretations, and a conclusion.

- 'The desperate measures by the Communists were legitimate responses to crises.' To what extent do you agree?
- What changes did the Communists make to Russian society that compromised or achieved their revolutionary ideals?

- Chekist Martyn Latsis said: 'The Cheka is not an investigating commission, a court, or a tribunal ... It does not judge, it strikes.' What was the role of the Cheka in shaping the new society?
- Select two or more social groups impacted by the revolutionary regime: workers, peasants, nobles, bourgeoisie or members of the Communist Party. How did these people respond to the challenges and changes of everyday life in a revolutionary era?



# FROM CRISIS TO COMPROMISE: KRONSTADT AND THE NEP

(1921–1927)

*'Lenin said that "Communism is Soviet power and electrification." But the people are convinced that the Bolshevik form of communism is commissarocracy plus firing squads.'*

—Stepan Petrichenko

By 1921, Soviet Russia was in economic and social turmoil.

Although the majority of peasants and workers were still supportive of Soviet power, they were disillusioned with the revolutionary regime. Critical choices in policy had to be made. Lenin recognised how serious the crisis was, and set about reviving the economy—which was no easy feat.

Abandoning War Communism was seen by some Communists as a betrayal of revolutionary ideals. However, other Communists were concerned about how the party had become overly bureaucratic and dictatorial. These issues were debated at the Tenth Party Congress, against a backdrop of peasant uprisings and the Kronstadt revolt. Lenin's iron will triumphed at this critical point. Opposition groups within the party were banned, and the more moderate New Economic Policy (**NEP**) was introduced.

The NEP allowed for a degree of free trade, and the hated War Communism policies of workplace militarism and grain requisitioning were abandoned. Overall, the number of rebellions in the countryside fell and living standards generally rose. However, there were worries over inconsistent results in different parts of the economy. Agriculture improved, but heavy industry lagged behind.

Lenin's more militant comrades were uneasy that capitalism seemed to be returning to Soviet Russia. And while the NEP showed a willingness to make economic concessions, the Bolsheviks remained determined to hold power at all costs. The Kronstadt sailors were suppressed, in a brutal demonstration of the party's absolute right to rule, as were the remaining peasant rebellions.

There would be no compromise of Communist authority in the so-called 'dictatorship of the proletariat'.

## KEY QUESTIONS

- What caused the Kronstadt Revolt?
- How did the Kronstadt Revolt represent a challenge to the new regime?
- How did the Communists respond to the demands of the Kronstadt sailors?
- What influenced the introduction of the NEP?
- What were the main features of the NEP?
- What were the effects of the NEP? To what extent was it successful?
- To what extent were the Kronstadt Revolt and the NEP a compromise of revolutionary ideals?
- What was the significance of the Tenth Party Congress?

**NEP** New Economic Policy, introduced at the Tenth Party Congress in March 1921 to promote economic recovery after the Civil War

# CHAPTER 12



Source 12.01 *After the Battle* by Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, 1923.

# THE KRONSTADT REVOLT

KEY DEVELOPMENT

**Kronstadt sailors:** 'The autocracy has fallen. The Constituent Assembly has departed to the realm of the damned. The commissarocracy is collapsing. The moment has come for a true government of toilers, a government of soviets.'

## DID YOU KNOW?

A 1919 resolution passed by a meeting of factory workers called for the leather jackets of commissars to be made into shoes for workers.

## KEY EVENTS

### February 1921—

Mass strikes in Moscow and Petrograd

### 22 February 1921—

State Planning Committee (Gosplan) established

### 1 March 1921—

Kronstadt sailors call for new socialist government and 'Soviets without Communists'

### 7 March 1921—

Launch of Red Army assault on Kronstadt

### 8–16 March 1921—

Tenth Congress of Communist Party

NEP introduced

### 17 March 1921—

Red Army captures Kronstadt

### June–July 1921—

Disastrous harvest leads to severe famine

### 16 March 1922—

Trade agreement negotiated with Great Britain

### 17–25 April 1923—

Trotsky analyses the 'scissors crisis' phenomenon

By the end of 1920, it was clear that although the Civil War was won, the Communist regime was in dire trouble:

- the economy was in tatters
- the urban population was ravaged by cold, hunger and disease
- the peasants in many regions were in open revolt.

And although the peasant rebellions were a huge threat to the regime, it was the uprising by Kronstadt sailors that forced the Communist Party to rethink its policies. Lenin would later remark: 'This was the flash which lit up reality better than anything else'.<sup>1</sup>

After the Civil War, the party tried to deal with the problems of economic reconstruction by continuing the policies of War Communism:

- the requisitioning of grain was increased
- the military-style approach to workplaces was reinforced by soldiers organised into 'labour armies'.

However, this approach was an ill-conceived strategy. Strengthening War Communism only made people resent the government even more. The Russian people might rally around the Soviet banner when they were threatened by White armies or foreign invaders, but the methods of war were not appropriate during peacetime.

- The peasants had long resented prodravverstka, but hated it even more when they realised their grain was no longer feeding soldiers.
- The Ukraine and Tambov were already in open revolt. Guerrilla fighters—such as Makhno and Antonov—had raised feared peasant armies and driven Soviet authorities out of these regions.
- Soldiers drafted into labour armies wanted to go home.
- Workers wanted a return to economic and social stability, not more dictatorial controls.

Anger and disillusionment festered among the workers of Russia's major cities throughout the winter days of 1921. Shortages of coal and fuel led to the closure of many industries, including Petrograd's massive Putilov Steelworks. Workers were cold and hungry—and many were now unemployed.

Tensions flared in late February when thousands of workers in Moscow and Petrograd went on strike over:

- cutbacks to their bread rations
- military methods imposed on factories.

Martial law was declared. Detachments of trainee Red Army officers patrolled the streets and stood guard outside factories. When sailors from Kronstadt became aware of the plight of workers and peasants, the stand-off escalated into a massive threat to the Communist regime.

## THE REDDEST OF THE RED

The Kronstadt sailors were one of the Bolsheviks' most loyal fighting forces, and had been described by Trotsky as 'the pride and glory of the Revolution ... the reddest of the

red'. Sailors from Kronstadt had stormed the Winter Palace and served valiantly in the Civil War—they were committed revolutionaries.

The island of Kronstadt was the first area to be fully controlled by the soviets during the period of Dual Authority in 1917. However, although the sailors were militant supporters of the Bolsheviks, many of them were also sympathetic towards the Left SRs and anarchist groups. One reason they had supported the Bolsheviks in October 1917 and during the Civil War was because they accepted the superior organisation and determination of the party.

When the Kronstadt sailors heard about the crackdown on workers' protests in 1921, they sent a delegation to Petrograd to investigate. The delegation was dismayed at what it found. One sailor who saw armed guards outside factories wrote, 'One might have thought that these were not factories but the forced labour prisons of tsarist times'.<sup>2</sup> The sailors were also disturbed by (untrue) rumours that worker protests had been suppressed by Cheka firing squads.

The Kronstadt sailors were already unhappy—quite a few were young men from peasant backgrounds who had been recruited in the months just before the February strikes. They became enraged when they received letters from their families telling them about the increase in grain requisitioning.

## RALLY IN ANCHOR SQUARE

On 28 February 1921 the sailors of the battleships Petropavlosk and Sevastopol held an emergency meeting to discuss the current political situation. One of the sailors, Stepan Petrichenko, drafted a 15-point resolution that outlined their demands of the government.

On 1 March 1921, thousands of sailors rallied in Kronstadt's Anchor Square. The meeting was addressed by Soviet chairman Mikhail Kalinin—who had replaced Sverdlov—and Nikolai Kuzmin, the Commissar of the Baltic Fleet. Speaking on behalf of the government, Kalinin and Kuzmin warned the sailors against taking further action.

However, their speeches did little to calm the mood at Kronstadt, as the sailors heckled and shouted in anger. Instead, the rally endorsed Petrichenko's Petropavlosk Resolution, and called for significant changes to Soviet society.

The next day a Provisional Revolutionary Committee was formed, and Kronstadt was declared free of Sovnarkom rule.



### ACTIVITY

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 How did Trotsky describe the Kronstadt sailors in the years before their uprising?
- 2 What conditions in Petrograd and the countryside were the immediate cause of discontent among the sailors?
- 3 What broader problems or issues antagonised the sailors?
- 4 When did the sailors hold their rally in Kronstadt's Anchor Square?
- 5 Who drafted the Petropavlosk Resolution?

◀ **Source 12.02** (far left) Sailors aboard the *Petropavlosk* holding a political meeting.

◀ **Source 12.03** Kronstadt soldiers.

→ **Source 12.04** Cited in Robert Daniels, *A Documentary History of Communism and the World: From Revolution to Collapse* (New England: New England University Press, 1994), 137–138.

### From 'What We Are Fighting For', letter written by Kronstadt sailors, 1 March 1921

After ... the October Revolution, the working class had hoped to achieve its emancipation. The result has been to create an even greater enslavement of the individual man. The power of the police-gendarme monarchy has gone into the hands of the Communist-usurpers, who instead of freedom offer the toilers the constant fear of falling into the torture-chambers of the Cheka ... [T]he sickle and the hammer—have actually been replaced ... with the bayonet and the barred window, for the sake of preserving the calm, carefree life of the new bureaucracy of Communist commissars ... Here at Kronstadt the first stone of the third revolution has been laid ...

→ **Source 12.05** In 'Resolution of the General Meeting of the Crews of the Ships of the Line, Kronstadt', *Pravda o Kronshtadte* (Prague: Volia Rossii, 1921), 46–47.

### 'The Petropavlosk Resolution' (Demands of the Kronstadt insurgents), 28 February 1921

KEY SOURCE

Having heard the report of the representatives of the crews dispatched ... from the ships to Petrograd in order to learn the state of affairs in Petrograd, we decided:

1. In view of the fact that the present soviets do not represent the will of the workers and peasants, to re-elect the soviets immediately by secret voting, with free canvassing [campaigning] among all workers and peasants before the elections.
2. Freedom of speech and press for workers, peasants, Anarchists and Left Socialist Parties.
3. Freedom of meetings, trade unions and peasant associations.
4. To convene, not later than 1 March 1921, a non-party conference of workers, soldiers and sailors of Petrograd City, Kronstadt and Petrograd Province.
5. To liberate all political prisoners of Socialist Parties, and also all workers, peasants, soldiers and sailors who have been imprisoned in connection with working-class and peasant movements.
6. To elect a commission to review the cases of those who are imprisoned in jails and concentration camps.
7. To abolish all Political Departments, because no single party may enjoy privileges in the propagation [spread] of its ideas and receive funds from the state for this purpose ...
8. All 'cordon detachments' [military units used to stop private trading and carry out grain requisitioning] are to be abolished immediately.
9. To equalize rations for all workers, harmful sectors being excepted.
10. To abolish all Communist fighting detachments in all military units, and also the various Communist guards at factories ...
11. To grant the peasant full right to do what he sees fit with his land and also to possess cattle, which he must maintain and manage with his own strength, but without employing hired labor.
12. To ask all military units ... to associate themselves with our resolutions.
13. We demand that all resolutions be widely published in the press.
14. To appoint a traveling bureau for control.
15. To permit free artisan production with individual labor.

The resolutions were adopted by the meeting unanimously, with two abstentions.

President of the Meeting, PETRICHENKO.

Secretary, PEREPELKIN.

## ACTIVITY

### HISTORICAL SOURCES

Using Sources 12.04 and 12.05 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Identify the criticisms of the Communist regime made by the Kronstadt sailors, as outlined in the sources.
- 2 Explain the causes of the March 1921 Kronstadt Rebellion.
- 3 Evaluate the significance of the Kronstadt Rebellion as a challenge to the Communist regime. Use evidence to support your response.

**ACTIVITY****SUMMARY**

Create a summary of the causes and consequences of the Kronstadt Rebellion of 1921.

Include the following elements:

**Causes:**

- grain requisitioning
- labour armies
- food and fuel shortages
- Cheka repression
- Soviet government response to sailors' demands.

**Consequences:**

- military threat
- moral crisis for the party
- Links to peasant revolts and plots by SRs, Mensheviks and White Guards
- Red Army assault on Kronstadt
- perspectives on Kronstadt's significance.

## SOVIETS WITHOUT COMMUNISTS

The Kronstadt sailors condemned what they described as the replacement of the tsarist autocracy with a Communist 'commissarocracy'. They called for new soviet elections with the slogan: 'Soviets without Communists'. They demanded:

- greater freedom of speech and press
- the release of socialist political prisoners from Cheka jails
- an end to grain requisitioning
- the disbanding of labour armies
- an end to military-style working conditions.

Importantly, the Kronstadt sailors did not call for an end to the revolution. On the contrary, their demands were left-wing and revolutionary. They were not demanding greater freedom for all—only for workers, socialists and peasants. Nor had they called for a Constituent Assembly: the sailors wanted 'Soviet power'.

However, the sailors did insist on a return to the revolutionary values of October 1917, and accused the Communists of betraying the original ideals of the Revolution. An article in a Kronstadt newspaper declared: 'All of Soviet Russia has been turned into an all-Russian penal colony'.<sup>3</sup> Another newspaper claimed that the Bolsheviks were 'worse than Nicholas'.<sup>4</sup>

The Kronstadt Rebellion was a moral and military crisis for the Communist regime. A revolt by well-armed sailors based on an island just 25 km off the coast of Petrograd posed a serious military threat to the second-most important city in Soviet Russia. If the rebellion was not settled before the ice of the Gulf of Finland thawed, Kronstadt would be almost impossible to re-take, and its ships could menace the city.

However, the moral dilemma the rebellion posed was of even greater importance. The 'reddest of the red' had effectively turned on the party.

The Communists refused to negotiate with the sailors. Trotsky warned: 'Only those who surrender unconditionally may count on the mercy of the Soviet Republic'.<sup>5</sup> Sailors who chose to ignore Trotsky's advice were faced with a bleak threat: 'You will be shot like partridges'. Lenin believed that a hard-line response was required to what he considered was an act of counter-revolution. He argued that the 1917 revolutionaries on Kronstadt island had been replaced by sailors sympathetic to SRs, Mensheviks and 'White Guardists'.

The Communist regime also feared that Kronstadt would join or inspire further Green rebellions.

**ACTIVITY****CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING**

- 1 Note three or more specific criticisms the Kronstadt sailors made of the Communist regime.
- 2 Note three or more specific demands made by the Kronstadt sailors in March 1921.
- 3 Identify two or more reasons the Kronstadt Rebellion was a significant crisis for the Communists.

## THE RED ARMY SUPPRESSES KRONSTADT

TURNING POINT

### DID YOU KNOW?

Many Red Army officers had served in the imperial armed forces and had assisted the tsar in quelling rebellions. The Cheka also used tsarist torture manuals to extract confessions.

The Kronstadt sailors were a mix of radicals—Bolsheviks, SRs and anarchists—who were fluid in their political allegiances, just as they had been in 1917. As historian Israel Getzler has convincingly shown, the sailors had remained a more or less united group since the October Days.<sup>6</sup>

It is debatable whether or not the Communists knew that the sailors were consistent in their revolutionary commitment or chose to ignore it. What is certain is that Lenin and his comrades were not willing to accept any opposition to their regime, or to show any signs of weakness because:

- further uprisings might occur if they gave in to the rebels' demands
- the countryside was already seething with discontent
- they needed to project an image of strength and intolerance towards critics of the Soviet government.

On 7 March, Trotsky ordered 50,000 Red Army soldiers under General Tukhachevsky to launch an offensive. Stepan Petrichenko, who was one of the leaders of the rebellion, later wrote: 'Standing waist deep in the blood of toilers, the bloody Field-Marshal Trotsky opened fire on revolutionary Kronstadt'.<sup>7</sup>

The 16,000 Kronstadt sailors waged a fierce and heroic battle against Soviet troops. The first assault was repulsed, leaving 700 Soviet soldiers killed and 2500 wounded. Further assaults were led by committed Red Army officers, backed up by Cheka machine gunners. Chekists were told to shoot any Communist soldiers who retreated without orders.

The Soviets brought in heavy artillery. Three hundred delegates from the Tenth Communist Party Congress joined the offensive to boost the morale of rank-and-file soldiers.

The Kronstadt sailors struggled to use their artillery effectively. Although they held off Soviet forces for more than a week, the Kronstadt sailors were eventually overwhelmed. On the night of 16 March the final assault came from three directions. Having breached the fortress city, the Red Army had to fight the sailors street by street, and house by house. At least 10,000 Red Army soldiers were killed during the siege, while the Kronstadt sailors lost 5000 men.

Victor Serge described the events as 'the beginning of a ghastly **fratricide** ... a senseless and criminal agony'.<sup>8</sup> Having captured the naval base on 17 March, Communist authorities sent in more Chekists, who executed about 2300 sailors and sent 6459 to prison or labour camps.<sup>9</sup> Thousands of sailors evaded capture by fleeing across the ice to Finland. Stepan Petrichenko was among those who escaped.

