

IGA-677 / RusNatSecPol / Lecture 4

The Seeds of Revolution

Yuri M. Zhukov
Visiting Associate Professor of Public Policy
Harvard Kennedy School

September 14, 2023

Today's objectives

1. *Identify*: key groups of actors central to Russian Revolution
2. *Distinguish*: revolutionary mobilization in theory vs. practice
3. *Discuss*: who (or what) planted the seeds of empire's collapse

Revolutionary actors

- peasants
- factory workers
- intellectuals
- ethnic, religious minorities
- military personnel
- someone else?

Note: these groups not mutually exclusive.

Discussion:

Who do you think presented the greatest threat to the imperial regime in 1917?



Figure 1: Angry Mob

Marx's Theory of Class Revolution

What is *capitalism*?

1. private ownership of means of production
2. existence of wage labor

Marx believed that capitalism's success will lead to its own **demise**.



Figure 2: Founding Fathers

Marx's Three Economic "Laws"

1. Law of Disproportionality
 - a) capitalist economies tend to overproduce certain goods
 - b) disproportionality b/w production, consumption causes econ crises
 - c) → **proletariat rebel against system**
2. Law of Concentration
 - a) competition forces capitalists to raise efficiency, accumulate capital
 - b) concentration of wealth, inequality
 - c) → **proletariat rebel against system**
3. Falling Rates of Profit
 - a) capital accumulates, rates of return decline
 - b) unemployment rises, wages fall
 - c) → **proletariat rebel against system**

Is this what happened in 1917?



Solidarity, June 20, 1917. The Hand That Will Rule the World—One Big Union.

Figure 3: Workers Unite!

The Countryside

Peasants

What did emancipation accomplish?

1. New rights
 - peasants' status changed from "serfs" to "temporarily indentured"
 - peasants given rights of full citizens, including property rights
2. Local self-government
 - peasants given right to form communes (*obshchiny*)
3. Land reform
 - landlords retained property rights over their land, but were required to allot land for peasant use
 - peasants pay state for land use, through labor (*barshchina*) or tax
 - state compensated landowners



Figure 4: The Emancipator

What did emancipation *not* accomplish?

1. Peasant land ownership

- peasants received land for homestead, not fields for farming
- field land given only to communes
- less acreage/family than pre-1861
- landlords retained “strips” of land (*otrezki*) that partitioned peasant holdings, made them unusable

2. Freedom from predatory taxes/rents

- buyout cost 2-5× market rate
- peasants still had to pay landlords rent to use “strips”
- peasant debt was written into law
- no “opt out” from land allotment

Result: all of this strengthened the institution of peasant **communes**



Figure 5: Hard at Work

What were peasant *communes*?

- village collectives, 300-2000 people
- field land communally owned,
distributed among families
- open field system: several large fields
subdivided into smaller family plots

Advantages

- provided financial security, insurance
- cheaper than private land holding
(due to debt/taxes/above-market rates)

Disadvantages

- overuse / Tragedy of the Commons
- stunted growth of agro labor market
- slowed industrialization of agriculture
(most farmers grew crops for household
consumption, not for trade)
- city food shortages b/c terms of trade



