

Sonali Krishnan-Deem

29 Nov 2018

Professor Jeremy Abrams

Pols 150

Realism in the Russian Revolution

Realism, explained by Thomas Hobbes, is a view seeing international relations as a struggle between self interested states within a system of permanent anarchy. Typically, realism is discussed in reference to multiple countries, but what is often overlooked is the relationship between realism and the origin of revolution. While researching, it was difficult to find much information relating the two, as if the climate at the individual level does not affect the international level. A majority of the works on realism are written by or derived from Henry Kissinger, who claims that revolutionary states are dissatisfied with the current state of international affairs, but does not elaborate further. Fred Halliday, author of *Revolution and World Politics*, writes, "For Kissinger, revolutionary states pose a challenge to the international balance of power: because of the dissatisfaction that underlies the revolution itself, they are states that tend not to accept or recognize the limits in the conduct of foreign affairs."

Revolutions change the state's preferences, causing the interests of the state on an international level to change. Furthermore, it distorts the states perception of the international realm, further causing issues on the international level, as well as increasing uncertainty and misinformation for all (Kent). As will be explained by the Russian Revolution (from 1905 to 1917), revolutions are a key component to change in the world, and are grossly overlooked concerning political realism.

In 1861, under the rule of Tsar Alexander II, the Emancipation Manifesto was created, abolishing serfdom throughout the country. This led to rapid urbanization in the major cities, such as St. Petersburg and Moscow. These cities were already undergoing rapid industrialization in an attempt to keep up with the western world, and the establishment of a new working class both helped and harmed the situation. The working conditions started out as terrible, and did not improve without protest. For example, in 1890 the workday was limited to eleven and a half hours. The working class, comprised of former unskilled serfs, was being paid incredibly low wages for the amount of work required in terrifyingly unsafe work environments. This combined with the abuse of power by factory owners led to many strikes all over Russia.

In Russia, participating in a strike was seen as a criminal offense (Sablinsky). Often what would happen is the leaders would be arrested for conspiracy and corruption, but the government would make one mistake. They wanted to keep their people happy, so they would take the strikers grievances into consideration. More often than not, the issues would be somewhat resolved (such as limiting the workday to eleven and a half hours). The citizens then began to use this as an effective way to get what they wanted out of their government. Changes were very minor, but they happened often enough that they had a large effect on the working world. Strike activity reached it's all time high in Russia from 1895 to 1905, with an average of 176 strikes per year (Ascher).

In 1905, big changes were made. The Assembly of the Russian Factory and Mill Workers of the City of St. Petersburg, hereafter referred to as The Assembly, was headed by Father Gapon. In his words, the organization was "a noble endeavor, under the guidance of truly Russian educated laymen and clergy, to foster among the workers a sober, Christian view of life

and to instill the principle of mutual aid, thereby helping to improve the lives and working conditions of laborers without violent disruption of law and order in their relations with employers and the government” (Sablinsky). Father Gapon had a soft spot for the working class, and did his best to help improve their lives. In December 1904, four workers were fired from their factory jobs for being involved in The Assembly. This made the rest of the company go on strike, causing many other companies to go on strike as well. By the end of January 1905, St. Petersburg was without electricity, newspapers, or public spaces. On Sunday January 22, 1905, Father Gapon and hundreds of workers peacefully marched on the Winter Palace to explain their grievances to Tsar Nicholas II. The Tsar was not in residence, and the military opened fire on the crowd, thinking it would be a violent protest or an attempt to overthrow the monarchy. Hundreds of casualties occurred, giving the strike its name of “Bloody Sunday”, and initiating a strike movement that swept across the country. In that time, there were about 15,000 workers hanged or shot, 20,000 injured, and 45,000 exiled. To quell the citizens, Tsar Nicholas II created the October Manifesto in late 1905. This established a parliamentary body, called the Duma. Although its intent was to represent the people, it was unfortunately given almost no power or influence and had very little effect on policy change in Russia.

In July 1914, World War I began. In August, Russia agreed to help its ally, Serbia, against Austria-Hungary. The Russian Army suffered many, many, defeats and fought in very poor conditions, as often happens in war. Both Russian soldiers and Russian citizens had a huge loss of morale due to many contributing factors such as losing repeatedly, a worsening economy, an increase in subsistence farming leading to a lack of food around the country, a massive increase in inflation, and continuing poor working conditions. In an attempt to resolve the

country's military issues, Tsar Nicholas II took control of the Russian army in 1915, leaving his German born wife and her supposed "holy man", Rasputin, in charge of the empire.

