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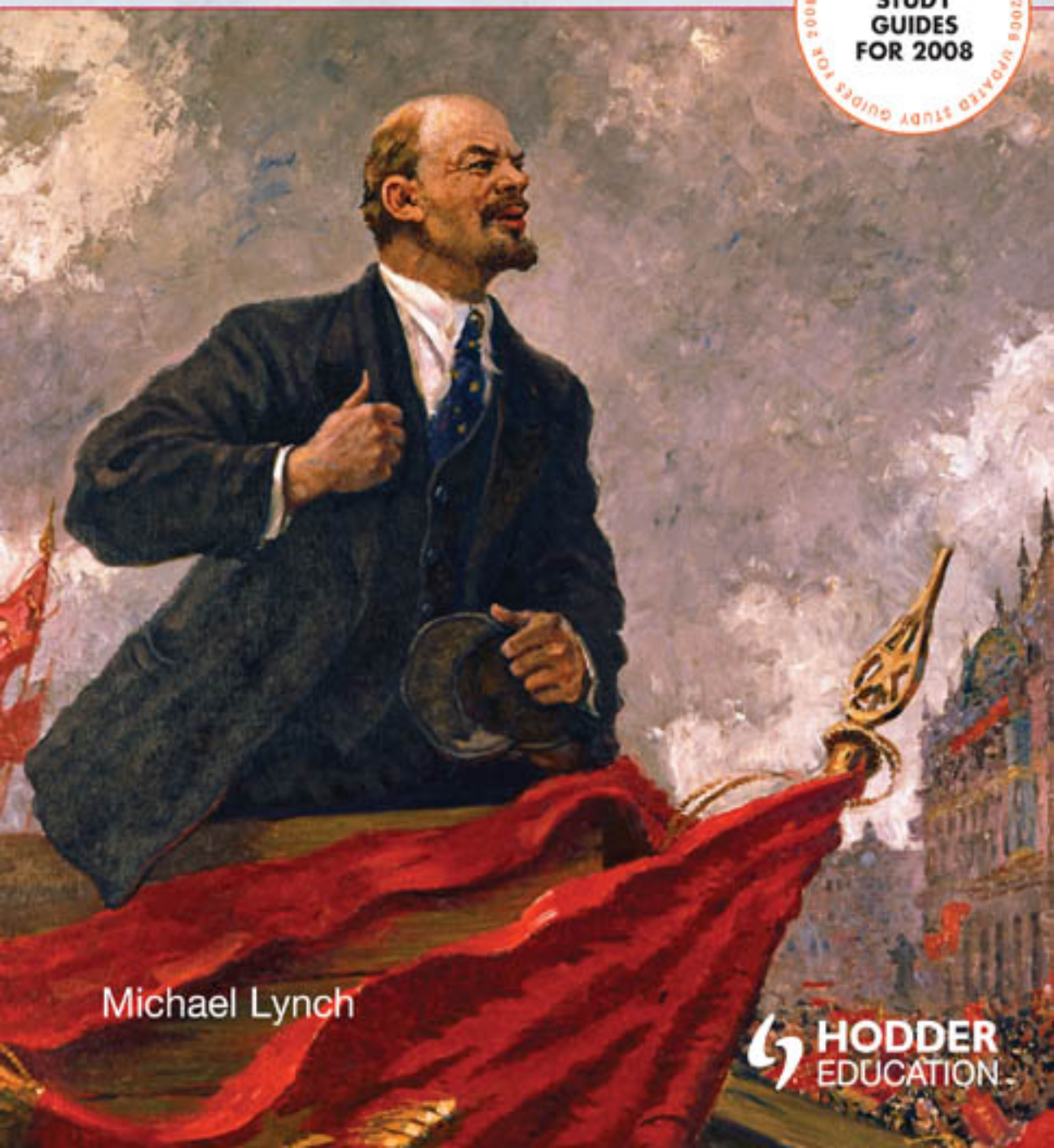
Reaction and Revolution: Russia 1894–1924

THIRD EDITION

UPDATED STUDY GUIDES FOR 2008



Michael Lynch

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Reaction and Revolution 1894–1924 THIRD EDITION

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Contents

Dedication

Keith Randell (1943–2002)

The *Access to History* series was conceived and developed by Keith, who created a series to 'cater for students as they are, not as we might wish them to be'. He leaves a living legacy of a series that for over 20 years has provided a trusted, stimulating and well-loved accompaniment to post-16 study. Our aim with these new editions is to continue to offer students the best possible support for their studies.

