

# Russian Revolution Timeline

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## 1870

**April 10<sup>1</sup>** Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, later known as **Vladimir Lenin**, is born in Simbirsk, Russia

## 1878

**Dec 6** Ioseb Besarionis dze Jughashvili, better known as **Joseph Stalin**, is born in Gori, modern-day Georgia

## 1879

**Autumn** A Russian populist group, *The People's Will*, is formed.<sup>2</sup>

**Oct. 26** Lev Davidovich Bronstein, later known as **Leon Trotsky**, is born in Yanovka, modern-day Ukraine.

## 1881

### Important Event

**March 1** People's Will succeed in **assassinating Tsar Alexander II**.<sup>3</sup> This act of terrorism is the first breath of potential revolution that proceeds the events of 1905 and 1917. The People's Will group go on to inspire other revolutionaries including the future SR party.<sup>4</sup>

Alexander III becomes the next Tsar.

## 1887

**March 1** Failed assassination attempt on Alexander III. One of the conspirators is Aleksandr Ulyanov, Lenin's older brother.

## 1894

### Important Event

**Oct. 20** Nikolai II, more commonly known as **Tsar Nicholas II** becomes Tsar of Russia after his father, Alexander III, dies. He marries Princess Alix of Hesse shortly after this. He will be the last Tsar of Russia.<sup>5</sup>

## 1898

**March 13** In Minsk the First Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party is held, forming the party.<sup>6</sup>



## 1902



Another socialist party, the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries, forms.

## 1903

### Important Event

**July – August** At the Second Congress of the RSDLP, the party splits over a debate about party membership into two factions: the Bolsheviks (meaning 'majority'), led by Vladimir Lenin, and the Mensheviks (meaning 'minority'), with no one leader but prominent figures include Julius Martov and Leon Trotsky. The Mensheviks outnumber the Bolsheviks and

<sup>1</sup> All dates prior to February 14, 1918 are in the Julian calendar.

<sup>2</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, *Nardonaya Volya*.

<sup>3</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, *Alexander II*.

<sup>4</sup> Fitzpatrick, Sheila, 25.

<sup>5</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, *Nicholas II*.

<sup>6</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, *Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party*.

this remains the case until Sept. 1917.<sup>7</sup>

## 1904

### Important Event

**Jan 27** Japan attacks the Russian-occupied Port Arthur, beginning the **Russo-Japanese War**. This war goes terribly for the Russians who suffer a defeat to an enemy they were expected to beat comfortably. Revolts begin at home and with the army being off in Manchuria, they are not able to stop the brewing unrest.<sup>8</sup>

## 1905

### Important Event

**Jan 9** Demonstrations and unhappiness in Saint Petersburg leads to a series of mass demonstrations throughout the city, led by *Father Gapon*. Gapon leads a group of demonstrators to the Winter Palace to deliver demands to the Tsar but are fired upon by Imperial Guards in what is known as **Bloody Sunday**. Hundreds are left dead or wounded. Mass strikes pop up all over the empire, beginning the **1905 Revolution**.



Figure 1. Artistic rendering of Bloody Sunday depicting the Imperial Guards firing on unarmed demonstrators outside the Winter Palace.

<sup>7</sup> Fitzpatrick, Sheila, 30.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 32-33.

**Oct 17**

Nicholas II releases the *October Manifesto*. Reception is mixed, but enough people are satisfied that the revolution is essentially over, barring some holdouts.

The manifesto promises an elected Duma as well as freedom of conscience, speech, and assembly. Marxists hope this is the “bourgeois revolution” they have been waiting for.<sup>9</sup>

## 1906

**Spring**

The Tsesarevich, Alexei, has a hemophilia fit and Grigori Rasputin is summoned to help.

### Important Event

**July 9**

Pyotr Stolypin is made Prime Minister after the **Duma is dissolved** by Nicholas. Stolypin will go on to introduce many reforms that, while bolstering Russia’s economy, are incredibly repressive. His agrarian reforms lead to the formation of the Kulak class.