**fratricide** the killing of brothers

Source 12.06 Assault on Kronstadt by Red Army soldiers.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE KRONSTADT REBELLION

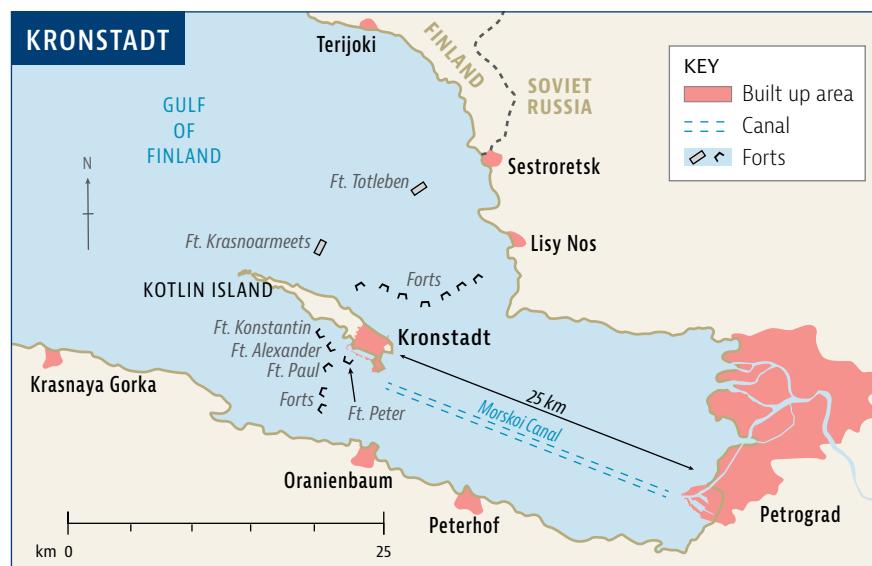
Many contemporary observers—including previous supporters of the party—viewed the suppression of Kronstadt as the point when the Bolsheviks broke with the ideals of October. Anarchist Emma Goldman wrote of her reaction after the Kronstadt Rebellion when she heard the Communist anthem 'The Internationale': 'Its strains once jubilant to my ears now sounded like a funeral dirge for humanity's hope.'<sup>10</sup> Fellow anarchist Alexander Berkman recorded in his diary: 'Kronstadt has been attacked! My heart is numb with despair; something has died within me ... Terror and despotism have crushed the life born in October. Dictatorship is trampling the masses under the foot. The revolution is dead.'<sup>11</sup>



Historians also see Kronstadt as a turning point in the Communist revolution. Sheila Fitzpatrick argues that it was 'a symbolic parting of the ways between the working class and the Bolshevik Party'.<sup>12</sup> The revolutionaries had turned on their own. Peter Kenez argues that by defeating the Kronstadt sailors, the party had 'in effect repudiated some of the utopian, but nonetheless emotionally powerful, goals of the revolution'.<sup>13</sup>

However, the party could hardly ignore an armed revolt in the middle of a supposed Communist stronghold. Kronstadt was both a lesson learned by the regime and a lesson taught. The Communists made it clear that they would respond to any challenge to their authority with brutal oppression—even if the critics were former supporters. Lenin admitted as much: 'Now is precisely the moment for us to teach this public a lesson, so that for decades to come they will not dare to even contemplate resistance'.<sup>14</sup>

Lenin was also keen to address the causes of the rebellion—particularly workers' strikes and peasant discontent with grain requisitioning. He now accepted that the current economic system was no longer feasible, and that a fundamental change in policy was needed. Leading members of the party had already been discussing alternative economic models. The Kronstadt Rebellion made change even more urgent.



Source 12.07

### ACTIVITY

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- When did the assault on Kronstadt occur?
- How many Red Army soldiers were involved in the assault?
- How many sailors were defending Kronstadt?
- How many soldiers and sailors were killed in the battle for Kronstadt?
- Paraphrase three interpretations or perspectives that highlight the significance of the Kronstadt Rebellion.

## THE NEW ECONOMIC POLICY

**Vladimir Lenin:** 'Let us retreat and construct everything in a new and solid manner; otherwise we shall be beaten.'

### LENIN PRESENTS THE NEP TO THE PARTY

On 8 March 1921, Lenin reversed the policies of War Communism. The setting was the Tenth Party Congress, which opened the day after the first offensive on Kronstadt. Lenin told the Congress, 'What is needed now is an economic breathing spell'. He introduced the replacement for War Communism: the New Economic Policy (NEP). The peasant rebellions and the Kronstadt revolt had made it clear that the authoritarian economic policies of the Civil War were creating more problems than they were solving. Although productivity needed to be restored across all enterprises, the most pressing concerns were pacifying workers' grievances and finding an incentive for the peasantry to produce more grain.

According to Lenin: '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'.<sup>15</sup>

The essence of the NEP was:

- restarting private trade
- relaxing centralised state control over the economy.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Harry Young, a British Communist who attended the Tenth Party Congress as a guest, recalled Lenin's handling of debate over the NEP: 'Lenin spoke to the Congress like a ... grandad speaking to wayward children ... he was administering a bitter pill. And they had to take it. And he just very quietly said, "We can't go on like this any longer, comrades"...and there was a sort of a subdued hush'.

# A RETURN TO STATE CAPITALISM

The NEP targeted working conditions and food production, where the aim was to give peasants an incentive to grow more food crops.

## FARMING

- Grain requisitioning was replaced by a tax based on a set percentage of a farmer's harvest. (This tax was 'in kind'—meaning it was in crops or goods rather than money.)
- Peasants were allowed to keep their surplus and sell it after they had paid their tax.
- There was no tax for the first year for areas in famine.
- The 'in kind' tax was replaced in 1924 by a tax in money, once the Russian currency had stabilised.

## CASH

- Government rationing and distribution of food was phased out.
- State-supplied services such as free public transport were phased out.
- Cash wages were reintroduced.
- A new currency backed by a gold standard was launched.
- Inflation was brought under control.

## NEP

## TRADING

- Markets and private trading were legalised.
- Small businesses could reopen shops and workshops.
- Some smaller factories were leased or sold by the government to private owners.
- Economic ties with foreign nations slowly resumed.
- A trade agreement with Britain was signed in 1922.

## WORKING CONDITIONS

- Militarised aspects of workplace conditions, such as labour armies, were abandoned.
- The economy was still subject to government control.
- Significant sectors of the economy, such as heavy industry, remained under state ownership.

**metallurgy** metal work and processing

Historian Martin McCauley argues that: 'If War Communism was a leap into socialism then the NEP was a leap out of socialism'.<sup>16</sup> However, the NEP was not a wholesale return to capitalism and private ownership of industry. Lenin reassured the party that the Soviet state was to retain the 'commanding heights of the economy':<sup>17</sup> banking, the transport sector, foreign trade and heavy industries such as mining and **metallurgy** were still government enterprises.

Despite this, the NEP was a noticeable step back from the principle of centralised control over trade, and a move towards a mixed economy where capitalism existed alongside socialism—the kind of economy that had existed in 1918 under State Capitalism. Historian Christopher Hill provides a good summary of how Lenin initially understood the development: '[he] 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'.<sup>18</sup>

## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 What significant development was underway as the Tenth Party Congress convened?
- 2 How did Lenin justify the introduction of the NEP?
- 3 Summarise the main features of the NEP.

## A CRISIS OF IDEOLOGY

Obtaining surplus grain by force under War Communism had been a complete disaster—so now the Communists tried persuasion. However, Lenin had a difficult time convincing his comrades to allow peasants to market their own grain. Just like the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the NEP brought on a crisis of ideology for some party members, and led to much friction. Some party members saw the NEP as:

- a break with true revolutionary strategy
- a betrayal of the proletariat.

Many Communists had seen the Civil War years as a period of heroic struggle and believed that centralised control of industry had been a great achievement. Now they wondered if all the sacrifices been in vain.

Lenin weathered the disapproval, and scolded those who longed for a continuation of more militant practices. He insisted the NEP was nothing more than a disciplined retreat following the unsuccessful phase of War Communism. Lenin ‘sold’ the NEP to his comrades as a tactical withdrawal—an opportunity for the Communists to regroup, and a ‘transitional’ phase from capitalism to socialism.

## COMMUNIST PARTY DEBATES

Evaluating Lenin’s real opinion on the NEP is problematic, as his views on the policy changed over time and were sometimes unclear. At first, the NEP was seen as a retreat, a breathing space before the next onslaught of militant communism. Grigory Zinoviev was blunt to the party rank and file when he was campaigning on Lenin’s behalf, when he said, ‘be clear that the New Economic Policy is only a temporary deviation, a tactical retreat, a clearing of the land for a new and decisive attack of labour against the front of international capitalism’.<sup>19</sup>

However, elsewhere Lenin admitted that War Communism was a mistake: ‘It was not, nor could it be a policy that corresponded to the economic tasks of the proletariat. It was a temporary measure’. So if the NEP was a return to the appropriate path of socialist development, was it really a retreat at all?



### DID YOU KNOW?

When challenged by party colleagues, Lenin reportedly shouted, ‘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!’

 **Source 12.08** A typical food market during the NEP period.

Politburo member Bukharin did not think the NEP was a retreat. He argued that it was a stepping stone towards socialism. In 1925, Bukharin created a stir when he instructed peasants to 'enrich' themselves under the NEP. This was not a popular slogan among Communist leaders, as Stalin made quite clear: 'The slogan "get rich" is not our slogan'.<sup>20</sup>

Bukharin withdrew the comment, although he remained a firm advocate of the NEP and its non-confrontational approach to the peasantry. Bukharin believed that Russia was 'riding into socialism on a peasant nag'.<sup>21</sup>

However, others disagreed with the NEP. Critics saw concessions to the peasantry and the loss of free services for the urban working class as the 'New Exploitation of the Proletariat'.<sup>22</sup>

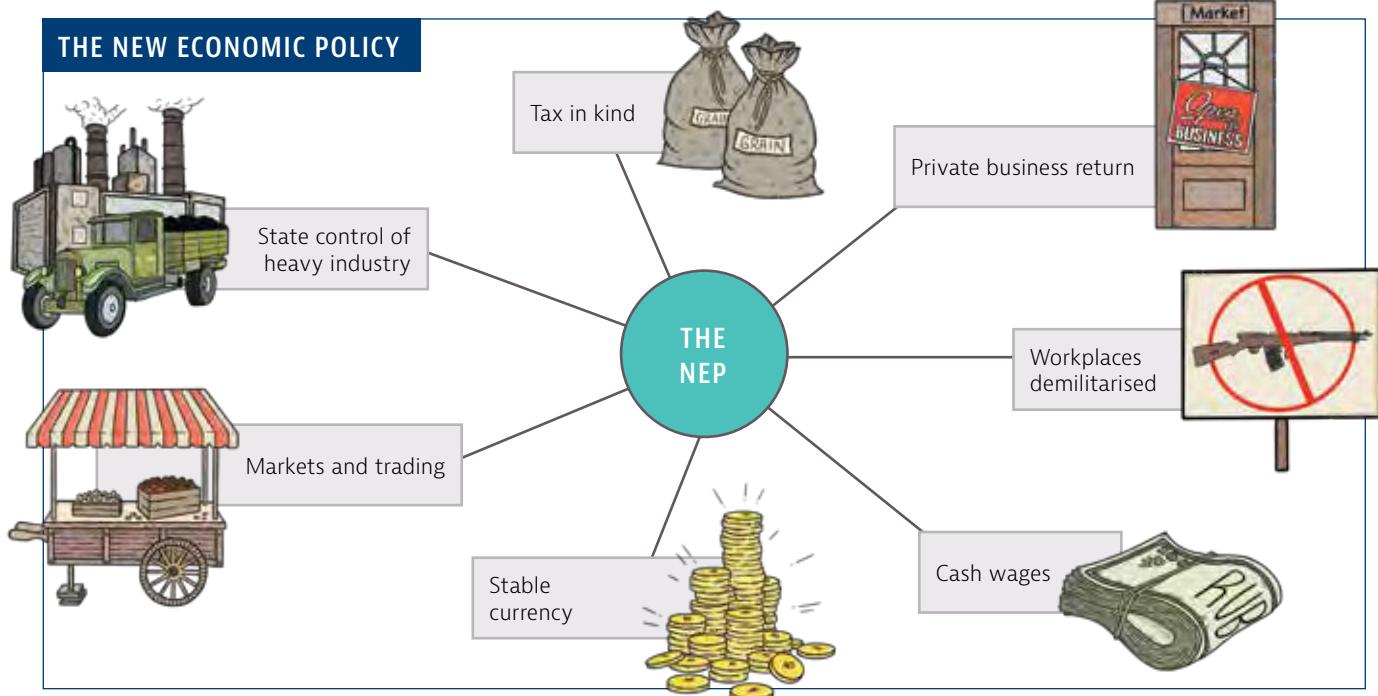
Discontent continued to simmer with the emergence of entrepreneurs colloquially known as 'NEP men'. NEP men flourished under the new system, and made considerable profits through **speculation**. They were an unwelcome capitalist blemish on what was supposed to be an emerging socialist economy.

There was a sense of restlessness among many Communists—especially veterans of the Civil War, who had a hard time accepting that the path to socialism might require slow and steady progress.

## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 In Lenin's reassurances to the party, what were the 'commanding heights' of the economy that remained under state ownership?
- 2 Why was the NEP a crisis of ideology for some Communists?
- 3 What was Bukharin's perspective of the NEP?
- 4 What were NEP men?



# RESULTS OF THE NEP

KEY DEVELOPMENT

**Nikolai Bukharin:** 'We must say to the whole peasantry, to all its strata: enrich yourselves, accumulate, develop your economy.'

The NEP was eventually successful in turning the economy around. By 1926–1927, production output in most industries had steadily increased—although only to pre-war tsarist levels. However, production levels were uneven between different industries.

- Manufacturing and light industry experienced considerable success.
- Exports of oil greatly exceeded those of tsarist times.
- Electricity made considerable gains.
- Heavy industry stagnated and lagged behind the output achieved in 1913.<sup>23</sup>
- The iron-ore industry brought in only half of what it mined before World War I.

At the same time, unemployment among workers involved in heavy industry had risen to half a million by the end of 1922. Party leaders knew that heavy industry was vital for supporting the armed forces, and fretted over how to modernise the industrial sector. It was not clear whether the NEP could produce sufficient capital for the construction of new metallurgy plants, mines and oil refineries.

There was also a shortage of foreign capital to boost industrial production, as foreign governments were unwilling to risk investment in Russia after the widespread nationalisation of foreign businesses after the Revolution. This shortage of finance added to the woes of heavy industry in the 1920s.

Despite this, the NEP reduced the discontent of workers and peasants, with strikes steadily decreasing from 1922 onwards. When they recovered from the famine, the peasantry made considerable advances.

- Grain production rose to levels similar to the harvests of 1909–1913.
- Livestock numbers were higher than pre-war levels.
- A greater range of crops was grown.
- Production of potatoes, cotton and sugar beets increased.
- Peasants were encouraged to consolidate strips of land into larger fields.
- Peasants used a farming method called crop rotation to improve soil quality.

The rural sector even began to produce more than the manufacturing sector—and by 1927, the area of cultivated land in Russia matched pre-war levels. By the mid-1920s most peasants were better off than they were before World War I. There were improvements in farming, and taxes were lower than they had been under the tsars. However, peasants still chose to eat more of their produce rather than sell it, which led to lower quantities of grain entering the market.<sup>24</sup>

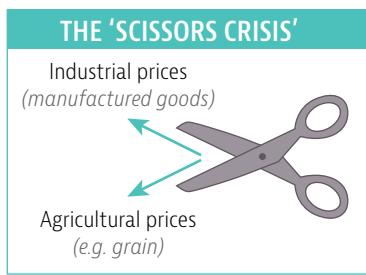
## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>1 Which areas of the economy improved under the NEP?</p> <p>2 How did heavy industry perform under the NEP?</p> <p>3 What impact did the NEP have on agriculture?</p> | <p>4 What happened to social discontent under the NEP?</p> <p>5 Outline how Trotsky used the example of scissors to describe a 1923 NEP problem.</p> |
|--|--|



## THE 'SCISSORS CRISIS'



In 1923, there was a growing gap between industrial and agricultural prices. Many factories were still struggling to produce enough goods to sell to the peasantry, while the countryside had recovered and was steadily increasing its output. Prices remained high for manufactured goods, while the price of grain was becoming cheaper.

The regime was afraid that the higher price and scarcity of goods, when combined with a lower grain price, would lead the peasantry to start hoarding their produce in a bid to drive prices up. The regime definitely did not want another shortage of grain!

In a figurative way, Trotsky likened the widening gap between industrial and agricultural prices to an open pair of scissors, which needed to be 'squeezed' and brought closer together. The squeeze to 'close the blades' was quickly implemented through the introduction of price controls in the industrial and manufacturing sectors.

ECONOMIC PRODUCTION 1913–1926

YEAR:	1913	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926
Coal (million tons)	29	8.7	8.9	9.5	13.7	16.1	18.1	27.6
Steel (thousand tons)	4231	–	183	392	709	1140	2135	3141
Electricity (million kWh)	1945	–	520	775	1146	1562	2925	3508
Cotton fabrics (million metres)	2582	–	105	349	691	963	1688	2286
Sown land (million hectares)	105	–	90.3	77.7	91.7	98.1	104.3	110.3
Grain harvest (million tons)	80.1 <i>(Excellent weather)</i>	46.1	37.6	50.3	56.6	51.4	72.5	76.8

↑ Source 12.09 Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR 1917–1991* (London: Penguin, 1992), 89.

### ACTIVITY

#### DATA ANALYSIS

Examine Source 12.09 and respond to the following:

- 1 Which industries in Russia suffered most during the Revolution?
- 2 Which industries were at or below pre-World War I levels by 1926?
- 3 Which areas of the economy had improved beyond pre-war levels by 1926?
- 4 Based on this economic data and further evidence, evaluate the effectiveness of the NEP by 1926.

#### DISCUSSION

In a small group, discuss the questions below, then complete your own response as a summary of the NEP.

- 1 Why was the NEP introduced?
- 2 What were the key features of the NEP?
- 3 How was the policy justified by Lenin and Bukharin?
- 4 Why was the NEP criticised at the time?
- 5 What were the effects of the NEP by 1927?

# THE TENTH PARTY CONGRESS

KEY DEVELOPMENT

**Vladimir Lenin:** 'Comrades, this is no time to have an opposition. Either you're on this side, or on the other, but then your weapon must be a gun, and not an opposition.'

## OPPOSITION PLATFORMS

As the Communist regime loosened control over trade and small industries with the NEP, Lenin argued that the strictest discipline needed to be maintained within the party. His concerns arose on 8–16 March 1921 with the emergence of *opposition platforms* at the Tenth Party Congress. The NEP was not the only controversial issue facing the party. There was also discontent over:

- increasing *bureaucratisation*
- the role of workers' unions
- the Politburo's dominance over lower levels of the party.

The atmosphere at the Congress was tense, as two main opposition platforms expressed their concerns to their comrades. The opposition platforms were:

- Workers' Opposition
- Democratic Centralists.