Figure 6: Family Plot



Figure 7: Village Center

The City

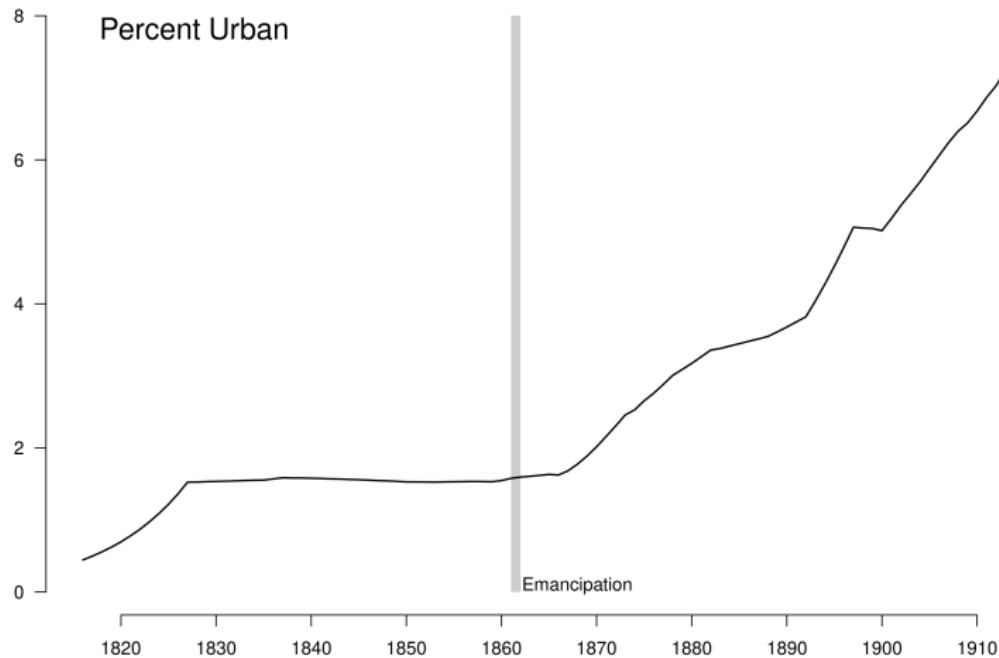


Figure 8: Urban Population as Percent of Total (1816-1914)

Russia's cities started growing at a fast rate after emancipation...

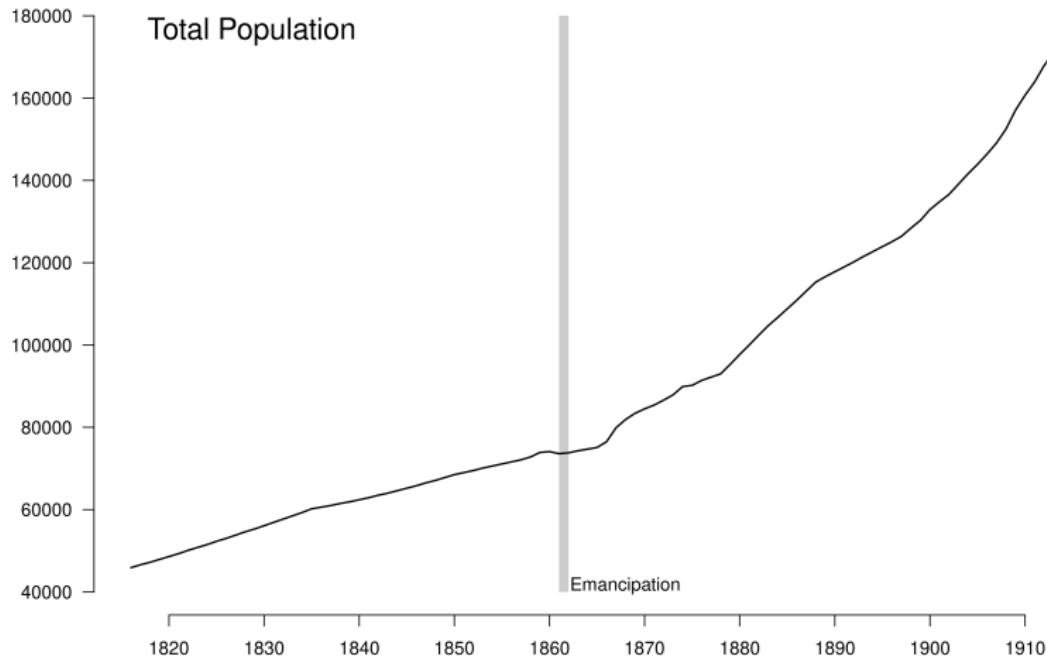


Figure 9: Total Population (1816-1914)

Russia's overall population growth rate also gathered pace.