## 1911

**Sept. 1**

At an opera in Kiev, Pyotr Stolypin is shot. He dies 4 days later.

## 1912

**January**

Prague Conference. The Bolsheviks officially split from the RSDLP to form their own party.

## 1914

**July 17**

After Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia, Nicholas II orders

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 34-35.

**August 18**

a general mobilization, entering Russia into World War I. To make it sound less ‘German’, the “Sankt” and “burg” are removed from Saint Petersburg (Sankt Petersburg in Russian) and the city is renamed *Petrograd*.

## 1916

**July**

The Second International disbands after unreconcilable differences between the various groups representing different countries on different sides of the war.

**Dec. 17**

Russian nobles led by Dmitri Pavlovich and Prince Felix Yusupov conspire to assassinate Rasputin. He is invited to Yusupov’s estate where he is poisoned and shot before being dumped in the Nevka river.

## 1917

### Important Event

**Feb. 23**

On *International Women’s Day*, there is a massive women-led strike due to food rations and poor working conditions. This strike matures over the coming days to a full-on revolution with students and labour groups joining the demonstrations.

**Feb. 28**

Petrograd’s Military Commander reports to the Tsar that the demonstrators had taken over the railway station, artillery depots, and possibly the entire city.

**March 2**

Nicholas II, stuck on a train in Pskov, is **forced to abdicate** by delegates from the Duma.

His abdication marks the official creation of the **Russian**

**Provisional Government** in cooperation with the **Petrograd Soviet**. This is the beginning of the **Dual Power** period.<sup>10</sup>

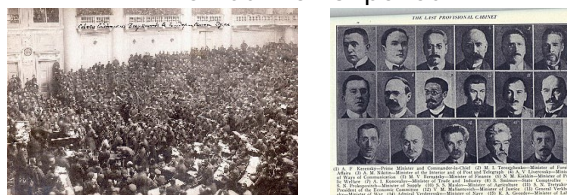


Figure 2. Left: The Petrograd Soviet. Right: Headshots of the third Provisional Government cabinet

### Important Event

**April 3**

**Lenin returns to Petrograd** after being smuggled out of Switzerland by the Germans. Lenin’s return is marked by the *April Theses*, where Lenin argues for no cooperation with the Provisional Government as well as an establishment of a land program. The slogan of Bolshevik revolution becomes ‘*All Power to the Soviets*’.<sup>11</sup>

**June 18**

Alexander Kerensky kicks off the Kerensky campaign as an attempt to prove the revolution did not weaken Russia but strengthened her. This goes horribly.

**July 3**

In response to the botched Kerensky offensive and the Provisional Government in general, soldiers and workers revolt in Petrograd. The Bolsheviks do not endorse the demonstrations, but they are blamed for them anyways. Protestors are shot and dispersed, Lenin is forced into hiding, Trotsky and others are arrested. These events are known as the **July Days**.

**Aug. 28**

The *Kornilov Affair*. General Kornilov’s march on Petrograd to dissolve the Soviet ends in failure and his arrest. Kerensky had appointed Kornilov as commander-in-chief, so he is blamed for this along with Kornilov.

<sup>10</sup> Fitzpatrick, Sheila, 44-47.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 51-52.

**Important Event**

- Oct. 25** After the Bolshevik Central Committee met and approved it a couple days prior, the Bolsheviks stage an uprising against the Provisional Government known as the **October Revolution**. The Bolsheviks take the Winter Palace and Kerensky flees Petrograd. Technically speaking this is the beginning of the **Russian Civil War** but no fighting occurs until 1918.
- Nov. 12** Elections for the promised constituent assembly are held.
- Dec. 20** The Revolutionary Military Committee (RMC) is reformed by Lenin into the **Cheka**, a precursor to what will become the **KGB**.