### WORKERS' OPPOSITION

The Workers' Opposition campaigned for the economy to be managed by authorities elected and directed by trade unions. The Workers' Opposition was headed by Alexandra Kollontai and Aleksandr Shlyapnikov, and they essentially wanted greater proletariat involvement in the day-to-day running of industry. They also criticised:

- Trotsky's efforts at further militarising the workplace
- Trotsky's proposal to put unions under central government control
- the continued influence of non-Communist experts (*spetsy*) in charge of factories.

The Worker's Opposition was concerned that the party was becoming dominated by self-serving officials and too bureaucratic: their view was that the Bolsheviks were losing touch with their rank-and-file supporters—the workers.

According to Kollontai, 'the Workers' Opposition considers that bureaucracy is our enemy, our scourge, and the greatest danger to the future existence of the Communist Party itself ... the building of Communism can and must be the work of the toiling masses themselves. The building of Communism belongs to the workers.'<sup>25</sup>

### DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISTS

The Democratic Centralists were the other opposition platform at the Tenth Party Congress, and they shared Kollontai and Shlyapnikov's concerns about the rise of bureaucratism in the new society. They also argued that the party leadership was stifling inter-party debate, and that the democratic element of democratic centralism had been lost.

More broadly, there was discontent about the NEP at the congress—especially among Civil War veterans. The NEP was seen by some as a surrender to the peasantry at the expense of the workers.



**Source 12.10** Lenin and Trotsky with delegates of the Tenth Party Congress of the Russian Communist Party.

**opposition platforms** groups within the Communist party that voiced concerns and criticism

**bureaucratisation** excessive growth and reliance on government administration agencies

**spetsy** Russian for 'specialist'. This could include former tsarist officers who served in the Red Army or members of the middle or upper classes who were employed by the Bolshevik regime for their technical knowledge as engineers, managers, etc.

# BAN ON FACTIONS

**anarcho-syndicalism** a combination of distrust of the state and trade unionism; proponents argued that workers should manage their own industries and share profits among themselves

The Worker's Opposition and the Democratic Centralists struggled to gather support—and were bitterly denounced by Lenin. Those who called for the unions to direct the economy were called **anarcho-syndicalists**, whose proposals conflicted with the basic ideals of the party.

According to Lenin, the demands of the rebel factions were too idealistic to be taken seriously, and merely provided ammunition for critics of the government. He called on the party to close ranks, and for his comrades to put a lid on internal disagreements.

The long-term survival of the regime depended on the party presenting a united front, and Lenin needed the swift approval of the NEP to appease the rebellious peasantry.

Taking firm steps to prevent further splits, Lenin introduced two decrees:

- 'On the Anarcho-Syndicalist Deviation'
- 'On Party Unity'.

## 'ON PARTY UNITY'

'On Party Unity' declared that the demands of opposition factions were 'inconsistent with membership' of the Communist Party. Continued promotion of these ideals would be illegal. Lenin introduced the decree with almost an air of nonchalance: 'I do not think it will be necessary for me to say much on this subject'.<sup>26</sup>

The decree banned factions within the party. Individual Communists were still allowed to voice their ideas on the direction of the party and government—however, all opposition platforms were to be immediately disbanded. Those who refused to disband or formed factions in the future would be threatened with expulsion. Despite threats from Kronstadt sailors and peasant insurgents, the Congress passed both decrees decisively. Members of the Workers' Opposition were among the delegates who had joined the assault on Kronstadt.

Although the decree stamped out the threat of internal division, it would later prove to have great significance. Karl Radek offered a forewarning in his thoughts on the decree.

**purge** to remove or cleanse impure elements. In a political context, it means finding and neutralising rivals or opponents, usually within your party

## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 When did the Tenth Party Congress convene?
- 2 Who headed the Workers' Opposition?
- 3 List two or more criticisms raised by the Workers' Opposition.
- 4 What changes did the 'On Party Unity' decree impose on members of the Communist Party?



### Karl Radek

In voting for this resolution I feel that it can be turned against us, and nevertheless I support it ... Let the Central Committee in a moment of danger take the severest measures against the best party comrades, if it finds this necessary ... Let the Central Committee be mistaken! This is less dangerous than the wavering which is now observable.

↑ **Source 12.11** Cited in Leonard Schapiro, *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (New York: Random House, 1970), 215–216.

Later, the ban on factions would allow Stalin to silence and remove his political opponents. In the end, Radek turned out to be one of the many 'best party comrades' **purged** from his position and executed by Stalin. In the meantime, Lenin's decree preserved party 'unity'.

## GREEN ARMIES

**General Mikhail Tukhachevsky:** 'Skilful methods must be applied to cure the local population of the epidemic of banditism.'

Following the Kronstadt Rebellion, harsh measures were taken to strengthen the regime's control of the countryside. The end of grain requisitioning had reduced the number of peasant uprisings, but there were still bands of Green army guerrillas.

The end of the Civil War meant that military forces that had been occupied elsewhere in Russia could now be applied against the Greens. As a result, rebel provinces were flooded with Red Army troops and Cheka commissars.

By late 1920, Nestor Makhno's Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine had been suppressed. He and a small number of his surviving followers escaped to Romania.

About 50,000 Red soldiers poured into the Tambov region to crush Aleksandr Antonov's rebellion. The forces were headed by General Tukhachevsky, who had suppressed the Kronstadt Rebellion. Commissar Antonov-Ovseenko took charge of subduing the civilian population, which involved:

- using poison gas to flush out partisans from the forests
- using aeroplanes to keep track of roving horsemen
- killing peasants on the spot if they refused to give their name
- killing peasants on the spot if they were suspected of hiding weapons.

Any village suspected of supporting the Greens would be given thirty minutes to reveal the whereabouts of rebels, and to identify those who helped them. If no information was forthcoming, hostages—including women—would be shot in front of the others. A Red Army commander reported: 'This method produced results'.<sup>27</sup> The whole village was threatened with execution if local rebels did not give themselves up.

By August 1921 the last of the Green movements had been stamped out. Antonov remained on the run until June 1922. He and his brother were killed in a shoot-out with Chekists who had found and surrounded their hiding place.



### DID YOU KNOW?

Makhno's Green forces fought under the black flag of anarchism and were fond of the slogan: 'Beat the Whites until they are Red! Beat the Reds until they are Black!'

#### ACTIVITY

##### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Who led the Tambov uprising?
- 2 What political ideology did Makhno follow?
- 3 Explain two or more methods used by Communists to suppress the Green rebellions.

◀ **Source 12.12** Tambov uprising.

▼ **Source 12.13** Antonov (centre) at the headquarters of the Partisan Army of the Tambov Territory.



## ACTIVITY



### CREATIVE RESPONSE

Consider the perspectives of different groups towards the events of 1921:

- Kronstadt sailors
- Red Army soldiers
- peasants
- industrial workers in Petrograd
- rank-and-file Communists (especially delegates to the Tenth Party Congress)
- Sovnarkom leaders.

Taking one of these perspectives, write a letter to *Pravda* or a private diary entry on your thoughts about the events leading to the introduction of the NEP.

### HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

#### Christopher Hill

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. The Russian working class was depleted and exhausted. It was the largely peasant armies that had saved the Soviet republic. Industry could be restarted only if food was made available for the towns. And that meant establishing satisfactory economic and political relations with the majority of the peasantry. The key figure in the New Economic Policy was the peasant ... a mutiny among the garrison troops in the old Bolshevik stronghold of Kronstadt ... was all the more significant for that ... it led Lenin at once to advocate a drastic revision of policy.

◀ **Source 12.14** Christopher Hill, *Lenin and the Russian Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1947), 140.

#### Orlando Figes

... doubts were strengthened by the sudden rise in unemployment in the first two years of the NEP. While these unemployed were living on the bread line the peasants were growing fat and rich. "Is this what we made the revolution for?" one Bolshevik asked Emma Goldman. There was a widespread feeling among the workers, voiced most clearly by the Workers' Opposition, that the NEP was sacrificing their class interests to the peasantry, that the 'kulak' was being rehabilitated and allowed to grow rich at the workers' expense. In 1921–22 literally tens of thousands of Bolshevik workers tore up their party cards in disgust with the NEP: they dubbed it the New Exploitation of the Proletariat.

◀ **Source 12.15** Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891–1924* (Sydney: Pimlico, 1996), 771.

Using Sources 12.14 and 12.15 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Explain why Lenin felt it was necessary to introduce the NEP, according to Hill.
- 2 Explain why some Bolsheviks saw the NEP as a compromise of revolutionary ideals.
- 3 Evaluate the effects of the NEP on Soviet society. Use evidence to support your response.

# CHAPTER 12 REVIEW

## KEY SUMMARY POINTS

- By late 1920, there was widespread discontent with the Soviet regime among peasants and workers.
- In March 1921, the Kronstadt sailors rose up in rebellion against the Sovnarkom. They voiced serious criticisms of the Communists.
- The government refused to compromise and responded with force; a series of bloody offensives by the Red Army overwhelmed and captured Kronstadt.
- The Communist leadership claimed the assault on Kronstadt was justified. The sailors were no longer 'the reddest of the red'.
- A number of contemporary observers and later historians see Kronstadt as the point where the party broke its last ties to its ideals of 1917.
- In response to peasant unrest, the Kronstadt Rebellion and the dire economic situation, Lenin introduced the New Economic Policy (NEP) at the Tenth Party Congress.
- The NEP was a mixture of state-directed policies and free-market policies; it led to an economic recovery and eased popular discontent.
- There was uneven development under the NEP; agriculture grew beyond pre-World War I output, but heavy industry lagged.
- The Tenth Party Congress was the setting for significant party debate. After much consternation, the NEP was introduced and opposition factions within the party were banned.
- As with Kronstadt, the Green rebellions were brutally suppressed.

## ACTIVITY

### EXTENDED RESPONSES

Write an extended response on one or more of the following topics. Use evidence to support your response.

- Explain what led the Kronstadt sailors to rebel against the Soviet government.
- Explain how the Kronstadt Rebellion challenged the Communist regime to consolidate its power.
- Outline the continuities and changes that resulted from the NEP.
- Discuss the significance of the Tenth Party Congress and how it was a turning point for the Soviet regime.

- Explain how the Soviet government responded to challenges to its authority in the early 1920s.
- Explain the significance of Lenin's leadership in changing the direction of Sovnarkom policy at critical times.
- Outline the changes to everyday life that peasants experienced under War Communism and the NEP.
- Discuss the challenges and changes in everyday life that workers experienced under different economic policies of the Soviet government.



# A NEW SOCIETY?

(1921–1927)



Source 13.01 *New Planet* by Konstantin Yuon, 1921.

# CHAPTER 13



***'We can construct a railway across the Sahara, we can build the Eiffel Tower and talk directly with New York. But surely we cannot improve man. No, we can! To produce a new, "improved version" of man—that is the future task of Communism.'***

—Leon Trotsky

Soviet Russia under the NEP was a time of contradictions.

- Centralised control over the economy was relaxed, but civil liberties were still limited.
- Dzerzhinsky continued to imprison opponents of the regime, and reliance on political police was made permanent as the Cheka became the OGPU.
- The Mensheviks and SRs were now repressed and criticism of the regime was not tolerated.

Yet for all its violence and hardship, the Russian Revolution also created opportunities for people to create exciting, vibrant expressions of a socialist world.

The 1920s in Russia was a period of 'cultural revolution'. Intellectual debate was diverse and original—provided it was within the limits accepted by the Soviet regime. The allure of the utopian and progressive elements of the new society captured the hearts and minds of many revolutionaries. A brutal dictatorship was not the entire revolutionary experience. New social values emerged, literacy levels improved, and significant advances were made in women's rights. The exhilaration of revolution was expressed through artistic experimentation and a passion for modernity.

Life for ordinary Russians in the 1920s was better than during the Civil War, but not much of an improvement on life under the tsars. A vast governmental bureaucracy continued to hinder relations between the people and their rulers.

On coming to power, Lenin had ruled more by his charisma than by the authority of his formal positions. When he died in 1924, Lenin left the Soviet state and its leaders unsure of the future.

## KEY QUESTIONS

- In what ways did political repression continue in the NEP era?
- What artistic trends and innovations emerged in response to the revolution?
- How did daily life reflect the values of the revolution?
- What initiatives in literacy and education featured in the new society?
- How did the Soviet regime respond to women's rights?
- What were the significant contributions of Alexandra Kollontai?
- How did 'productivist' ideals influence the electrification program under the NEP?
- To what extent had the Communist regime compromised or fulfilled its ideals by the end of the NEP?

# EVOLUTION OF THE CHEKA

Martyn Latsis: 'There is no sphere of life exempt from Cheka coverage.'

In February 1922, the Cheka was replaced by the State Political Administration (GPU)—a new branch of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD). The change reflected a transition from violence and 'revolutionary expediency' towards what Lenin called 'revolutionary legality'.

Ordinary crimes were now dealt with by the Commissariat of Justice, while espionage, crimes against the state and counter-revolution were dealt with by the political police in the GPU. The name *Cheka* had become linked with terror, so a change of name was needed to give the impression of a less violent regime.

However, not much changed, as Dzerzhinsky headed both the NKVD and the GPU. Many of the old Cheka staff were retained and the headquarters were still in Moscow's notorious Lubyanka building.

## UNITED STATE POLITICAL ADMINISTRATION (OGPU)

In July 1923, the GPU was renamed the United State Political Administration (OGPU). It was given the status of an independent People's Commissariat, and its existence was enshrined in the Russian constitution. No longer 'extraordinary', the former Cheka was now a permanent Soviet institution.

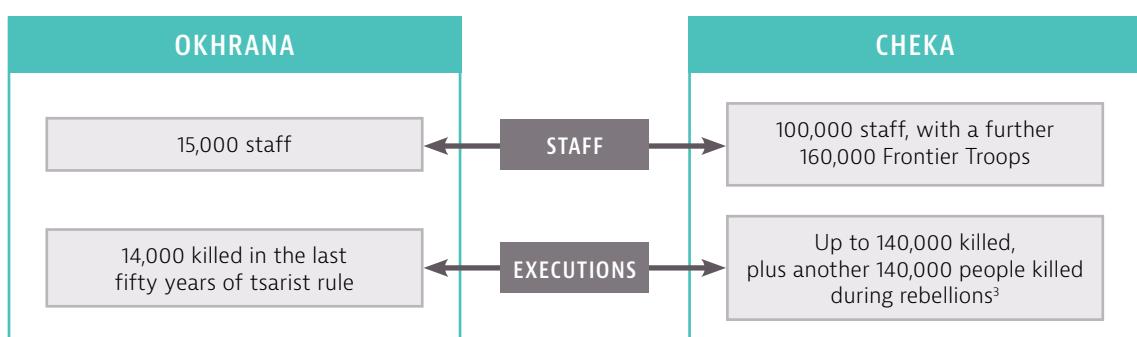
While the OGPU continued much of the work of the Cheka, there was a decline in executions, and the more extreme elements of police terror became the exception rather than the rule.<sup>1</sup> However, other operations were refined and improved, such as surveillance of citizens and foreigners. Government spies, named *agent provocateurs*, were used to infiltrate businesses and organisations to expose potential counter-revolutionary activity. Suspect individuals were promptly arrested. Infiltrating all areas of society was the ultimate aim of the OGPU.

**agent provocateurs** secret government agents who infiltrated a 'suspect' organisation and encouraged members to break the law; this information was then fed back to the government

## COMPARISONS WITH OKHRANA

Historian George Leggett explains the degree of continuity and change between the tsarist secret police, the Okhrana, and the Cheka/OGPU: 'The Vecheka [Cheka] continued a long tsarist political police tradition, but differed both quantitatively and qualitatively from its immediate predecessor'.<sup>2</sup>

The Cheka was bigger and more ruthless than the Okhrana, as outlined below.



While the terrifying Cheka of the Civil War period was different from the Okhrana, the OGPU was closer in approach to the Okhrana. The OGPU used formal procedures—at least in theory—and preferred surveillance and agent provocateurs rather than terror. However, regardless of what they were called and what their procedures were, the party elite were unwavering in their support for the secret police.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Lenin said, 'A good Communist is a good Chekist at the same time'.

## POLITICAL REPRESSION

**Vladimir Lenin:** 'We have risen to the highest and at the same time the most difficult stage of our historic struggle. Our enemy at the present moment and in the present period is not the same one that faced us yesterday.'

The suppressions of the Kronstadt Rebellion and the peasant revolts were the first of further waves of repression in the NEP era. Other socialist parties and intellectuals were the targets of the GPU following the Tenth Party Congress. Dzerzhinsky and his Chekists remained vigilant, but terror and executions were no longer the norm in the post-Civil War years, as dissenting voices were exposed and censored via informants, surveillance and imprisonment.

## MENSHEVIKS AND SRs

The formal bans on Mensheviks and SRs were removed during the Civil War. Some members of these parties had already taken up posts in the Soviet administration, while others had joined the Communist Party.

However, Communist tolerance did not last long.

- 1921: Menshevik and SR support for the strikes in Petrograd and Moscow led to both parties again being declared illegal and 'counter-revolutionary'.
- 1921: About 2000 Mensheviks were arrested following the Tenth Communist Party Congress; most leading Mensheviks fled overseas.
- 1922: In June and August, thirty-four SRs were brought to trial and accused of plotting terrorist acts, counter-revolution, colluding with White generals and organising strikes. (The group included twelve members of the SR Central Committee.)

The trial of the thirty-four SRs was the first of Soviet Russia's political 'show trials'. The SRs had already been imprisoned by the Cheka for months, and were meant to stick to a rehearsed script and plead guilty to made-up charges. However, the SR Central Committee refused to cooperate. Those SRs who did cooperate were acquitted, and those who did not cooperate were found guilty and given death sentences.

After spending eighteen months on death row in Lubyanka jail cells, the SRs' death sentences were changed to five years imprisonment.<sup>4</sup>

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Socialist newspapers avoided Bolshevik censorship by using tactics they had employed under the tsar. If they were shut down they would open again the next day with a new name and new editor. The Menshevik paper *Den* (Day) had eight names in one month: 'Midday', 'New Day', 'Night', 'Midnight', 'The Coming Day', 'New Day' (again) and 'Dark Night'. Its final edition was 'In the Dead of the Night'.