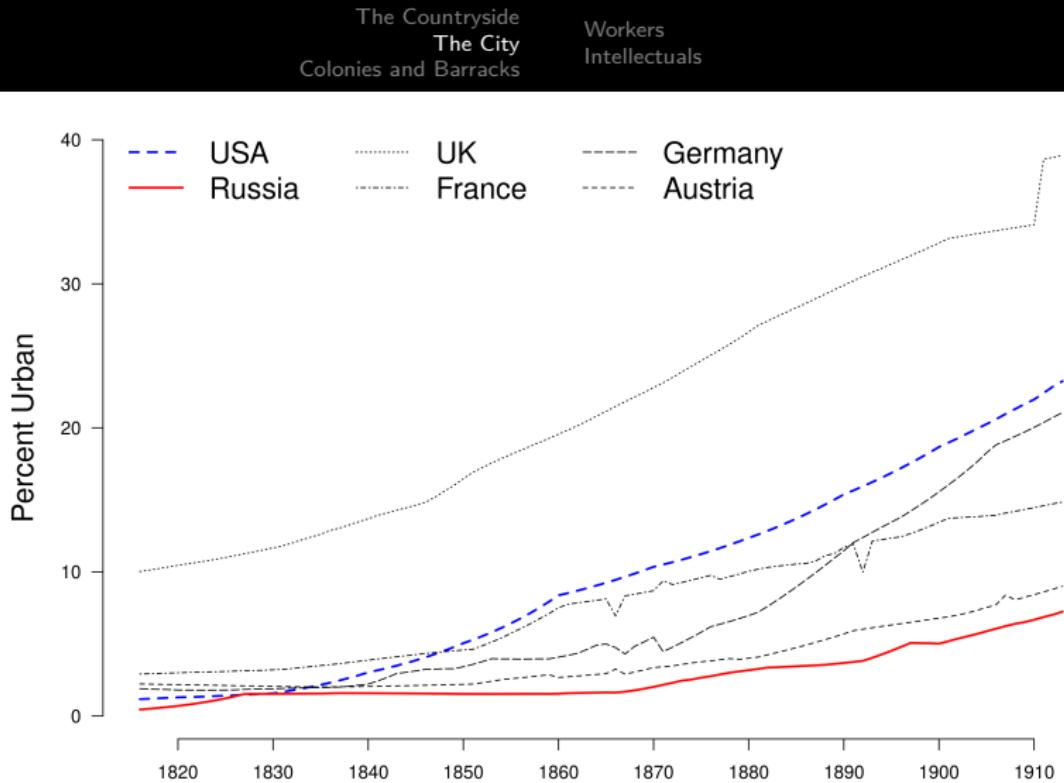


Figure 10: Urban Population in Comparative Perspective (1816-1914)

But Russia's urbanization levels still lagged way behind its peers.