Unfortunately, half the Russian people thought that it was a plot for the Germans to take over the country, and the other half thought that Rasputin's influence was creating disastrous ministerial appointments and corruption, as well as worsening the conditions of the country as a whole. On top of all this, the Ottoman Empire established a blockade on the southern border of Russia, blocking all major trade routes. This stopped the country from giving or receiving any goods, further worsening the economic crisis and not allowing Russia to provide munitions to its army. So, to sum up, World War One has given Russia nothing but crushing defeat, loss of morale, no supplies, no food, no money, ten million casualties, and more. This all contributes to the sharp loss of confidence in the regime, even in the ruling class.

At this point in time, many political parties are being formed, most notably the socialist factions, the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. They have very similar ideologies, although Mensheviks were more loose, reformist types. They believed that Russia was not quite ready for socialism and that the revolution should be led by the people already holding the power, the bourgeoisie, or the ruling class, and not the proletariat, or the working class. Bolsheviks were more of an organizationally united party of serious revolutionaries. They believed the bourgeoisie could not be trusted to carry out their democratic revolution, because it would mean a loss of power for them.

Since Bloody Sunday, the socialist leaders had been in exile, and they were ready to return in 1917. In December 1916, Rasputin was murdered. In February 1917, many workers in the city of Petrograd (St. Petersburg renamed to be more Russian) went on strike. By the end of

the month, the entire city was shut down. The Tsar regime had fallen apart, and Nicholas II was forced to abdicate the throne. From this, Russia gets the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviets, who make up the basis of the government. The two competed against each other for power, one being for a constitutional democracy and the other for complete socialist reform. With this much representation, you would think that the citizens would see some improvement in the state of things, but unfortunately no! During this dual power period, the provisional government chose to stay involved in World War One, which was ultimately a terrible idea. All of the terrible conditions that were mentioned above just got worse, and the people felt that even though they had succeeded in overthrowing the monarchy, they did not succeed in improving their own lives. In June, the Provisional Government saw fit to launch an attack on Germany, which backfired. In July, some Bolsheviks took to the streets and called for "Power to all Soviets!" but this mini revolution was disowned by Lenin, who explained that it was not quite time yet. In August, the military attempted to take over the government in an attempt to establish a dictatorship of authoritarian totalitarianism. At this point, the leader of the Provisional Government, Alexander Kerensky (a socialist) asked Lenin for help in maintaining control of the government. The Provisional Government was hated so much that the Bolsheviks began to gain momentum, and eventually in October Lenin, Trotsky, and others overthrew the Provisional government and created a Government by Soviets. These Soviets are political organizations - local councils elected by bodies of workers and peasants. In November, elections to the Russian Constituent Assembly were held. The Bolsheviks - who were confident that they would win fair and square - only got 24% of the vote. Upon learning this, Lenin and others barred non Bolsheviks from membership in soviets, thus not allowing them to vote. Most of

these people who were denied their vote were people in non industrialized or urbanized cities. These cities saw less of the impact of the war and poor governing skills and simply wanted their voices to be heard. By denying the votes, the Bolsheviks were able to take control of the Russian government and create a dictatorship of the proletariat. This, combined with the end of the war and trying to establish a steady economy, eventually led to the creation of the red and white armies, thus plunging Russia into a civil war.

As exemplified, the citizens always prioritized self interest. The proletariat was created in 1860 with the emancipation of serfs, and since then have worked for their rights to be represented in their country, because after all, they make up a very large portion of it.

Individually, one can see that the Russian people had a distrust of long term cooperation. Historically the proletariat had been beaten down by their government, and offered little to no solutions, so when they had a chance to take matters into their own hands (even with the small following like the Bolsheviks had), they took it.

For years, Russia has battled the unequal distribution of resources, which led to the creation of communist and socialist parties to begin with. Industrialization created many economic issues as it brought more variables into the equation and caused many riots, revolts, and strikes along the way. World War One caused issues for everyone around the world, but it was really the cherry on top for Russia. They were already struggling with issues such as food scarcity, economic downturn, and social inequity and the war amplified those issues and created even more. And finally, what pushed the country over the edge was the consistent power transitions. Transitions like these create chaos and stress no matter when they occur, but to have 3 in just a matter of a few years creates an incredibly unstable political environment.

To sum up, realism is not typically associated with revolutions because they are strictly internal conflicts, but it is these smaller conflicts that make the basis of global conflicts. The origins of revolution can be explained with realist theories, if one can just turn their head the right way.