## ARTISTS AND INTELLECTUALS

In May 1922, Lenin directed the GPU to examine academic and literary journals for dubious 'bourgeois' influences. He was concerned by writers who were suspected of being 'overt counter-revolutionaries' and 'corruptors of student youth'.<sup>5</sup> By September, 120 intellectuals had been imprisoned. Most were later deported to Germany or France.

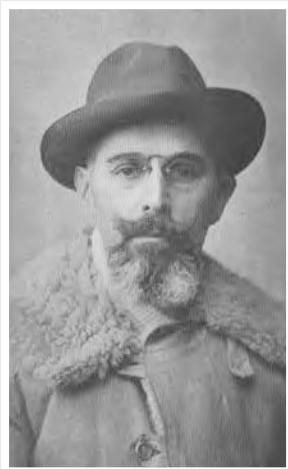
## DID YOU KNOW?

The Communists launched an offensive against the Russian Orthodox Church in 1922–1923. Saying that funds were needed for famine relief, authorities confiscated all valuable religious items. Bloody conflicts raged as the faithful rallied to defend their places of worship. Thousands were arrested and around 7000 priests, monks and nuns were killed.

It was a forced cultural emigration that included renowned authors, composers and scientists. After GPU intimidation, there was a further exodus in September–November 1922, when 160 intellectuals and their families left Russia aboard so-called ‘philosophy steamboats’.<sup>6</sup>

Many outstanding thinkers, writers, musicians and artists had already fled or were forced from their homeland during the Bolshevik revolution. Maxim Gorky had left Russia in October 1921—he was ill and disillusioned by the new regime. Those who escaped to the émigré communities of Paris and Berlin were the lucky ones. In August 1921, the poet Nikolai Gumilev was accused of conspiring with counter-revolutionaries and arrested by the Cheka. Despite the charges being unfounded—and the efforts of Gorky, who petitioned Lenin on the poet’s behalf—Gumilev was executed.

## BORIS CEDERHOLM'S MEMOIR



↑ Boris Cederholm.

→ **Source 13.02** Boris Cederholm, *In the Clutches of the Tcheka*, 1929 (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1929), 38–40.

Boris Cederholm was a Finnish businessman who was sent by his employers to Petrograd in 1923 to investigate possible contracts. Set up by an agent provocateur on false charges of laundering foreign goods—actually a small box of typewriter ribbons—Cederholm was arrested and imprisoned by the OGPU from 1924 to 1926. In his memoirs, Cederholm recalls the nature of political repression in Soviet Russia.

### Extract from Boris Cederholm, *In the Clutches of the Tcheka*, 1929

Attracted by the bait of ‘Nep’, business men, traders, and the intellectuals who had been spared by the terror during the period of militant Communism, crept out of their holes. The apparent possibilities of ‘Nep’ aroused some hopes of enrichment, in others of suitable work ... Foreign merchants, contractors, and even financiers made their appearance ... but disillusionment quickly set in, and the faces of those optimists who had seen in the ‘Nep’ a sign of evolution and retreat from the Communist positions began to grow longer and longer. The so-called dictatorship of the proletariat remained unshaken, and the Tcheka [Cheka], reformed under the title of State Political Administration (GPU), and extended and perfected to an incredible degree, remained the old Tcheka with wider powers than ever ... Thus the activities of the Tcheka became every moment more multifarious and elaborate, till they embraced the tiniest manifestations of life in the remotest corners of the Soviet State. The Tcheka is everywhere. It is in the schools, the factories, the party organisations, in all works and businesses, in the police, in the army, on the railways ... The Tcheka is even in the home; for owing to the great number of ruined and collapsing houses, almost every flat is inhabited by several families, and there are always several secret agents of the Tcheka to every house.

## ACTIVITY

### HISTORICAL SOURCE

Using Source 13.02 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Identify the continuities and changes Cederholm observes during his time in Soviet Russia.
- 2 Explain how the Cheka continued its role into the NEP period.
- 3 Analyse how the Soviet regime used political repression to consolidate its authority during the NEP era.  
Use evidence to support your response.

**ACTIVITY****CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING**

- 1 By what name was the Cheka known after July 1923?
- 2 Who headed this organisation?
- 3 How was the Cheka similar to the Okhrana? In what ways did it differ?
- 4 Which political groups became a focus of repression following the Tenth Party Congress of 1921?
- 5 Which social group became a focus of repression in 1921–1922?

# ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENTS

**KEY DEVELOPMENT**

**Vladimir Mayakovsky:** 'What we need is not a dead cathedral of art, where dead masterpieces can languish, but a living factory of the human spirit. We need raw art, raw words, raw deeds. Art ... should be everywhere—on the streets, in streetcars, in factories and in workers' homes.'

As well as challenging economic and social structures, education and the arts were also reimagined by the new society. Bolsheviks were driven by a passion for modernity and cultural revolution, especially in 1920s. Lenin and Anatoli Lunacharsky, Commissar for Enlightenment, were particularly interested in these new movements. The sense of excitement in creating a new society was reflected in new 'proletarian' culture, expressions of a 'socialist lifestyle' and imagined communist utopias of the near future. In one of the many contradictions of the period, creativity and experimentation was accompanied by increased Communist influence over the arts.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

One artistic movement, the 'Nothingists', expressed their revolutionary zeal by vowing to write, read, speak and print nothing!

## REVOLUTIONARY STYLES AND MOVEMENTS

Even before the October Revolution, Russia was having a so-called 'silver age' of literary and artistic experimentation. The exhilaration of 1917 and the heady days of the Civil War inspired further innovation among writers and artists.

In the 1920s, radical experimentation and utopian thinking flourished. Many writers and artists saw the revolutionary regime as the dawning of a new age. Influential movements included:

- Futurism—which glorified technology and rejected past traditions
- Proletarian Culture Movement (Proletkult)—which abandoned traditional modes of artistic representation; followers hoped that expressing a new proletarian-style culture would bring about socialist revolution
- Constructivism—where art was 'constructed' with social and political purpose, and led to constructivist styles of sculpture and architecture.

Public sculptures in honour of tsarist leaders were replaced by busts of Marx, Engels and other revolutionaries. Grand plans were drawn up for remarkable new buildings that incorporated radical design. One of the most famous was Vladimir Tatlin's Monument to the Third Internationale. This building was to be twice the height of the Empire State Building, with spiral fretwork like the Eiffel Tower and massive rotating glass cylinders. It was to house a projector that illuminated images on clouds against the night sky and a huge screen for displaying news and proclamations.

## DID YOU KNOW?

A friend of Mayakovsky's wrote of the Civil War years: 'In this terrifying world made of frost, stale herrings, rags, typhoid fever, arrests, bread lines, and armed soldiers, ... the theatres were jammed every evening.'

**Mauser** the most common type of pistol used by the Cheka and the Red Army



↑ Vladimir Vladimirovitch Mayakovsky (1894–1930).



Painters experimented with geometric form and 'proletarian' themes. Writers embraced the sense that a new world was in the making. The poet Mayakovsky recalled his response to the October Revolution: 'To accept or not to accept? There was no such problem for me (and other Moscow futurists). It was my revolution ... I did everything that was necessary.'

### Revolutionary Poetry: 'The Left March', by Vladimir Mayakovsky

Rally the ranks into a march!  
Now's no time to quibble or browse there,  
Silence, you orators!  
You  
have the floor  
Comrade *Mauser*.  
Enough of living by laws  
that Adam and Eve have left.  
Hustle old history's horse.  
Left!  
Left!  
Left!  
Ahoy, blue jackets!  
Cleave skywards!  
Beyond the oceans!  
Unless  
your battleships on the roads  
blunted their keels' fighting keenness!  
Baring the teeth of his crown,  
let the lion of Britain whine, gale-heft.  
The Commune can never go down.  
Left!  
Left!  
Left!

There—  
beyond sorrow's seas  
sunlit lands uncharted.  
Beyond hunger,  
beyond plague's dark peaks  
tramping the marching of millions!  
Let armies of hirelings ambush us,  
streaming cold steel through every rift.  
L'Entente can't conquer the Russians.  
Left!  
Left!  
Left!  
Does the eye of the eagles fade?  
Shall we stare back at the old?  
Proletarian fingers  
grip tighter  
the throat of the world:  
Chests out! Shoulders straight!  
Stick the red flags adrift!  
Who is marching there with the right?  
Left!  
Left!  
Left!

↑ **Source 13.03** Cited in Mikhail Guerman, ed., *Art of the October Revolution* (Leningrad: Aurora Art Publishers, 1979), 52.

← **Source 13.04** Model of the Monument to the Third Internationale, installed at an exhibition in Moscow in 1920, with Tatlin in the foreground holding a pipe.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Under the Bolshevik regime, workers held parades where they marched behind floats that represented their labour: workers from a tool factory walked behind an oversized chisel, brewery workers walked behind barrels, and so on. At one march, the Association of Chemists marched behind a huge tablet that had the following prescription: 'For the sick proletariat of Western Europe: one part general strike, one part united front, and one part soviet republic. Ordered by Doctor Lenin. Dose: as much as is required.'

Inspiration for revolutionary themes came from a range of sources, both mundane and romantic:

- factories, coal, steel, tools
- battles from the Civil War, and utopian visions of the future.

One group of classical musicians demonstrated their socialist convictions by performing as an orchestra—without a conductor. The musicians sat in a semi-circle facing each other, so they could communicate changes in the piece by eye contact. The repertoire and interpretation of the music were decided collectively, and each musician learned the whole score. They set themselves a 'production plan' of concerts and rehearsals and modelled efficiency to the public by starting exactly on time.<sup>8</sup>

## VISUAL PROPAGANDA

Literacy levels were low in the Russian population, so visual imagery became the main tool of propaganda. The Bolsheviks made ready use of the artists who were willing to work for them. Mayakovsky designed vibrant propaganda posters with captivating figures and witty captions that were easily understood by the general public. His Rosta window posters, made for display outside the Russian Telegraph Agency, were particularly striking.

Brightly painted trains carried Bolshevik agitational propaganda ('agitprop') across the countryside. Agitprop staff gave rousing speeches and handed out posters and pamphlets wherever they went. The agitprop trains were accompanied by theatre troupes and brass bands, and often contained a movie theatre. Many Russians saw their first film in an agitprop train. There was even an agitprop ship, the Red Star, which travelled the Volga and Kama rivers.



Source 13.05 'Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge', 1920.

## REVOLUTIONARY THEATRE

Playwrights Vsevolod Meyerhold and Yevgeny Vakhtangov produced some of their most groundbreaking works during the revolutionary era. Meyerhold was significant for his innovations in actors' movements and gestures. He was also responsible for the nationalisation of Russian theatre, which strengthened Communist influence over the arts. Directing theatrical experiments involving eight different theatres, Vakhtangov aimed to create a 'people's theatre' in which spectators became actors and mass scenes gave life to heroic revolutionary tales.<sup>9</sup> Plays depicting scenes from the Civil War and the October Revolution were especially popular.

Mass involvement in spectacles, such as recreating the 'storming' of the Winter Palace, fostered a cultural memory of the revolution among ordinary people. One 1920 performance held around Palace Square involved a 500-piece orchestra, 8000 participants and 100,000 spectators. Such performances enabled everyday people to engage in the drama, passion and symbolic meaning of the October Revolution.<sup>10</sup>

### ACTIVITY

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- Who served as the Commissar for Enlightenment?
- List three or more of the artistic movements or popular themes that developed in response to the Russian Revolution.
- Name two or more significant artistic figures who responded positively to the Russian Revolution.
- What style of propaganda was commonly used by the Communist regime? Why?

## FUTURIST MAY DAY, 1918

To commemorate Moscow's first May Day under Soviet rule in 1918, Lenin suggested the capital be decorated to give it an appearance 'entirely different from any other city in Europe'. However, the project grew far beyond Lenin's idea when artists were given free rein by Commissar for Enlightenment Lunacharsky.

As writer Ilya Ehrenburg recalled: 'Moscow was decorated with Futurist and Suprematist paintings. Demented squares battled with rhomboids on the peeling facades of colonnaded Empire villas and faces with triangles for eyes popped up everywhere.'<sup>11</sup>

Trucks displaying striking artworks were parked throughout the city centre, and trees were painted red, purple, blue and yellow. One old woman looked at a large Cubist mural depicting figures with fish eyes, and concluded that a campaign was underway to have people 'worship the devil'. Ehrenburg thought the decorations were 'mad ornaments on a house about to collapse or the foundations of another kind of structure never yet seen even in creative dreams'.<sup>12</sup>

However, Lenin was not pleased—and ordered that the paintings be removed. But despite their best efforts workers could not remove the paint on some murals, and the remnants were still visible years later.

Source 13.06 'Recall the Day of the Red Army', Rosta poster by Mayakovsky, 1920. It reads:

- 1) We killed the Russian Whites, but that wasn't enough;
- 2) The monster of international capitalism still exists;
- 3) Therefore we still need the Red Army;
- 4) Therefore we obviously must help the Red Army.



## ACTIVITY

### EVALUATING SOURCES

Select two or three examples of art, architecture or performance from the revolutionary period and complete the tasks below.

- 1 Using details from your sources and your own knowledge, explain how artistic experimentation reflected the ideals of the new regime.
- 2 Evaluate the changes and continuities that emerged in artistic expression as a result of the Russian Revolution. Use evidence to support your response.

### CREATIVE RESPONSES

Imagine you are a Russian journalist writing in the period 1921–1927. Your magazine specialises in new artistic trends. Write a review of an artwork, poem or performance that was produced in this period. Assess the artistic and persuasive techniques it used to convey a Communist message.

Alternatively, create your own painting, propaganda poster, poem or sculpture that reflects the ideals of the Communist regime. Present it to the class and explain which values of the new society you have tried to reflect.



Source 13.07 A civil marriage conducted beneath the red flag, officiated by a provincial commissar.

## DAILY LIFE

Under the Bolshevik regime, everyday practices and places were remodelled to incorporate the new Soviet values.

- Cities were renamed to commemorate Communist leaders, such as Leningrad, Trotsky, Sverdlovsk, Stalingrad and Zinovievsk.
- Christenings were replaced by Octoberings, where parents vowed to raise their children as loyal Communists.
- Couples formalised their relationships with 'red marriages'.
- Children were given names such as Oktyabrina, Revolyutsiya, Ninel (Lenin spelled backwards), Marx, Engelina, Rosa (after Rosa Luxemburg), Terrora, Illich and Illina.<sup>13</sup>
- Traditional Christian holidays were replaced with celebrations of May Day and the October Revolution.
- Terms such as 'Mister', 'Sir', 'Madam', etc. were replaced with 'Comrade' to show that everyone was equal.
- The use of acronyms and short expressions was praised as a means to 'mechanise' speech and make it more efficient.
- Designs for 'socialist' clothing were drawn up, based on Constructivist ideals. There was even talk of disposable clothing made of paper.
- Trotsky called for the Russian language to be refined and freed from coarseness—he believed swearing was a product of poverty and working-class hardship.<sup>14</sup>

# LITERACY AND EDUCATION

◀ KEY DEVELOPMENT

**Lenin:** 'The illiterate person stands outside of politics. First it is necessary to teach him his ABCs. Without it, there are only rumours, fairytales, and prejudices, but not politics.'

For the Bolsheviks, it was critical to conquer illiteracy—as the ability to read was needed for full participation in socialist society. Leading Bolsheviks and volunteer activists made great efforts to improve the education of ordinary Russians. It was believed that science, education and socialism would lead to the creation of a new type of 'Soviet man'.

The newly-acquired skill of reading offered many people a glimmer of hope in the midst of economic hardship.

Early campaigns to 'liquidate' illiteracy focused on the Red Army because of the difficulties and shortages of the Civil War. In April 1918, compulsory reading lessons for soldiers were introduced. As they marched, soldiers sang: 'Two days of study, then a week in battle. Two days with pencils, a week with bayonets.'<sup>15</sup> During the Polish-Soviet War, cavalrymen rode with cards on their backs bearing letters of the Russian alphabet for the troops behind them to recite as they marched. Nikolai Podvoisky, head of training for the Red Army, declared, 'Our word is our best weapon'.

Reading opened up new worlds of knowledge, and the sense of liberation it inspired was a moving experience for many.

Bolshevik activist Dora Elkina was sent to teach soldiers to read. At the start of one lesson, Elkina wrote on the board the sentence: 'Masha ate the kasha'—the equivalent of 'Mary ate the porridge'.

The soldiers thought this was quite funny. They heckled and laughed, asking silly questions: 'Who is Masha? What kind of kasha?' Elkina, on the verge of losing her temper, began a political discussion. She explained why the country was so short of staple foods like kasha, and why loyal Red Army men could not yet go home to their Mashas. The soldiers began to settle and Elkina wrote on the board: 'We are not slaves, slaves we are not'.

The sentence struck a chord with the soldiers—as being respected and not being treated as slaves were both key revolutionary ideals. They begged Elkina to teach them this powerful set of words. In this way, 'We are not slaves, slaves we are not' became a common sentence in reading texts of the 1920s and 1930s. It was the first sentence that millions of Russians learned to read.<sup>16</sup>

## THE POWER OF WORDS

Historian Jochen Hellbeck notes that some Soviet citizens, having learned to write, expressed revealing thoughts about post-revolution Russia in their diaries:

### Historian Jochen Hellbeck

They held in common a striving to inscribe their life into a larger narrative of the revolutionary cause. ... The power of the Communist appeal, which promised that those who had been slaves in the past could remold themselves into exemplary members of humanity, cannot be overestimated. It is poignantly expressed in the groping autobiographical narratives of semi-literate Soviet citizens who detailed their journeys from darkness to light.