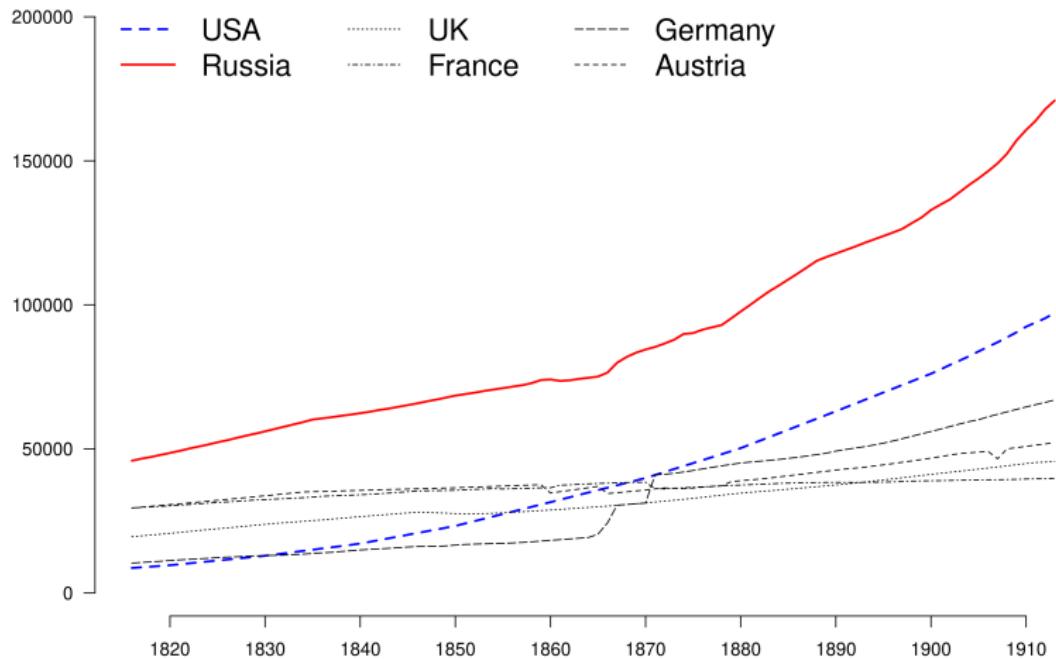


Figure 11: Total Population in Comparative Perspective (1816-1914)

On eve of revolution, Russia remained an empire of peasants.

Workers

From farm to factory

- Russia's "urban proletariat" was small by European standards
- 12.3 million urban dwellers (7.24% of total population)
- 3 million factory workers (1.75% of total population)
- most factory workers were just 1-2 generations removed from peasant life
- many were seasonal workers from the countryside, with families still on farm

What did this mean for Marx's theory?

Was a proletarian uprising possible in Russia?



Figure 12: Petrograd Rising

Intellectuals

Narodnik movement (agrarian socialism)

- left-wing radical intellectual movement, emerged after emancipation
- key ideologues: A.Herzen, V.Chernov
- goals:
 1. overthrow of monarchy
 2. redistribution of land to peasants
- key difference from Bolsheviks:
 - wanted land socialization (collective ownership by peasants), not land nationalization (state ownership, collectivization)
- saw peasants as revolutionary class, commune as nucleus of mobilization
- but... believed peasants too innately passive to start revolution on their own
- peasants needed to be somehow “emboldened” for revolution to occur...

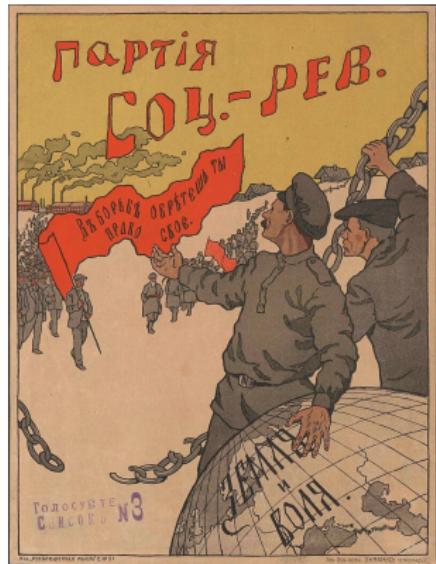


Figure 13: Vote SR 1917!

Revolutionary Terrorism

Key Narodnik terrorist groups:

- *Land and Liberty* (Zemlya i Volya)
1860-1879
- *People's Will* (Narodnaya Volya)
1879-1887
- *Socialist Revolutionary Party* (esery)
1900-1920

The toll:

- 17,000 killed by terrorism, 1897-1917
 - targeted govt officials, police
 - but 2/3 of victims were civilians
- counter-terrorism: ~ 10,000 executions

Intent of terrorist violence:

1. mobilize masses / accelerate revolution
2. intimidate government into concessions



Figure 14: Alexander II



Figure 15: Duke Sergey

Urban violence, rural audience

Challenges in “going to the people”:

1. Educational gap (1897 census)
 - 45.3% literacy in urban areas
 - 10.8% literacy in rural areas
 - how many peasants could read Narodniks' pamphlets?
2. Cultural gap
 - Narodnik positions on gender, church landed poorly with conservative rural population
3. Violence
 - NV assassination of Alexander II alienated many peasants
 - SR more successful at mobilizing support, by capitalizing on backlash to government repression



Figure 16: Meet the People



Figure 17: Give Pamphlet

Colonies and Barracks

Minorities

Discussion:

Why were some minorities over-represented in the revolutionary movement?