**1918**

- Jan. 5-6** The constituent assembly meets and is swiftly disbanded by the Bolsheviks and Left SRs after a motion forcing the Assembly to recognize the Bolsheviks as the true source of power in Russia fails.
- Feb 1 (Feb 14)** Soviet Russia adopts the Gregorian calendar. *All dates from this point forward use the Gregorian calendar.*
- March 3** **Important Event**  
**The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk** is signed between Russia and Germany. This sees Russia lose a lot of land, people, and access to resources, particularly food. It is however the first time an international treaty recognizes the legitimacy of the Soviet government.

- March 12** The Bolsheviks Communists<sup>12</sup> move the capital from Petrograd to Moscow.
- July 17** At the “house of special purpose” near Yekaterinburg, the Romanov family is murdered.
- August 30** A fellow socialist revolutionary Fanny Kaplan shoots Lenin in Moscow.

**1919**

- Feb. 14** The Polish-Soviet War begins.

**1921**

- March** The Kronstadt Naval Base, formally a revolutionary stronghold, rebels in the *Kronstadt Rebellion*.
- March 8 – 16** 10<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party. Lenin seeks to lower the risk of growing party factionalism. He introduces a resolution called “On Unity” and being accused of forming factions was now something that could get you removed from the party.<sup>13</sup>
- March 18** The Polish-Soviet War ends with the signing of the Treaty of Riga.
- March 21** **Important Event**  
In response to the Kronstadt rebellion and other pressures from within the party, Lenin introduces the **New Economic Plan (NEP)**. While large-scale industry and banking would still be state run, smaller businesses were allowed to operate and foreign investors were welcomed. The goal was to give Russia a rapid influx of cash since they had been drained by WWI and the Civil War. Some Bolsheviks supported the NEP, but others saw it as a betrayal of

<sup>12</sup> On March 8, 1918 the Bolshevik party officially becomes the *Communist Party of Russia*.

<sup>13</sup> Fitzpatrick, Sheila, 101.

communism and the revolution. Stalin was one such party member.<sup>14</sup>

## 1922

- April 3** Joseph Stalin is made the General Secretary of the Communist Party.<sup>15</sup>
- June 8 – August 7** The *Trial of the Socialist Revolutionaries*. 12 former SR party members are put on trial and given the death penalty. This was later changed to imprisonment, however it would only be a temporary stay of execution as all 12 would be executed in Stalin's purges.
- May** Lenin suffers his first stroke.
- Oct. 25** Vladivostock is occupied by the Red Army, ending the Civil War.
- Dec.** Lenin has his second stroke. At this point a power struggle begins to emerge between Stalin and Trotsky since Lenin's health was clearly declining.

At some point this month Lenin also dictates what is known as *Lenin's Testament*: a document in which Lenin outlines what he hopes for the party leadership after his death, and says that Stalin would not be cautious enough with the power he would hold.<sup>16</sup>

- Dec. 28** A conference between the:
- Russian SFSR
  - Transcaucasian SFSR
  - Ukrainian SSR
  - Byelorussian SSR
- confirms the Treaty on the Creation of the USSR.
- Important Event**

- Dec. 30** The Treaty on the Creation of the USSR is ratified and the **USSR officially comes into existence**. In terms of the revolutionary aims, this was to many the culmination of their efforts. Much of what was previously the Russian Empire had been included in this socialist union.



Figure 3. Flag of the USSR at its creation in 1922.

## 1923

- March** Lenin has a third stroke and temporarily is paralyzed and loses the ability to speak.
- October** Power struggle within the Communist party gets worse with clear lines being formed between Trotsky's *Left Opposition* and Stalin's *Troika*.

## 1924

- Jan. 21** Lenin has a fourth stroke that sends him into a coma. Later that day, **Vladimir Lenin dies**. He was 53.
- Jan. 26** Petrograd is renamed Leningrad.
- May** Lenin's Testament is brought to the Central Committee, but two members of the Committee Kamenev and Zinoviev (the other two people that make up Stalin's Troika) say Lenin's claims are baseless.

<sup>14</sup> Fitzpatrick, Sheila, 95-96.