### DID YOU KNOW?

A sample reader for the Red Army included the following:

**B**

The Bolsheviks hunt the *burzhois* [bourgeois]

The *burzhois* run a mile

**K**

It's hard for cows to run fast  
Kerensky was Prime Minister

**M**

The Mensheviks are people  
Who run off to their mothers

**T**

Flowers smell sweet in the evening  
Tsar Nicholas loved them  
very much

### DID YOU KNOW?

George Orwell's novel *1984*, about a dystopic totalitarian society, was partly based on the Russian Revolution. One fascinating aspect of the novel is the remodelling of the English language to reduce the opportunity for free thought. The language imposed by the 'Big Brother' state—called Newspeak—attempts to make all words functional and free of emotion. For example, the word 'free' can only be used to describe an absence (e.g. 'this dog is free of lice') rather than a state of being. The concept of political freedom is replaced by 'thoughtcrime'.

◀ **Source 13.08** Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 22.

The strangeness of new words and the power they represented had some amusing outcomes. During a visit to the Tambov Province in mid-1920, a young Red Army recruit revealed his new knowledge to an audience of peasants at a propaganda meeting.

→ **Source 13.09** Cited in Orlando Figes, 'The Revolution and its Language in the Village,' in *The Russian Revolution: Blackwell Essential Readings in History*, ed. Martin Miller (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 98.

### A young Red Army recruit reveals his new knowledge

Comrades! Can you tell in diameters what you know of the internal size of our victorious Red Army? I am sure that diametrically-perpendicularly you can not say anything about its internal size. Our victorious Red Army on a scale always beats our enemies in parallel. To understand the axiom, you ought to think not in straight lines, like women, but perpendicularly like men. Then the two radiuses will be equal to a diameter.

The audience exclaimed: 'See how clever he has become! All those words! Where did he learn them? He is completely educated!' Although the sentences made no sense, it is undeniable that the words had meaning to the speaker, and they certainly made an impression on the audience. Learning to read also allowed people to seek new knowledge.

→ **Source 13.10** Cited in S. A. Smith, *Russia in Revolution: An Empire in Crisis, 1890 to 1928* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 359.

### A request to officials from a peasant

Send me a list of books published on the following subjects because I am interested in everything: chemistry, science, technology, the planets, the sun, the earth, the planet Mars, world maps, books on aviation, the number of planes we possess, the number of enemies the Socialist Republic has, books on comets, stars, water, the earth, and sky.

## LITERACY IMPROVEMENTS

Throughout the 1920s, volunteers travelled the countryside to teach people to read. About 16,000 reading rooms were established in provincial towns across the Soviet Republic, which provided peasants with access to books and newspapers. In cities, free workers' reading rooms were established, and intensive courses for talented—though formally uneducated—adults were offered.

The regime also undertook experiments in school curriculum. In May 1918, primary and secondary education was standardised through Consolidated Labour Schools, which were administered by the Commissariat for Enlightenment (Arts, Literacy and Education—**Narkompros**). Classes were free and co-educational, and attendance was compulsory—although the last condition was hard to enforce.

As Commissar for Enlightenment, Lunacharsky was passionate about modern educational theories, such as the Montessori method. He felt that students should 'learn by doing'.<sup>17</sup> Many of Lunacharsky's ideas were progressive and would fit comfortably into a modern classroom.

- Group work was promoted.
- A more collaborative relationship between teacher and students was encouraged.
- Grading and homework were discouraged.
- The teacher was to be 'an organiser, an assistant, an instructor and above all an older comrade, but not a superior officer'.<sup>18</sup>
- Activity-based learning was the preferred teaching method, rather than instructional learning.

**Narkompros** The Commissariat for Enlightenment (Arts, Literacy and Education)

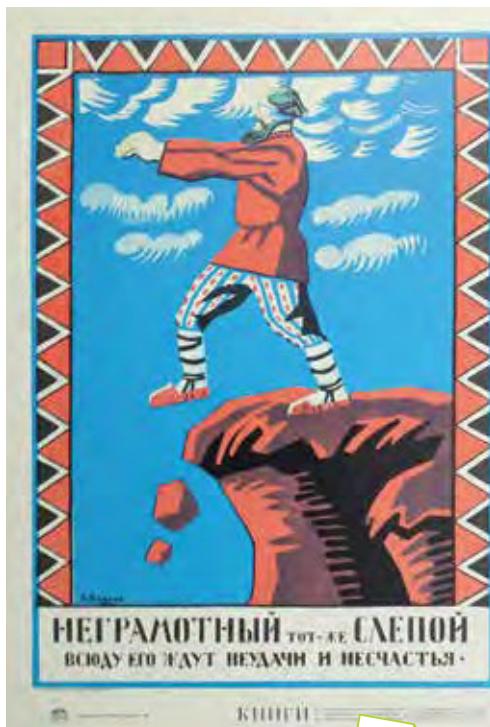
Moves were made towards an inter-disciplinary curriculum based on themes such as industry, nature and society, and excursions to factories, museums and theatres were encouraged. Vocational training was supported. Students were expected to manage their own behaviour and 'excessive' discipline by teachers was discouraged.

Some people argue that this approach only led to classroom chaos and low standards. For example, Richard Pipes said that 'the only innovations that struck root were those directed against academic standards and teachers' authority'.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, some party members complained that 'nothing of any use was being taught in the experimental schools, that the whole system of education had become a hotbed of anarchists'.<sup>20</sup>

The late-1920s saw the return of a more traditional education system. Experimental approaches aside, the Communist drive for literacy achieved considerable results.

- 1900: 23 per cent of Russians could read and write.
- 1926: 51 per cent of Russians could read and write (although females had lower literacy rates than men).<sup>21</sup>
- By the mid-1930s, there were very few illiterate Russians.<sup>22</sup>

→ **Source 13.11** Propaganda poster: *The Illiterate is Blind* by Aleksei Aleksandrovich Radakov, 1920.



## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Describe two more changes to everyday life that emerged under the Soviet regime.
- 2 Describe three ways the Communist regime aimed to improve literacy and engagement in education.
- 3 What percentage of Russians could read and write by 1926?

### HISTORICAL SOURCES

Using Sources 13.12 and 13.13 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Using details from the sources, outline the benefits that literacy gave to Soviet citizens.
- 2 Using details from the sources and further evidence, explain how the Soviet regime attempted to improve literacy in Russia.
- 3 Evaluate the Communist initiatives in education as an achievement of revolutionary ideals. Use evidence, including perspectives, to support your response.



↑ **Source 13.12** Literacy—the Path to Communism. Poster, 1920.

→ **Source 13.13** 'Somebody's clever, somebody's a fool—one reads a book, and the other one goes to the pub.'



## ANATOLI LUNACHARSKY, 1875–1933

Anatoli Lunacharsky was the first Commissar for Enlightenment (Arts and Education). He was a man of independent views, and had a number of disagreements with Lenin on literary, philosophical and political matters in the years before 1917.

Lunacharsky was a member of Trotsky's small Inter-district Group of SDs and joined the Bolsheviks in the merger before the July Days. In the lead-up to the October Uprising, Lunacharsky was a prominent speaker for the Bolshevik cause, and was considered second only to Trotsky.

As Commissar for Enlightenment, Lunacharsky was renowned for his ability to tolerate temperamental artists and writers, and for his own artistic endeavours. Lunacharsky had a deep love of Russia's cultural heritage. He insisted that the artistic achievements of the past be preserved from needless revolutionary destruction. Innovations in education were Lunacharsky's main contribution to education—80 per cent of children aged 8–11 regularly attended school by 1926, compared to 49 per cent in 1915.

After Lenin's death, Lunacharsky played no role in the inter-party leadership struggles—he preferred instead to focus on literary and philosophical interests. Lunacharsky wrote over 1500 articles on artistic matters, and jointly represented the USSR at the League of Nations 1930–1932. He died peacefully in 1933.



↑ Anatoli Lunacharsky.

## WOMEN'S RIGHTS

◀ KEY GROUP

**Alexandra Kollontai:** 'In the name of equality, of liberty, and of love, we call upon the working women and working men, peasant women and peasants, courageously and with faith to take up the work of the reconstruction of human society with the object of rendering it more perfect, more just, and more capable of assuring to the individual the happiness which he deserves.'

Legislative improvements for women were a significant part of the new society and an achievement Lenin was proud of.<sup>23</sup> Female members of the Bolshevik Party—called *Bolshevichki*—had a long tradition of active involvement as revolutionary agitators.

As historian Barbara Evans Clements argues, 'The Bolsheviks were engaged in all the activities that prepared the way for their party's seizure of power in October'.<sup>24</sup> Women such as Inessa Armand, Alexandra Kollontai and Nadezhda Krupskaya were well respected by their party colleagues and, after the October Revolution, these leading Bolsheviks put women's rights on the political agenda for the new regime.

A key ideal of the Bolsheviks was the emancipation of women—whatever their social class—from their shared experience of life in a male-dominated society. In Russia, anti-female (or misogynist) attitudes were illustrated by the common saying: 'A chicken is not a bird, and a baba [peasant wife] is not a human being'.

Bolsheviks saw gender equity as fundamental to a new Communist society. However, much like the Bolsheviks' efforts to bring the peasant economy under central control, the regime's influence on gender relations in the villages was limited. Women in the countryside were given the right to act as heads of households, and were granted equal rights in ownership of land.



↑ Alexandra Kollontai.

**Bolshevichki** female members of the Bolshevik Party

Despite this, peasant women were suspicious of anything from external authorities that they perceived to be a threat to the village community. These suspicions were fuelled by false rumours that women were to be 'nationalised' and communally 'shared'. Bolshevikki activists sent to the countryside were often abused by village women, rather than welcomed.

Despite setbacks in rural areas, the Bolshevikki made improvements in urban centres, where new laws aimed at freeing women from the bonds of male domination (patriarchy) had considerable impact. In December 1917, the Decree on Marriage specified that:

- marriage was an act of mutual consent
- married couples could take either the wife or husband's surname
- divorce was made easier through a straightforward civil process
- women were guaranteed the right to equal pay in the workplace.

Also, the regime launched campaigns against prostitution, and abolished laws that discriminated against children born outside marriage. In November 1920, Russia became the first country in the world to make free, legal abortions available.



↑ Source 13.14 A women's street parade in revolutionary Russia, 1917.

## INESSA ARMAND, 1874–1920

Inessa Armand was born in Paris, then raised in Russia by her step-father, who was a wealthy industrialist. In her early years she taught in a school for peasant children and joined a Moscow charity that supported poor working-class women.

However, Armand gradually embraced a more radical career. She left her husband, and in 1903 joined the SDs, where she rose to become an influential Moscow Bolshevik propagandist. After several arrests and a period of exile, Armand emigrated to Western Europe.

In 1910, Armand met Lenin in Paris: she was enthralled by his revolutionary charisma; he was enchanted by her sharp intellect and her beauty. There is strong evidence that they had an affair for two years—an arrangement tolerated by Lenin's wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya.

Lenin relied on Armand to present his views at any party conferences in Europe that he was unable to attend. Armand remained a staunch feminist throughout her career, and she founded and edited the SD paper *Rabotnitsa* (Woman Worker). Armand was among the nineteen revolutionaries who returned with Lenin to Russia in April 1917.

After the Bolsheviks came to power, Armand was appointed the first director of *Zhenotdel* (Women's Department of the Central Committee). Armand's fluency in French and other languages earned her a role in the Comintern. She died in 1920 at the age of forty-six, after contracting cholera. Lenin was shattered by the death of his 'dearest friend', and her remains were interred under the Kremlin wall alongside other leading Soviet dignitaries.



↑ Inessa Armand.

**Zhenotdel** Women's Department of the Central Committee

## ZHENOTDEL

### DID YOU KNOW?

Some Bolsheviks were known to have derisively referred to Zhenotdel as 'baba central' or 'babatdel'.

In 1919 the Women's Department of the Communist Party (Zhenotdel) was formed to promote women's rights. Zhenotdel was headed by Inessa Armand until her death in 1920, and afterwards by Alexandra Kollontai. Zhenotdel's programs included crèches, communal kitchens and laundries. Liberating women from the chores of family life, such as housework and childcare, would allow them to get more involved in the party and the workplace. Efforts were made to improve women's literacy and industrial skills. Ella Shistyter, a student and electrical engineer during the 1920s and 1930s, recalled the ideals and opportunities:

#### Source 13.15 Red Flag:

*Communism in Russia 1917–36*, PBS documentary, 1998: [www.pbs.org/wgbh/peoplestcentury/episodes/redflag/description.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/peoplestcentury/episodes/redflag/description.html)

#### Ella Shistyter

What I liked was the promise of a happy, classless society in the future, in which everyone would enjoy all the good created by society ... The Revolution gave me the right to feel equal to any man. It gave me the right to work, to study what I wanted to study.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Lenin described housework as 'the most unproductive, the most savage and most arduous work a woman can do'.

Gains in rights for women seem substantial—at least on paper. However, many of these policies expected women to gain freedom through their own collective effort, such as through Zhenotdel-sponsored laundries and kindergartens. The more difficult question of male attitudes to women was not addressed. As historian Linda Edmondson argues: 'The socially more radical possibility that men might take on traditionally feminine roles at home (as women were expected to take on men's at work) was never explored'.<sup>25</sup>

Source 13.16 Cited in Robert Daniels, *A Documentary History of Communism and the World: From Revolution to Collapse* (New England: New England University Press, 1994), 131–132.

Source 13.17 'Emancipated Woman—Build Socialism!' by Adolf Strakhov, 1926.

#### Extract from Alexandra Kollontai, *Communism and the Family*, 1920

There is no escaping the fact: the old type of family has seen its day ... it is worse than useless, since it needlessly holds back the female workers from more productive and far more serious work ... on the ruins of the former family we shall soon see a new form rising which will involve altogether different relations between men and women ... a union of affection and comradeship, a union of two equal members of the communist society ... No more domestic 'servitude' of women. No more inequality within the family ... The woman in the communist city no longer depends on her husband but her work. It is not her husband but her robust arms which will support her ... Marriage is henceforth to be transformed into a sublime union of two souls in love with each other ... In place of the individual and egotistic family, there will arise a great universal family of workers, in which all the workers, men and women, will be, above all, comrades.

## KOLLONTAI AND WOMEN'S LIBERATION

Kollontai's theories on women's liberation were often misunderstood. She advocated for a woman's right:

- to a fulfilled relationship
- to choose her partner
- to be freed from the 'bonds' of marriage.

However, these rights were seen as endorsing sexual promiscuity. Kollontai said that under communism, the satisfaction of one's sexual desires would be 'as simple and unimportant as drinking a glass of water'.<sup>26</sup> Lenin did not approve. He retorted, 'To be sure, thirst has to be quenched. But would a normal person lie down in the gutter and drink from a puddle?'<sup>27</sup>

Historian Sheila Fitzpatrick argues that Kollontai, 'was a believer in love rather than the "glass of water" theory of sex that was often attributed to her'.<sup>28</sup> Kollontai's



involvement in the Workers' Opposition movement was the beginning of her political decline, and her influence diminished in the years that followed.

Although important gains were made, women's liberation continued to be challenging in the Soviet Republic:

- funds and experienced staff for communal kitchens and crèches were lacking
- women had more opportunities, but were still expected to do the housework
- patriarchal attitudes undermined the decrees, including within the party.

In the new society, a *baba* was a human being—but some comrades were still more equal than others.

## MODERNISATION AND ELECTRIFICATION

**Vladimir Lenin:** 'Communism equals Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country.'

Many Bolshevik policies were based on a utopian vision for the future—they considered revolution to be a forward march towards economic, political, social and cultural improvement. These ideals came to the front of Sovnarkom policy after the Civil War and the NEP era.

The revolution was no longer a bitter struggle for survival, but a quest for modernisation and a better life. Careful economic management plus advances in science and technology were critical in constructing socialism. The development of rational, scientific processes to raise productivity in the economy were one aspect of this—but social benefits were also apparent. Historian Steve Smith describes this 'new strain in Bolshevik ideology' as 'productivist'.<sup>29</sup>

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ELECTRIFICATION

The productivist ethos was best demonstrated by the goal of electrification. In explaining how Russia would move towards socialism in the NEP era, Lenin said:

### Lenin on socialism and electrification

Is a direct transition from this condition predominating in Russia to Socialism conceivable? Yes, it is conceivable to a certain degree, but on one condition, the precise nature of which we now know thanks to an enormous piece of scientific work that has been completed. That condition is electrification. If we construct scores of district electric power stations ... if we transmit electric power from these to every village, if we obtain a sufficient number of electric motors and other machinery, we shall not need, or shall hardly need, transition stages, intermediary links between patriarchy and Socialism.

Even before the introduction of the NEP, Lenin had claimed that electrification was the key to overcoming the 'backwardness' of the countryside. During a discussion in 1918 with Commissar of Trade and Industry Leonid Krasin, Lenin had said, 'Electricity will take the place of God. Let the peasant pray to electricity; he's going to feel the power of the central authorities more than that of heaven'.<sup>30</sup>

### ACTIVITY

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Who were Bolshevikki?
- 2 Name two or more significant women who contributed to Sovnarkom initiatives.
- 3 Identify three or more specific gains or initiatives in women's rights that emerged under the Soviet regime.
- 4 What challenges continued to hinder efforts to improve women's rights in the new society? Identify two or more examples.

#### HISTORICAL SOURCES

Using Sources 13.16 and 13.17 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Explain how women's rights were addressed by the Soviet government.
- 2 Outline how gender equality featured in Soviet campaigns.
- 3 Analyse how women responded to the challenges and changes to everyday under the new regime. Use evidence to support your response.

**Source 13.18** The first electric lightbulb in a village in Bryansk province.



**Source 13.19** V.I. Lenin, 'The Tax in Kind,' in *Selected Works: Volume II* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1947), 718.

# ALEXANDRA KOLLONTAI, 1872–1952



KEY INDIVIDUAL

Alexandra Kollontai was a tireless champion of women's rights, and a leading figure in the Bolshevik Party. She believed that equal political, social and economic opportunities for women were essential elements of the Communist revolution.