For example:

1. In 1900, Jews were 5% of empire's population, but accounted for 50% of revolutionary party members, 30% of individuals arrested for political crimes.
2. Polish Socialist Party carried out "bacchanalia of murders," but hardly any terrorist violence in Finland.

Could different strategies of colonial management / integration of minorities have prevented this?



Figure 18: Eksplozja

Military

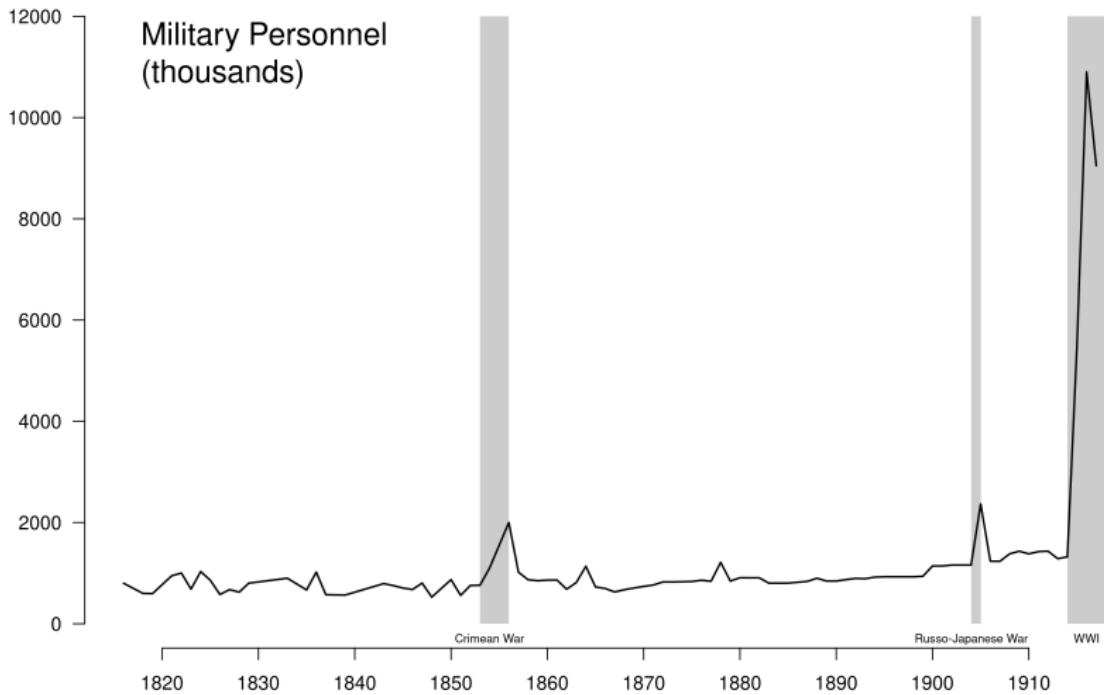


Figure 19: Number of Military Personnel (1816-1918)

Half of military-age male population mobilized for WWI. 2.2M killed.

Impact of WWI on domestic politics

1. Battlefield losses

- Russia loses control of Poland
- mass casualties
- mutinies, high desertion rates

2. Economic crises

- loss of access to export markets
- agro, industrial labor shortage
- supply shocks, breadlines in cities

3. Crisis of confidence

- Nicholas II takes personal command of army in 1915
- leaves power vacuum at home
- regime seen as incompetent, aloof

4. Social change

- new roles for women



Figure 20: Territory Lost

Breaking point

February 1917 Revolution:

- public outrage over Tsar's prosecution of WWI, food shortages
- ~ 250,000 striking workers, protesters gather in Petrograd in February
- Petrograd military garrison refuses Tsar's order to fire on protestors
- soldiers switch sides, join protestors
- protestors, soldiers storm Duma, occupy government buildings
- Duma forms Provisional Committee
- Army Chief, Duma deputies meet with Tsar, convince him to abdicate throne



Figure 21: Bigger Rations!



NEXT MEETING

Building Communism (Tu, Sep. 19)

- the dog catches the car, now what?
- things to consider:
 - how did the Bolsheviks go about consolidating their power?
 - what was “war communism”, and how did it affect the peasants?