<sup>15</sup> At this point the position did not have the same weight it would have after Lenin's death.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 108.

## 1925

- January** Trotsky removed from the People's Commissariat of War.
- April 10** The city of Tsaritsyn is renamed to Stalingrad.

## 1926

- Early** Kamenev and Zinoviev swap allegiances and form the *United Opposition* with Trotsky against Stalin.
- October** Trotsky is removed from the Politburo.<sup>17</sup>

## 1927

- October** Both Trotsky and Zinoviev are removed from the Central Committee.

## 1928

- January** Trotsky exiled to Alma-Ata (now Almaty, Kazakhstan).
- Early** Show trials against Bourgeois class enemies begin in Donbass.

After returning from Siberia, Stalin also claims that the Kulaks are hoarding grain and this is the reason for the grain shortages. This begins the *dekulakization policies*.<sup>18</sup>

### **Important Event**

- Oct. 1** The **First Five Year Plan** aimed at rapidly industrializing Russia begin. This era is a conflicting one, as Stalin seeks to expand Russian metalworking industries but at the same time is executing bourgeois engineers. Ultimately though this plan was an investment in the future as many of the projects planned don't

come online until the conclusion of the First Five Year Plan in 1932.<sup>19</sup>

## 1929

- January** Trotsky expelled from USSR.
- Summer** Dekulakization is in full swing as are Stalin's plans for agricultural collectivization.



Figure 4. An anti-kulak poster during the First Five Year Plan. It reads, "Kick kulaks from the kolkhozes."

Politburo establishes collective farms (kolkhoz) and state farms (sovkhoz).

## 1930

Famines begin all throughout the Soviet Union that will last until 1933. Perhaps most notable among these famines is the Ukrainian famine, also called the **Holodomor**. In total, an estimated 5.7 – 8.7 million people die due to famines in this time period.

## 1934

- Jan. – Feb.** 17<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party known as the "Congress of Victors" due to the urban development, agricultural collectivization, and economic

<sup>17</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, *Role in Soviet Government of Leon Trotsky*.

<sup>18</sup> Fitzpatrick, Sheila, 125.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 132-133.

growth because of the First Five Year Plan.<sup>20</sup>

### **Important Event**

- Dec. 1** Leader of the Communist Party in Leningrad Sergei Kirov is assassinated. Kirov was a close associate of Stalin and his assassination is used as justification for the beginning of **Stalin's purges.**

## **1936**

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While in exile in Norway, Trotsky pens *The Revolution Betrayed*, a condemnation of Stalin's leadership and claims that Stalin had betrayed Lenin's vision for the USSR.

- July 29** The Central Committee sends a letter to all the various party organizations across the USSR claiming that "spies, provocateurs, saboteurs, White Guards, [and] Kulaks" were conspiring against the Party and were responsible for Kirov's death.

- August** The **Moscow Show Trials** begin with the *Trial of the Sixteen*. This trial is famous for including Stalin's original *Troika* supporters, Lev Kamenev and Grigory Zinoviev. Both are executed. Two more show trials would be conducted in early 1917 and 1918.

## **1937**

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- Feb.** Stalin gives the Central Committee the green light to begin "witch hunts." These last through all of 1937 and almost all of 1938. Communist party members in prominent positions are accused of being "enemies of

the people" and arrested, executed, or sent to the Gulags. At the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1956, Nikita Khrushchev said that of the 139 members elected to the Central Committee at the "Victory Congress" in 1934, only 41 survived the purges.<sup>21</sup>

## **1939**

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- Aug. 24** Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact signed.
- Sept. 1** WWII begins with the Nazi invasion of Poland.
- Sept. 17** Stalin begins invasion of Poland citing concerns for "ethnic Ukrainians and Belarusians" in Poland.

## **1940**

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- Spring – Summer** The USSR occupies and annexes the Baltic States (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia) as well as parts of Romania and Finland.
- Aug. 21** Leon Trotsky is assassinated in Mexico.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 165.



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