Like Lenin, Kollontai spent much of her revolutionary career in European exile. She was a prolific writer and an excellent public speaker. A radical by inclination, Kollontai backed Lenin's April Theses and campaigned on his behalf after his return to Russia.

She was appointed Commissar of Social Welfare after the October Revolution—and was one of the few women to hold office in national government anywhere in the world at this time. Later, she headed Zhenotdel, after the death of Inessa Armand.

↑ Alexandra Kollontai.

Kollontai was a compassionate woman who took her work very seriously—and did her best to assist petitioners who came to her commissariat. She articulated arguments for women's rights within relationships, but her views were misrepresented and ridiculed by some Bolsheviks.

At the Tenth Party Congress of 1921, Kollontai was the chief spokesperson for the Worker's Opposition group. She and her comrades criticised the growing bureaucratisation of the party and its fading links with the working class. Kollontai's political influence lessened after 1921, and she served out the rest of her career as Soviet diplomat to Norway, Sweden and then Mexico. She died peacefully in retirement in 1952—one of the few old Bolsheviks to survive Stalin's purges.



## KEY POINTS

- A gifted writer and speaker for the Bolshevik Party.
- One of the few Bolshevik leaders to give immediate support for Lenin's April Theses.
- Commissar of People's Welfare and head of Zhenotdel.
- Champion of women's right and liberation.
- Leading figure in the Worker's Opposition faction.

## ACTIVITY

### EXTENDED RESPONSE

Explain how Alexandra Kollontai influenced and changed Soviet society. Use evidence to support your response.

↑ Alexandra Kollontai, c. 1900.

For Lenin, there was something special, almost magical, about electricity. He urged his colleagues to restrict their use of electricity, and at night he would roam the corridors of the Kremlin turning off lights left on by his comrades. In October 1920, when British writer H.G. Wells met Lenin, he observed: 'Lenin, who like a good Marxist, denounces all "utopians", has succumbed at last to utopia, the utopia of electricians'.<sup>31</sup> Wells called Lenin 'the Kremlin dreamer'.

## PLANNING FOR ELECTRIFICATION

Many others shared Lenin's passion for electric power. The poet Mayakovsky wrote: 'We must snatch away God's thunderbolts, Take 'em, We can use those volts, For electrification'.<sup>32</sup> Electricity was the ultimate symbol and expression of modernity, as Mayakovsky bluntly admitted: 'After electricity, I lost interest in nature. Too backward.'<sup>33</sup>

However, the Bolsheviks did not just dream about electrification—they made plans to introduce it across Soviet Russia. In 1920, Lenin had overseen the creation of a State Commission for the Electrification of Russia (**GOELRO**), which set out a long-term strategy for the country's electric infrastructure.

In February 1921, the task of building up power resources was taken up with enthusiasm, with the creation of the State Planning Committee (**Gosplan**). Gosplan took over directing the national management of industry, replacing *Vesenkha*. Lenin's program of electrification was central to these plans. In June 1921 Lenin outlined the 'tactics' that would bring about socialism: the electrification of Russia, with the expansion of large-scale industry in order to modernise farming.

The challenges involved in nationwide electrification were considerable. As N.S. Simonov argued, 'the program of electrification in reality resembled electro-fiction'.<sup>34</sup> Even the head of GOELRO, Gleb Krzhizhanovsky, posed the following question:

### Head of GOELRO

How, in view of the enormity of the destruction and ruin we have lived through, can we possibly establish a plan for the widespread electrification of such an economically backward land as Russia has been and still is ...? Doesn't the scheme of electrification in a period of gigantic economic dislocation seem a fantasy, a utopia, a paper project?

**Source 13.21** Cited in Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 49.

But Krzhizhanovsky answered his own question with an emphatic 'no'. Electrification was a dream for the Communists, but it was one that would become a reality given time and resources.

**Source 13.22** Alec Nove, 'The NEP' in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of the Russian Revolution*, ed. Harold Shukman (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1988), 89.

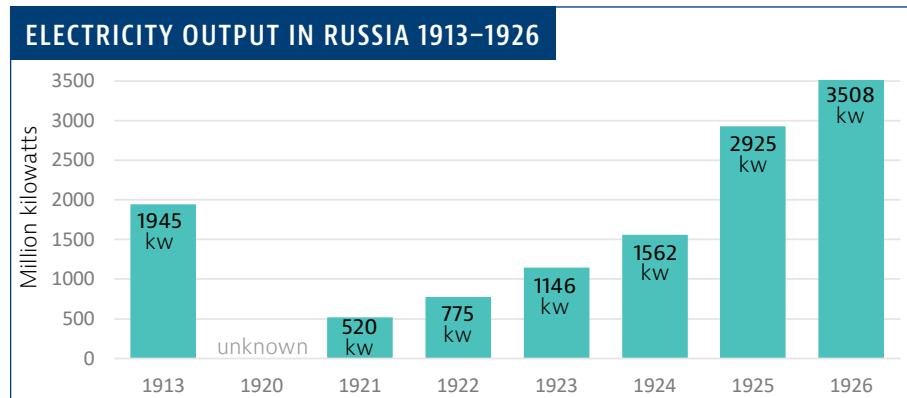
**GOELRO** State Commission for the Electrification of Russia, established in 1920

**Gosplan** State Planning Committee. Took over from *VSNKh* in supervising the economy and industrial expansion in 1921

### Lenin on the electrification of Russia

The only material basis that is possible for Socialism is large-scale machine industry that is capable of re-organising agriculture. But we cannot confine ourselves to this general thesis ... Modern large-scale industry ... means the electrification of the whole country ... The execution of the first part of the electrification scheme is estimated to take ten years.

**Source 13.20** Vladimir Lenin, 'Theses of Report on the Tactics of the Russian Communist Party to the Third Congress of the Communist International: The Material Basis of Socialism and the Plan for the Electrification of Russia,' in *Selected Works II* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1947), 735.





Source 13.23 Lenin and Electrification. Communism is Soviet Power + Electrification. Volkhovstroy Give Us Power! Poster by Yulii Shass and Vasili Kobelev, 1925.

## BENEFITS OF ELECTRIFICATION

Electrification had many benefits, particularly for peasants, and would furthermore demonstrate the potential of socialism. Electricity would bring light, heat, sanitation, knowledge and efficiency. According to historian Lars Lih, when considering the possibilities of electricity, 'Lenin himself was electrified'.<sup>35</sup> Lenin once expressed a hope that electric power grids might extend to neighbouring countries, thereby fostering fraternal internationalism. Around 1 billion gold roubles were invested in the electrification program, but only modest gains were made by the mid-1920s.

By 1924, output was still below pre-war tsarist levels. It was, however, increasing—a fair achievement given the poor state of industry after the Civil War. By 1926 the investment was paying off, and it must be remembered that rapid short-term increases in output were not expected.

Lenin died before his scheme was successful, but light globes would later be called 'little Illich lamps' in his honour. A 'cultural revolution' in which literacy, science and technology laid the foundations for socialism was a feature of Lenin's later writings—and electricity was a vital part of his vision.

### ACTIVITY

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Note a number of anecdotes that illustrate how electricity was seen as 'special' to Lenin.
- 2 What values were reflected in the productivist outlook of the Communists during the NEP?
- 3 What role did GOELRO play in the Soviet economy?
- 4 Comment on the extent to which the Soviet electrification program was a success.

#### DATA ANALYSIS

Examine the figures for electricity output in Russia between 1913–1926 (Source 13.22) and consider the efforts by the Soviet government towards electrification. Then complete the tasks below.

- 1 Using the data and further evidence, outline the importance of electricity as a measure of the NEP's success.
- 2 Using your own knowledge, identify and explain three or more problems with electrifying the whole of Russia.
- 3 Evaluate the success of Lenin's electrification campaign as an example of Communist revolutionary ideals. To what extent was this 'productivist' project successful? Use evidence to support your response.

### HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Using Sources 13.24 and 13.25 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Outline two or more aspects of life that had improved by the NEP era.
- 2 Outline how continuities in authoritarian rule continued into the NEP era.
- 3 Evaluate the extent to which life had changed for workers and peasants by the end of the NEP. Use evidence to support your response.

#### Ron Suny

By the end of the 1920s the Soviet people enjoyed greater security, better health care, higher literacy, better nutrition, greater social mobility, and more social equality than most of them had ever experienced. Not surprisingly, looking forward from the civil war years and back from the Stalinist decades, NEP retains a brighter glow than many other periods of Soviet history. For the Bolsheviks it was a retreat, a detour, but for millions of Soviet citizens it was a time of relative peace and steady improvement in their lives.

#### Source 13.24

Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 193.

#### Robert Service

... how new was the world being built by Lenin and Sovnarkom? The RSFSR [Soviet Republic] had facets reminiscent of the tsarist order at its worst. Central power was being asserted in an authoritarian fashion. Ideological intolerance was being asserted and organised dissent repressed. Elective principles were being trampled under foot.

#### Source

13.25 Robert Service, *A History of Twentieth-Century Russia* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 98.

# VLADIMIR ILYICH ULYANOV (LENIN), 1870–1924

## Early Life

Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, popularly known as Lenin, was born into an upper-middle-class family in the town of Simbirsk. His father was a provincial schools inspector—an important job that gave the family the status of hereditary nobles. Lenin grew up in a household that encouraged hard work and thrifty living. He was a gifted student who made a great impression on his school's headmaster—who, by coincidence, was Kerensky's father. He was a keen sportsman, and competitive by nature.

Lenin's early life was marked by tragedy. His father died unexpectedly in 1886 and the young Lenin became defiant and disobedient. In 1887, his brother Alexander was hanged for being a member of a populist terrorist group that plotted to kill Tsar Alexander III.

The death of his brother had a profound impact on Vladimir Lenin. He became intensely interested in politics and revolutionary literature. The Ulyanov family was also monitored closely by authorities. Lenin went on to study law at Kazan University, but was expelled for participating in student protests. With the help of Kerensky's father, Lenin was able to complete his law degree by correspondence. He worked for a short time as a lawyer but was soon devoting most of his time to the emerging Russian Marxist movement.

## Revolutionary Work

In 1895, Lenin was arrested for revolutionary agitation, and was sent into exile in Siberia. Around this time, he adopted his pseudonym 'Lenin', which was derived from the Lena River. In 1898, he married a fellow revolutionary, Nadezhda Krupskaya. Having served his sentence Lenin emigrated in 1900, spending time in Switzerland, Austria, France and Britain.

In the 1890s, Lenin collaborated with a number of Marxist intellectuals. He joined the Social Democratic Workers' Party (SDs) soon after its foundation, and became a leading figure within the party. He was a brilliant thinker, and a charismatic and formidable debater—he could also be intense, volatile and intolerant of people who disagreed with him. Some people found him obsessive. He would get furious if his pencils were in the wrong place in his office. His need for quiet when he was writing was so great that he would tiptoe around the room in socks so that his own footsteps would not interrupt his thinking. Prematurely bald, Lenin's nickname was 'Old Man'.

Lenin co-founded the SD newspaper *Iskra* (The Spark) with Yuri Martov and became its leading editor. Lenin enjoyed a good argument with his comrades, particularly when his views on party structure and membership were contentious. His key 1902 work *What Is to Be Done?* called for a smaller, professional and disciplined group or 'vanguard' of revolutionaries, guided by the principle of democratic centralism. However, Martov and others argued for a broader, more democratic party. This issue saw the SDs split in 1903. The Mensheviks followed Martov, while the Bolsheviks followed Lenin. Lenin was a master of factional politics and the split, which formalised into two distinct parties in 1912, was to his liking. He likely had an affair with Inessa Armand around 1910–1912.

### KEY INDIVIDUAL



↑ Vladimir Lenin.

↓ Source 13.27 A meeting of one of the early St Petersburg Marxist groups, 1897. Yuri Martov is sitting closest to the right; Lenin is seated next to him.



CONTINUED ...

Lenin spent the coming years involved in Marxist politics. He returned briefly to Russia following the 1905 Revolution before leaving again to avoid arrest. In 1916, he produced one of his most important works: *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*. In it, Lenin argued that revolution in Russia would lead to the outbreak of socialist revolution worldwide, as the Russian Empire was the 'weakest link' in the 'capitalist chain'. Lenin notoriously called for Russia's defeat in World War I, as the war would speed up the development of the revolution.

## From February to October

Lenin was in Switzerland during the February Revolution—and the abrupt end of tsarism took him by surprise. He had told a group of younger revolutionaries only weeks earlier that he did not expect to see the overthrow of the tsar in his lifetime.

Lenin was desperate to get back to Russia to regain influence over the direction of the Bolshevik Party, and he travelled through German territory in a special sealed train carriage, arriving at Petrograd's Finland Station on 3 April 1917.

The radical proposals of Lenin's April Theses had an immediate impact. The SDs were forced to choose whether to support Lenin's radical ideas or the moderate, orthodox Marxist position of the Mensheviks. Lenin insisted that 'no co-operation' should be given to the Provisional Government—it should be overthrown instead. This was a significant turning point in the revolution.

Under Lenin's leadership, the Bolsheviks positioned themselves as the most radical political group, and from April onwards they were consistently anti-war and anti-government in their agitation. Lenin's brilliance was further shown by his ability to capture his party's response to complex political, social and economical situations with powerful slogans, such as: 'Peace! Bread! Land!'

As 1917 wore on, Lenin's ideas gained mass support for the party, as they were commonly associated with Soviet power. Lenin's role in the subsequent October Revolution was significant—without him the October Revolution would not have occurred (or not in the way that it did). Trotsky organised the seizure of power, but it was Lenin who inspired the party, shaped its policies and urged his colleagues to overthrow the Provisional Government.



Source 13.28 Lenin reading *Pravda*.

In the weeks before the October Uprising, Lenin wrote *The State and Revolution*, in which he outlined his theory of how a socialist society would develop. In essence, this involved a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' followed by a socialist 'workers' state' that would, in time, 'wither away' and allow a communist society free of 'exploitation of man by man' to evolve.

## The New Society

On coming to power with the founding of Sovnarkom, Lenin showed both a willingness to compromise at key moments and a determination to hold power at all costs. He did not accept that Sovnarkom should be a coalition government—he briefly tolerated the Left SRs in the Sovnarkom, but it was vital that his ideas and his party were dominant.

Lenin evolved from revolutionary to statesman as chairman of the Sovnarkom. The early Sovnarkom decrees owed much to his influence, as did the founding of the Cheka. Lenin's position on the question of peace—sign immediately to end the war—was a critical issue at the Brest-Litovsk talks and the subsequent crisis. Lenin was the leading Bolshevik behind the dismissal of the Constituent Assembly. His tendency to take a pragmatic approach to some challenges was shown through State Capitalism.

The Red Terror, which escalated after he survived an assassination attempt in August 1918, was given his unquestioning backing. Lenin's ideals of class war shaped many policies of the Civil War era, particularly War Communism and its campaigns against 'kulaks' in the countryside. However, the peasant revolts and the Kronstadt Rebellion showed him the shortcomings of using war approaches in peacetime.

At the Tenth Party Congress in 1921, Lenin led the regime to adopt the NEP, despite his own doubts. In 1922 he said, 'My wish is that in the next five years we will conquer peacefully not less than we conquered previously with arms'. The mid-1920s saw the rise in influence of productivist ideas, which can be seen by Lenin's enthusiasm for electricity and hopes for cultural revolution.

Lenin had a variety of personal interests, including exercise, chess and a passion for Mozart. He gave up most of these hobbies because they 'distracted' him from the task of making revolution. Lenin was good with children—he had none of his own—and liked pets, especially cats.



**Source 13.29** Lenin with his cat.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Lenin once said, 'I can't listen to music too often ... It makes me want to say kind, stupid things, and pat the heads of people ... But now you have to beat them on the head, beat them without mercy'.

## Legacy

Lenin's health declined after 1922, and he passed away in 1924 at the age of fifty-three. Lenin has cast a long shadow over the twentieth century.

- To his admirers, he was the great comrade of the working class and its vanguard—a brilliant revolutionary who continues to inspire revolutionary idealism.
- To his detractors, he was the founder of Soviet totalitarianism—a murderous ideologue blind to the errors of his own beliefs.

Lenin had profound influence as a revolutionary statesman. His vision brought enormous change to the lives of millions in the Soviet Republic. He was also a complex person, with many flaws and shortcomings. Lenin remains an enigma as his legacy and historical significance continues to be debated.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Menshevik Fedor Dan said of Lenin: 'There is no one else who for the whole twenty-four hours of every day is busy with the revolution, who thinks and even dreams only of the revolution. What can you do with a man like that?'



**Source 13.30**  
1967 Communist propaganda poster depicting Lenin, by Viktor Ivanov. The text features lines from a 1924 poem by Vladimir Mayakovsky: 'Lenin lived, Lenin lives, Lenin is to live forever'.

## KEY POINTS

- Co-founder and editor of SD newspaper *Iskra*, Lenin contributed significant ideas that shaped the Russian Marxist movement. His major philosophies were outlined in influential texts, which included *What Is to Be Done?* and *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*.
- He developed and led the Bolshevik faction of the SDs.
- Lenin's April Theses polarised the Russian Marxist movement and radicalised the Bolshevik Party platform. His ideas were controversial at first, but by October 1917 had placed the Bolsheviks at the head of mass support for Soviet power.
- Lenin was critical in getting the Bolshevik leadership agree to remove the Provisional Government by force.
- He founded and chaired the Sovnarkom, and was the most influential and authoritative figure on both the Central Committee and Politburo.
- Lenin influenced major campaigns and policy initiatives, including many new decrees, the Cheka and Red Terror, State Capitalism, War Communism, literacy improvements and the NEP.
- Lenin's leadership style fluctuated between a stubborn adherence to ideological beliefs and an ability to compromise at key moments. The influence of his leadership was significant during the Constituent Assembly dispersal, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the Tenth Party Congress and many other events.



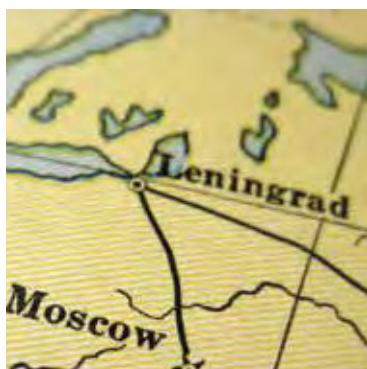
↑ **Source 13.26** Lenin and Stalin discuss their plans.

# PARTY LEADERSHIP AND THE DEATH OF LENIN

**Josef Stalin:** 'Departing from us, Comrade Lenin adjured us to hold high and guard the purity of the great title of member of the Party. We vow to you, Comrade Lenin, that we will fulfil your behest with credit! Departing from us, Comrade Lenin adjured us to guard the unity of our Party as the apple of our eye. We vow to you, Comrade Lenin, that this behest, too, we will fulfil with credit! Departing from us, Comrade Lenin adjured us to guard and strengthen the dictatorship of the proletariat. We vow to you, Comrade Lenin, that we will spare no effort to fulfil this behest, too, with credit!'

Lenin's health had been poor since 1918, when he survived an assassination attempt. He had an enormous workload, several medical conditions, and had been troubled by a weak stomach and severe headaches throughout his life. Lenin was also deeply upset by the 1920 death of Inessa Armand, with whom he had been romantically involved. As Kollontai recalled: 'Lenin never survived Inessa's death and it precipitated the illnesses which were eventually to undermine him too'.<sup>36</sup>

On 26 May 1922 Lenin suffered his first stroke. He was mentally alert and still able to speak, but was paralysed down his right side. Lenin rested for two months at his country house outside Moscow, recovered, and returned to work with a reduced load. However, he was living on borrowed time. In December he had two more strokes and had to get around in a wheelchair. Leadership of the party was shared by a 'triumvirate' of three leading Communists in Lenin's absence: Kamenev, Zinoviev and Stalin.



↑ **Source 13.31** Under the Bolshevik regime, cities were renamed to commemorate Communist leaders, e.g. Leningrad and Stalingrad.

→ **Source 13.32** Cited in Robert Daniels, *A Documentary History of Communism and the World: From Revolution to Collapse* (New England: New England University Press, 1994), 149–151.

## LENIN'S TESTAMENT

Since April 1922, Stalin had been General Secretary of the Communist Party, which meant that he headed the party bureaucracy. This was meant to be an administrative position, but Stalin had placed his supporters into positions of influence, and increased his support among the party rank and file.

However, this did not mean that Lenin had chosen Stalin as his successor. Lenin felt that no individual party member was capable of filling his position, and he assumed that a collective leadership would come about after his death.<sup>37</sup> Lenin was particularly suspicious of Stalin, who had come to wield enormous influence in his role as General Secretary. If anything, Lenin had become closer to Trotsky, who he hoped might restrain some of Stalin's policy proposals.

In late December 1922, Lenin dictated his 'Testament' to one of his secretaries. In it, he offered a critical assessment of all the leading Communists. His most damning appraisal was of Stalin:

### Lenin on Stalin

Comrade Stalin, having become General Secretary, has concentrated an enormous power in his hand; and I am not sure that he always knows how to use that power with sufficient caution ... Stalin is too rude, and this fault, entirely supportable in relations among us Communists, becomes insupportable in the office of General Secretary. Therefore, I propose to the comrades to find a way to remove Stalin from that position and appoint to it another man who in all respects differs from Stalin only in superiority—namely, more patient, more loyal, more polite and more attentive to comrades.

On 4 March 1923, after an argument with Stalin, Lenin had a stroke that left him unable to speak and almost totally paralysed. He never fully recovered, and died on 21 January 1924 at the age of fifty-three. Nadezhda Yoffe, the daughter of a senior party official, was with her father when news of Lenin's death was announced at the Congress of Soviets.

### Lenin's death

I have never seen so many people, especially men, who were in tears. I was sitting somewhere in a corner and sitting next to me was an elderly man—he looked like a worker. He turned around and said to me: 'Little one, what are we going to do? What's going to happen now?'

For the next few days Lenin's body was publicly displayed, and over half a million people queued in freezing conditions to pass his coffin and pay their respects. A special funeral edition of *Pravda* was released.

- Bukharin wrote: 'We shall never again see that great forehead, the wonderful head which radiated revolutionary energy in all directions'.
- Zinoviev described Lenin as 'a rebel among rebels, a thinker among thinkers'.
- Stalin called Soviet citizens to remember Lenin as 'a genius of geniuses among the leaders of the proletariat'.<sup>38</sup>

The whole of the USSR—as Russia was known after 1922—came to a standstill for Lenin's funeral on 27 January 1924.

## LENIN'S FUNERAL AND LEGACY

Stalin delivered the main eulogy at Lenin's funeral. Trotsky was noticeably absent—he later claimed he was told the wrong date by Stalin, but it is also possible he was too ill to travel.<sup>39</sup> At exactly 4 pm, cannons, factory whistles, train horns and sirens sounded out across the nation as Lenin's body was placed into its vault. Public radio called for silence and announced, 'Stand up, comrades, Illich is being lowered into his grave'. The silence was ended a few minutes later with the announcement: 'Lenin has died—but Leninism lives!'

Lenin's role in shaping the Communist Party and the direction of the USSR is significant, and historians are still debating his legacy. His death was a profound loss to the Communist party, and many issues remained uncertain. Lenin had bequeathed to his comrades:

- a party with a leadership based on his own personal authority
- an economic policy that was controversial and soon to be hotly debated.

Dispute would rage over these two issues in the coming years.



◀ **Source 13.33** Cited in Jonathan Lewis and Phillip Whitehead, *Stalin: A Time for Judgement* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1990), 39–40.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Lenin's body was preserved after his death and displayed in a sombre mausoleum in Red Square. Although there has been talk of laying him to rest in a proper grave, as he requested, his body can be seen there today. Shortly after his death, his wife Krupskaya wrote in *Pravda*: 'Do not build memorials to him, name palaces after him, do not hold magnificent celebrations in his memory. All of this meant so little to him'.

### ACTIVITY

#### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 What was the cause of Lenin's ill-health from 1922?
- 2 Briefly explain the assessment of the Communist Party leadership that Lenin gave in his Testament.
- 3 When did Lenin die? How old was he when he died?
- 4 What elements of Lenin's funeral suggest that the Soviet regime revered him as a great leader?

◀ **Source 13.34** Felix Dzerzhinsky leads the pallbearers carrying Lenin's coffin. Kamenev is to the left.

## ACTIVITY

### HISTORICAL INQUIRY

Research and analyse the impact of three key developments, challenges or policies of the Communist regime and their subsequent consequences. To guide your research, compose a series of historical inquiry questions that highlight the significance of your topics. Use your questions as subheadings to structure your response and to guide your research. Each inquiry question should include a brief introduction, a number of paragraphs citing evidence, and a short summative conclusion. Include a bibliography that demonstrates further reading on your topics.

### HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

#### W.H. Chamberlin

Every revolution has its ... combination of tragedy and triumph as it ... uproots individuals and whole classes and ... pushes up others which were previously submerged. Whether measured by the misery which it caused some, or by the opportunity which it created for others, or by the ... social reorganization which it brought about, the Russian Revolution is the greatest event of its kind in history ... [T]here has perhaps never been so ... spectacular an inflow of fresh people, mainly recruited from classes which were formerly largely excluded from the governing group, into posts of authority. Out of the endless turmoil and bloodshed of the terrible years from 1917 until 1921 there emerged a new state order, a new economic system, a new world outlook, a new conception of life and ethics, in short, all the elements of the distinctive new epoch of Russian national development.

#### Source 13.35 W.H.

Chamberlin, *The Russian Revolution 1918–1921* (New York: Universal Library, 1965), 462–463.

#### Richard Pipes

Judged in terms of its own aspirations, the Communist regime was a monumental failure: it succeeded in one thing only—staying in power. But since for the Bolsheviks power was not an end in itself but the means to an end, its mere retention does not qualify the experiment as a success ... 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. They ignored that the means—the well-being and even the lives of people—are very real, whereas the ends are always nebulous [vague] and often unattainable ... The tragic and sordid history of the Russian Revolution ... teaches that political authority must never be employed for ideological ends.

#### Source 13.36 Richard

Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 510, 512.

#### Stephen A. Smith

The Bolshevik revolution wrought calamity on a scale commensurate [in proportion] with the transformation in the human condition it sought to achieve. Measured by the benchmarks of contemporary politics, Bolshevik ambition leaves us reeling. But it is easier for us today to appreciate the illusions under which they laboured than the ideals they sought to achieve. Yet we shall never understand the Russian Revolution unless we appreciate that the Bolsheviks were fundamentally driven by outrage against the exploitation at the heart of capitalism and the aggressive nationalism that had led Europe into the carnage of the First World War. The hideous inhumanities that resulted from the revolution ... should not obscure that fact that millions welcomed the revolution as the harbinger [sign or indicator] of social justice and freedom.

#### Source 13.37 Stephen

A. Smith, *The Russian Revolution: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 167.

Using Sources 13.35, 13.36 and 13.37, and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Compare and contrast how each historian describes the consequences of the Russian Revolution.
- 2 Using these interpretations and your own knowledge, evaluate the extent to which the Communist regime compromised or achieved its revolutionary ideals.

# CHAPTER 13 REVIEW

## KEY SUMMARY POINTS

- The Cheka became a permanent institution of the Soviet state in the mid-1920s and was reorganised as the GPU/OGPU (United State Political Administration).
- Political repression continued into the NEP era. Mensheviks, SRs and intellectuals were intimidated by the political police.
- Experiments and innovations in art emerged in response to the revolution, particularly in the 1920s. Revolutionary themes and aesthetics were used in literature, poetry, painting, sculpture, film, architecture and theatre.
- There were examples of the revolution's influence in everyday life. Children's names, public places, rituals and language changed to reflect revolutionary references.
- The Sovnarkom made great efforts to improve literacy through reading rooms, night classes and travelling literacy activists.
- Commissar for Enlightenment Anatoli Lunacharsky was a passionate supporter of modern education, and encouraged new methods and approaches in the classroom.
- Zhenotdel, the women's department of the Central Committee, promoted women's rights and programs to reduce the burden of domestic duties. Leading Bolsheviks, such as Armand and Kollontai, championed women's rights as essential to the Communist revolution.
- Support for technology, education, rational economic planning and electrification reflected the productivist outlook of the Bolsheviks in the mid-1920s.
- Lenin's health deteriorated after 1922. He died in 1924 following a series of strokes. At the time of his death both the future of the NEP and the leadership of the party were unclear.

## ACTIVITY

### ESSAY

Write a 600–800-word essay on one of the topics below. Your essay should include an introduction, paragraphs supported by relevant evidence from primary sources and historical interpretations, and a conclusion.

- 'The consequences of the Russian Revolution were both triumphant and tragic.' Do you agree?
- 'We are not slaves, slaves we are not.' How did the Russian Revolution empower different people to change the world around them?
- 'The Russian Revolution had high hopes, but ultimately the Soviet regime failed to fulfil them.' To what extent do you agree?

### EXTENDED RESPONSES

Write an extended response on one or more of the topics below. Use evidence to support your response.

- Explain how initiatives in education and literacy brought change to Soviet society by 1927.
- Explain how the Soviet regime addressed women's rights in the new society.
- What changes and continuities in social and cultural conditions emerged in the Soviet Union in the 1920s?
- Outline how everyday life was affected by the Russian Revolution.
- Explain how the Communist regime consolidated its authority over critics and the general population in the NEP period.
- Discuss how revolutionary ideals were expressed through the productivist projects of the mid-1920s.



# CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN RUSSIAN SOCIETY, 1896–1927

## SOCIAL-CULTURAL

### INEQUALITY AND EXPLOITATION

Wealth and living conditions varied widely under the tsarist regime. Peasants and workers lived in appalling conditions and were exploited for their labour by a small privileged ruling class. There was little opportunity for social advancement by the poor. At the height of the Civil War, life for ordinary people became incredibly difficult because of famine and disease. Conditions improved and normalised during the NEP era.

### RELIGION

The Russian Orthodox Church reinforced the tsarist order, and dominated the lives of ordinary people. Seeing priests as 'exploiters' and religion as 'opiate of the people', the Communist government repressed the church and replaced its customs with new secular, revolutionary traditions.

### CLASS CONFLICT

Hatred of the bourgeoisie was a revolutionary ideal that gained support for the Bolsheviks among the working classes. The ruling elite of the tsarist era became 'former people' under Soviet rule: politically repressed, socially humiliated and economically impoverished.

### ARTISTIC INNOVATION

Soviet art and culture reflected and celebrated the idealism of the revolution. Blok, Deni, Mayakovsky and others explored bold styles and socialist themes.

### EDUCATION

Under the Soviet regime there were innovations in schooling, the alphabet and mass literacy campaigns. Literacy brought opportunities for social advancement.

### WOMEN'S RIGHTS

In a notoriously patriarchal society, the gains made for women under the Soviet regime were considerable, thanks to Armand, Kollontai and Zhenotdel.

### SOCIAL CUSTOMS

The new regime brought changes to names, greetings, rituals, language and fashion. Revolutionary motifs were ever-present in daily life.

### SUMMARY

The Soviet government encouraged experimentation and sought to engage people through education, the arts and propaganda. There were many improvements to social life. However, people of bourgeois backgrounds experienced great hardships as a result of the revolution.

## MILITARY

### RUSSO JAPANESE WAR

The tsarist government hoped for a 'short, victorious' war to distract the general population from deep-seated social conflict. However, a series of humiliating defeats brought the government into disrepute instead. The war worsened economic problems and heightened political tensions.

### WORLD WAR I

World War I exposed flaws in the tsarist regime. Political, social, economic and military challenges that emerged as a result of the war contributed significantly to the creation of a revolutionary situation by February 1917. Problems arising from the war continued to undermine the Provisional Government. The Bolsheviks' promise of 'peace' and their anti-imperialist stance helped them win power in October 1917.

### CIVIL WAR

This four-year conflict between Whites, Greens and Reds was the fundamental influence on Soviet institutions and policies, and resulted in a Communist victory in 1920. However, victory came at great cost: the death of 8 million people, and extraordinary damage to the Russian economy.

### POLISH-SOVIET WAR

Following Poland's 1920 invasion, the Red Army marched into Polish territory, sparking hopes of an international revolution. Poland's counter-offensive dashed those hopes.

### POPULAR REVOLTS

Peasant rebellions, soldier and sailors' mutinies, plus working-class demonstrations flared as a symptom of broad discontent with the tsarist regime. The Provisional Government was also rocked by rural unrest and mass demonstrations. In the New Society a profound crisis emerged when the previously loyal Kronstadt sailors rebelled in 1921. Around the same time, peasant Green armies rebelled in the Ukraine and other regions.

### SUMMARY

Marx said war was the 'midwife of revolution'. War undermined the tsarist and Provisional Governments, contributing towards revolutionary tensions. The Civil War and international conflicts had a profound influence in shaping the new society. The Communists became increasingly militaristic and policies became authoritarian because of the influence of military conflict.

## POLITICAL

### AUTOCRACY

Tsarist Russia was an absolute autocracy, where the Romanov dynasty ruled by divine right. It was not until October 1905 that any element of democratic representation was granted. Tsar Nicholas remained stubbornly opposed to any reduction in autocratic principles.

### DEMOCRACY

The February Revolution popularised the idea that Russia's future was democratic, and all were citizens. The Provisional Government granted considerable rights and freedoms to the people of Russia, but it remained an unelected authority. Lacking popular support and legitimacy, Russia's 'democratic' period under the Provisional Government lasted just eight months.

### CENTRALISATION

A vast bureaucratic civil service was a feature of the tsarist regime.

The October Revolution brought a 'Soviet' government to power, but over time the Communist party and Soviet state became highly centralised and hierarchical in structure. The government and its departments also became considerably bureaucratised over time.

### CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

A Constituent Assembly was a longed-for ideal. Its dissolution after just one day caused despair for its advocates, but was met with indifference by the general population.

### DIPLOMATIC ISOLATION

Western governments supported the Whites in the Civil War. Afterwards Soviet Russia was a pariah state, cut off from trade opportunities. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and disruption of the Civil War undermined the cohesion of the former Russian Empire.

### REPRESSION

The tsarist regime employed political police called the Okhrana that kept political opponents under threat through agents and a vast network of informants. The Communist regime also had political police, but the Cheka was larger and more brutal than the tsarist Okhrana.

Partly as a response to the Civil War, the regime imprisoned and executed thousands of real and supposed opponents. The level of repression was far greater under the Soviet regime than under tsarism.

### OPPOSITION GROUPS

Until 1905, trade unions and political groups were illegal in tsarist Russia, and were suppressed by the Okhrana.

Kadets, Mensheviks and others were harassed or banned in the new society. Many fled Russia and others were arrested or executed. Communist Party factions were banned.

### SUMMARY

Autocratic rule came to an end with the February Revolution, but Russia's future was not democratic. The Communists set up hierarchical and centralised structures. They repressed dissent and used terror to control their one-party state. While not yet entirely autocratic, by 1927 Russia was an authoritarian dictatorship of the Communist Party.

## ECONOMIC

### AGRICULTURE

Tsarist Russia was an agricultural society: 82 per cent of the population were peasants. Russia was the world's largest grain exporter. However, farming practices were outdated and inefficient, especially the use of strip farming and wooden ploughs. Population increases led to chronic land shortages by the 1890s.

### THE GREAT SPURT

Witte directed the expansion of industry in the 1890s. Foreign investment, a stable currency and investment in railway infrastructure saw the emergence of manufacturing and heavy industry.

### STATE CAPITALISM (1918)

This policy of mixed socialist and free-market practices brought economic breakdown and lasted less than six months.

### WAR COMMUNISM (1918–1921)

War Communism was celebrated by radicals and addressed immediate needs, but led to famine, shortages of goods and widespread suffering.

### NEP (1921–1927)

A mix of free market and state ownership, the NEP showed Lenin's ability to compromise. Industry recovered but stayed around pre-war levels. Agriculture made improvements.

### SUMMARY

Russia had mixed and uneven levels of economic development under the tsarist regime. Industry was emerging, while agriculture remained undeveloped and backward. Soviet economics reflected the challenges of the period and Bolshevik ideology. The suffering wrought by War Communism and the return to a mixed economy under the NEP left a mixed legacy.

# SECTION C

## ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

Additional material is provided for each section of the book. This includes extra exercises, projects, and resources to help you further develop your understanding of the concepts presented.

The additional material is organized by section:

- Section A: Basic Concepts**
  - Exercises: Practice problems related to basic concepts.
  - Projects: Practical projects to apply concepts.
  - Resources: Additional reading and links.
- Section B: Advanced Topics**
  - Exercises: Practice problems related to advanced topics.
  - Projects: Practical projects to apply concepts.
  - Resources: Additional reading and links.
- Section C: Applications**
  - Exercises: Practice problems related to applications.
  - Projects: Practical projects to apply concepts.
  - Resources: Additional reading and links.
- Section D: Case Studies**
  - Case Studies: Real-world examples and case studies.
  - Discussion Questions: Questions for discussion.
  - Resources: Additional reading and links.

Please refer to the table of contents or the index for specific sections and their corresponding additional material.



# ENDNOTES

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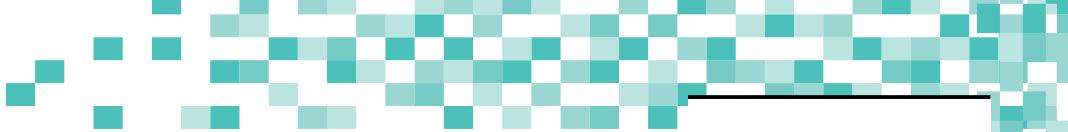
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# GLOSSARY

## A

### agent provocateur

Secret government agent who infiltrates a 'suspect' organisation and encourages members to break the law; this information is fed back to the government.

### anarchism

Political movement based on the goal of removing formal government; valued personal independence and collectivism.

### anarcho-syndicalism

A combination of distrust of the state and trade unionism; proponents argued that workers should manage their own industries and share profits among themselves.

### anarchy

A state of disorder and lawlessness due to the break down or absence of government authority.

### Anglo-Japanese Alliance

1902 agreement between Britain and Japan designed to control Russian expansionism in the Pacific.

### annexation

Taking over land and attaching it to territory already held.

### anti-Semitism

Dislike of Jews, or discrimination against Jews.

### arbitrariness

Decisions made at the whim of officials, particularly at the lower levels of government.

### autocracy

Absolute rule by a single person.

### autonomy

Independence; the ability of people within a state to decide their own future.

## B

### bagmen

Speculators who traded goods and food on the black market during War Communism.

### Bolshevichi

Female members of the Bolshevik Party.

### Bolsheviks

Radical faction of the Social Democratic Workers' Party (SDs). They emerged after the Second Party Congress of 1903. The Bolsheviks emerged as a distinct political entity after 1912. They seized power in October 1917.

### bourgeois (adj.)

The attitudes, possessions and behaviours of those that owned the means of production.

### bourgeoisie (n.)

The wealthy middle class and upper class of capitalists who own factories, industrial enterprises and other large-scale businesses.

### bureaucratisation

Excessive growth and reliance on government administration agencies.

### burzhooi

Working-class slang and derogatory term for bourgeois. Was used to describe people formerly of wealth and privilege.

## C

### capitalism

Economic system based on free-market principles, in which individuals are encouraged to seek prosperity and private capital (wealth). In theory, the government plays a limited role in the economy in a capitalist system, allowing the marketplace to decide general prices, salaries and conditions. Individuals and corporations are encouraged to trade goods, services, labour and land.

### CEC

All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the Soviets. Chaired by Sverdlov and, later, Kalinin.

### censorship

The restriction or removal of information from the public domain.

### Cheka

The Soviet political police, named from the abbreviation for the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution, Speculation and Sabotage. Founded in December 1917 and headed by Felix Dzerzhinsky. Also called 'Vecheka' or 'Tcheka.'

### Chekist

Member of the Cheka.

### civil war

A military conflict between groups within a society.

### coalition

Two or more groups that join together without necessarily agreeing on all issues.

### Comintern

Short for Communist International, and also known as Third International. An organisation set up by the Bolsheviks in 1919 to promote Communist party organisations worldwide.

### commissar

Minister or official of the Soviet government.

### Committee of Ministers

The heads of government ministries who managed the affairs of the Russian Empire.

### communism

A political and economic doctrine that aims to replace all private property and a profit-based economy with public ownership and collective control of the means of production (such as agriculture, natural resources and manufacturing). Based on theories and the work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

### conservative

Opposed to change and supportive of tradition.

### Constituent Assembly

Democratically elected body that discussed and formulated constitutional matters. The Bolsheviks dispersed the first and only Constituent Assembly in January 1918.

### cossack

A member of a people of Ukraine and southern Russia, noted for their horsemanship and military skill.

### coup d'état

Sudden overthrow of a government, often by military personnel or officials.

## D

### divine right

Political authority received directly from God.

### Duma

Russian word for 'parliament'; from the Russian *dumat*, meaning 'to consider'. The right to elected government was granted by Tsar Nicholas in the 1905 October Manifesto. Tsarist Russia had four Dumas, although only the last two served full terms. Deputies from the Fourth Duma formed the Provisional Government during the February Revolution.

## E

### emancipated

Freed or released from control by another person.

### exile

Being sent to live in the more remote regions of the Russian Empire, such as Siberia.

## F

### faction

Small group within a large group that opposes the majority position, or splits because of differences of opinion.

## **foreign interventionists**

Foreign armed forces involved in the Russian Civil War, namely Britain, France, the United States and Japan.

## **franchise**

The right to vote.

## **fratricide**

The killing of brothers.

## **Fundamental Laws**

Passed by Tsar Nicholas II on 23 April 1906, the Fundamental Laws reiterated the supreme power of the tsar and limited the powers of the newly-formed duma.

## **G**

### **garrison**

Group of soldiers stationed within a city or town; the building in which the group lives.

### **GOELRO**

State Commission for the Electrification of Russia, established in 1920.

### **gold standard**

A monetary system that defines the value of a country's currency to an amount in line with its gold reserves.

### **Gosplan**

State Planning Committee. Took over from Vesenka in supervising the economy and industrial expansion in 1921.

### **Greens/Green armies**

Peasant insurgent armies that fought against both Red and White armies in the Russian Civil War.

### **groznyi**

A traditional trait of Russian tsars, meaning awesome, fierce, mighty.

## **H**

### **haemophilia**

A rare inherited bleeding disorder where blood does not clot properly.

### **hereditary landowners**

People who had inherited land upon the death of a family member.

## **hierarchy**

A system of people in graded order, according to their status or authority.

## **I**

### **icons**

religious images used for worship by orthodox Christians.

### **imperialism**

To extend a country's power and influence by conquering and ruling over foreign territories.

### **indemnities**

Taking over territories and imposing reparation payments (compensation).

### **industrialisation**

Creating large-scale factories that will be more efficient and produce goods more cheaply.

### **intelligentsia**

The intellectual elite, usually professionals such as writers, artists, lawyers, doctors, educators and academics.

### **Iskra**

Social Democrat newspaper, translates as 'spark'.

## **K**

### **kombedy**

Committees of the Poor. Groups of poor peasants who were to help the government extract grain from kulaks under War Communism.

### **Komuch**

Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly. Called for honouring of the Constituent Assembly elections in 1917, in which the SRs gained a majority. Overthrown by Kolchak in November 1918.

### **Kronstadt**

Island naval base off the coast of Petrograd. The sailors of Kronstadt were revolutionary in outlook and helped topple the Provisional Government. They rose up against the Communists in March 1921 and were brutally suppressed.

## **kulak**

Peasant or farm owner who was rich enough to employ workers or lease out land. Russian word for 'fist'.

## **L**

### **Left Communists**

Radical wing of Bolshevik party, headed by Bukharin. Called for non-cooperation with Germany during negotiations over peace treaty; allied with Left SRs.

### **Left SRs**

Radical wing of the Socialist Revolutionary Party. Heirs to the political terrorism of their People's Will forebears. Left SRs formally split from the more moderate SRs in the midst of elections to the Constituent Assembly and joined Sovnarkom in December 1917. They left the Bolshevik-dominated government in protest at the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

### **liberal/liberalism**

Belief in the rule of law and the importance of freedoms and civil rights.

### **Little Father**

A name for the tsar used by common people. It reflected both his paternalistic and divine leadership.

## **M**

### **Mauser**

The most common type of pistol used by the Cheka and the Red Army.

### **Mensheviks**

Non-Leninist faction of the Social Democratic Workers' Party, which split from the Bolsheviks in 1903. From *menshinstvo*, meaning 'minority'. More moderate than Bolsheviks. The 'Menshevik-Internationalists' were a left-wing faction of the Menshevik party, headed by Martov, which supported the anti-war stance of the Bolsheviks. By October 1917 they were advocates of Soviet power, but on the basis of a coalition of socialist groups.

## **metallurgy**

Metal work and processing.

### **Milrevcom**

The Military Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet. A council headed by a five-man executive committee (dominated by Bolsheviks) that assumed authority over the Petrograd garrison in October 1917. Under the command of Trotsky, the Milrevcom played a key role in the Bolshevik seizure of power.

### **mir**

The village communal councils of Russian peasants. *Mir* means both 'village commune' and 'world'. This emphasises the extent to which the village was often the peasants' whole world.

## **N**

### **Narkompros**

The Commissariat for Enlightenment (Arts, Literacy and Education). Headed by Lunacharsky, it oversaw Bolshevik initiatives in arts and education.

### **nationalism**

Identifying with your country and national identity; showing loyalty and support towards your nation's interests.

### **NEP**

New Economic Policy, introduced at the Tenth Party Congress in March 1921 to promote economic recovery after the Civil War by abandoning grain requisitioning (in favour of a 'tax in kind'), reintroducing private trade and relaxing state control of industry. Nationalised control of heavy industry and the banking sector was maintained. Many elements of the NEP were contentious.

### **Nepmen**

Merchants and private traders who emerged during the NEP to exploit commercial opportunities.

**NKVD**

Secret police force established in 1934 to take over the work of the OGPU, including control the labour camp system.

**O****October Manifesto**

Issued by Tsar Nicholas II on 17 October 1905 in response to the revolution that year. Granted limited civil liberties and allowed the creation of State Duma (national parliament).

**OGPU**

United State Political Administration. Soviet political police that evolved in the 1920s from the Cheka and the GPU. The OGPU favoured surveillance and infiltration rather than mass terror. Like the Cheka, it was headed by Felix Dzerzhinsky.

**Okhrana**

Tsarist secret police, charged with protecting the tsar and Imperial family, investigating left-wing revolutionaries and combating terrorism.

**opposition platforms**

Groups within the Communist party that voiced concerns and criticism; they included the Workers' Opposition and the Democratic Centralists. Lenin clamped down on these platforms with his decree 'On Party Unity'.

**oratory**

Public speaking.

**Orgburo**

The organisational body of the Bolshevik Central Committee.

**P****parliamentarianism**

A system of government in which the ruling authority is dependent on the direct or indirect support of an elected body, usually with law-making power or influence (often called a parliament).

**partisans**

Ordinary people, rather than soldiers, who join together to fight enemy soldiers occupying their country or region.

**patriarchal**

Society ruled by men.

**patrimonial**

Land or wealth inherited from parents or ancestors.

**peasants**

Farm workers who rented land or worked for farm owners.

**Petrograd Soviet**

The workers' council established in Petrograd in March 1917 after the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II. Comprised a rival power base to Provisional Government.

**pogrom**

An organised, violent attack on a minority group (particularly Jews). In this context the term was used to emphasise the destructive and mindless nature of the drunken riots.

**Politburo**

The political bureau of the Bolshevik Central Committee.

**power vacuum**

When an authority or government has lost control and no one has replaced it.

**Pravda**

Translates as 'truth'; *Pravda* was the main Bolshevik newspaper.

**prodrazverstka**

Forced grain requisitioning by government. Instituted under War Communism after January 1919.

**Progressive Bloc**

An alliance of liberal Duma deputies who petitioned the tsar for political reform during World War I, particularly the creation of a government that had public support.

**proletariat**

Marxist term for the industrial working class (factory workers).

**Proletcult**

Proletarian Culture Movement. A non-Communist organisation that placed great emphasis on artistic endeavour as a means to achieve socialism.

**prologue**

An event or act that leads to another; an introduction.

**propaganda**

Material designed to influence people's political opinions; usually involves presenting facts selectively or appealing to emotion rather than intellect. Often in a visual form in Russia, e.g. posters and films.

**purge**

To remove or cleanse impure elements. In a political context, it means finding and neutralising rivals or opponents, usually within your party.

**R****radical**

To be committed to extensive political, social and economic change. By their nature, revolutionaries are radicals.

**reactionary**

To be adamantly opposed to change.

**real worth/real wages**

The buying power of wages once adjusted for inflation, i.e. the amount of goods and services that can be purchased with the money earned by an employee.

**Red Army**

The Workers' and Peasants' Red Army was founded during the Civil War by Leon Trotsky in February 1918. In 1922 it became the army of the Soviet Union. The Red Army continued until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. 'Red' symbolises the blood of the workers in their struggle against capitalism.

**redemption payments**

Annual taxes paid by peasants to the tsarist government in return for an allocation of land.

**Red Guards**

Groups of armed workers formed by the Bolsheviks in 1917; abolished after the creation of the Red Army in 1918.

**reform**

The process of slow and gradual change. Reformists aim to amend the established order and improve its flaws—but they do not want widespread or disruptive changes in society.

**regiment**

Military unit containing two or more battalions.

**Revolutionary Defencism**

War waged in defence of new revolutionary government.

**requisition**

When a government or official body seizes and claims property or material.

**RSFSR**

The Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic was declared on 7 November 1917. After 1922 Soviet Russia was known as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

**Russification**

The imposition of Russian language, culture and religion on non-Russians, especially ethnic minorities in Imperial Russia.

**S****Secretariat**

The administrative wing of the Bolshevik party and Soviet government.

**serfdom**

An agricultural system based on virtual slavery, where peasants were owned by nobles or wealthy landowners.

**Slavic**

East European ethnicity with shared culture and origin of language.

**Smolny Institute**

Bolshevik headquarters and meeting place of the Petrograd Soviet.

## **social hierarchy**

A system of people in graded order, according to their status or authority.

## **socialism**

Ideology that calls for the equal distribution of wealth by the state. The basis of socialism is a society built on fair and equitable political, social and economic structures. Revolutionary socialism argues that this can only be achieved by the overthrow of capitalism; reformist socialism argues that such changes can come gradually and without undue conflict.

## **sovereign**

A respectful term for addressing a royal or high-ranking ruler.

## **soviet**

Originally referred to a workers', soldiers' or peasants' council. Soviets became formal organs of the government under the Bolsheviks and acted as 'houses of review' to the Sovnarkom.

## **Soviet power**

Establishment of a government authority that would act in the best wishes of the working classes.

## **Sovnarkom**

Acronym for the Council of People's Commissars, the Soviet government that came to power in the October Revolution. Each ministry or Commissariat was headed by a commissar. Lenin was the chairman of Sovnarkom.

## **speculation**

Buying and stockpiling goods with the aim of selling them later for profit.

## **spetsy**

Russian for 'specialist'. This could include former tsarist officers who served in the Red Army or members of the middle or upper classes who were employed by the Bolshevik regime for their technical knowledge as engineers, managers, etc.

## **State Capitalism**

Economic policy initially adopted by the Bolsheviks, emphasising a mixed economy, the employment of bourgeois specialists and industries managed by workers.

## **State Council**

The tsar's advisory panel; many of its members were nobles or members of the Romanov family.

## **subbotnik**

Voluntary work day on a weekend.

## **suffrage**

The right to vote in political elections.

## **surplus**

Excess supply; an amount more than is permitted.

## **T**

### **thou**

Russian has two forms of the personal pronoun 'you'. One is informal, used when addressing people you know very well, and for speaking to children. The other is formal and more polite. Soldiers wanted to be addressed by the formal 'you'.

## **Treaty of Brest-Litovsk**

Peace treaty signed on 3 March 1918 at Brest-Litovsk (Poland) between Russia and Germany, marking the former's exit from World War I. Though almost obsolete before the end of the year, the treaty took pressure off the Bolsheviks as they waged civil war. It also acknowledged the independent status of Poland, Finland and countries in the Baltic region.

## **Treaty of Portsmouth**

Signed in England on 5 September 1905, the Treaty formally ended the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905.

## **triumvirate**

Group of three that wields power and influence (also called 'troika'). In a Russian context it usually refers to Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev.

## **tsar**

The Russian equivalent of 'emperor'; derived from the ancient Roman word Caesar.

## **U**

## **universal suffrage**

The right to vote for all citizens.

## **V**

## **Vanguard party**

A political organisation that would lead the workers to socialist revolution; without leadership, the proletariat could never develop 'revolutionary consciousness'.

## **Vesenkha**

Supreme Council of the National Economy; government body that regulated and managed the economy under the Bolsheviks.

## **Vikzhel**

Union of Russian Railroad Workers. Attempted to pressure the Bolsheviks into a coalition government after the October Revolution.

## **W**

## **War Industries Committee**

An organisation of patriotic businessmen who tried to assist the Russian government with the war effort.

## **War Communism**

Series of harsh, centralised economic measures adopted during the Civil War: seizing private businesses; nationalising industry; and forcible removal of surplus grain from peasants. Abandoned after March 1921.

## **White armies**

Counter-revolutionary armed forces opposed to the Bolsheviks in the Civil War. Comprised a disparate group of Kadets, dispossessed landowners and factory owners, monarchists and devout members of the Orthodox Church.

## **Z**

## **zemstvos**

Elected local assemblies, largely made up of landed gentry. Established by Tsar Alexander II in the mid-nineteenth century and abolished after the October Revolution.

## **Zhenotdel**

Women's Department of the Central Committee, led by Inessa Armand and Alexandra Kollontai. Promoted women's rights and advancement.

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