1 Late Imperial Russia 1894–1917

POINTS TO CONSIDER

Tsar Nicholas II came to the throne of the Russian Empire in 1894. His was to be a tragic reign and he was to be the last tsar. By the time he was murdered in 1918, Nicholas had abdicated, the Russian Empire had collapsed and a new revolutionary force, the Bolsheviks, had seized power. This book describes these dramatic events and explains why they occurred. Particular attention is paid to the events of 1917 – the year of the Russian Revolution. This first chapter sets the scene by examining:

- The main features of Imperial Russia: the land, the people and the character of the tsarist system that Nicholas operated
- The problem of political and economic reform that Russia faced as it tried to come to terms with the modern world
- The opponents of tsardom

Key dates

1854–6	The Crimean War
1861	Emancipation of the serfs
1881	Assassination of Alexander II
1881–94	Reign of Alexander III
1894	Start of Nicholas II's reign
1894–1906	Sergei Witte's economic reforms
1897	Jewish Bund formed
1898	Social Democratic Party (SDs) came into existence
1901	Formation of the Social Revolutionary Party (SRs)
1903	SDs split into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks
1904–5	Russo-Japanese war
1905	'1905 Revolution'

1 | The Land, the People and Tsardom

Key question
How had Russia's geography helped shape its history?

To understand the problems that were to dominate the reign of Nicholas II, we need to grasp the character of the Russia that he inherited.

Russia's geography and peoples

In 1894 Imperial Russia covered over eight million square miles, an area equivalent to two and a half times the size of the USA today (see Figure 1.1). At its widest, from west to east, it stretched for 5000 miles; at its longest, north to south, it measured 2000 miles. It covered a large part of two continents. European Russia extended eastward from the borders of Poland to the Urals mountain range. Asiatic Russia extended eastward from the Urals to the Pacific Ocean. The greater part of the population, which between 1815 and 1914 quadrupled from 40 million to 165 million, was concentrated in European Russia. It was in that part of the empire that the major historical developments had occurred and it was there that Russia's principal cities, Moscow and St Petersburg, the capital, were situated.

The sheer size of the Russian Empire tended to give an impression of great strength. This was misleading. The population contained a wide variety of peoples of different race, language, religion and culture (see Table 1.1). Controlling such a variety of peoples over such a vast territory had long been a major problem for Russian governments.

Table 1.1: The major nationalities of the Russian Empire according to the census of 1897 (in millions, defined according to mother tongue)

Russian (Slav)	55.6	Lithuanian	1.2
Ukrainian	22.4	Armenian	1.2
Polish	7.9	Romanian/Moldavian	1.1
White Russian (Belorussian)	5.8	Estonian	1.0
Jewish (defined by faith)	5.0	Mordvinian	1.0
Kirgiz/Kaisats	4.0	Georgian	0.8
Tartar	3.4	Tadzhik	0.3
Finnish	3.1	Turkmenian	0.3
German	1.8	Greek	0.2
Latvian	1.4	Bulgarian	0.2
Bashkir	1.3	Uzbekh	0.1

The tsar

The peoples of the Russian Empire were governed by one person, the tsar (emperor). Since 1613 the Russian tsars had been members of **the Romanov dynasty**. By law and tradition, the tsar was an absolute ruler. There were no restrictions on his power. The people owed him total obedience. This had been clearly expressed in the '**Fundamental Laws of the Empire'** issued by Nicholas I in 1832.

The tsar's absolute rule was exercised through three official bodies:

- The Imperial Council – a group of honorary advisers directly responsible to the tsar
- The Cabinet of Ministers – ran the various government departments
- The Senate – supervised the operation of the law.

Key terms

The Romanov dynasty
The Russian monarchy was hereditary. Between 1613 and 1917, Russia was ruled by members of the House of Romanov.

'Fundamental Laws of the Empire'
Article 1 of this document declared: 'The Emperor of all the Russias is an autocratic and unlimited monarch. God himself ordains that all must bow to his supreme power, not only out of fear but also out of conscience.'

Figure 1.1: Imperial Russia

These bodies were much less powerful than their titles suggested. They were appointed, not elected, and they did not govern; their role was merely to give advice. They had no authority over the tsar, whose word was final in all governmental and legal matters.

Russia's political backwardness

Key question
Why had there been so little political progress in Russia?

What the tsar's power showed was how little Russia had advanced politically compared with other European nations. By the beginning of the twentieth century all the major western-European countries had some form of democratic or representative government. Not so Russia; although it had been frequently involved in European diplomatic and military affairs, it had remained outside the mainstream of European political thought.

There had been reforming tsars, such as Peter I (1683–1725), Catherine II (1762–96) and Alexander II (1855–81), who had tried to modernise the country by such measures as re-building Moscow and St Petersburg, improving the transport system, and making the army more efficient. But their achievements had been in practical areas; they had not included the extension of political rights. In Russia in 1881 it was still a criminal offence to oppose the tsar or his government. There was no parliament, and although political parties had been formed they had no legal right to exist. There had never been a free press in Imperial Russia. Government censorship was imposed on published books and journals.

Repression

Such restriction had not prevented **liberal ideas** from seeping into Russia, but it did mean that they could not be openly expressed. The result was that supporters of reform or change had to go underground. In the nineteenth century there had grown up a wide variety of secret societies dedicated to political reform or revolution. These groups were frequently infiltrated by agents of the ***Okhrana***. As a result, raids, arrests, imprisonment and general harassment were regular occurrences.

Extremism

The denial of free speech tended to drive **political activists** towards extremism. The outstanding example of this occurred in 1881 when Tsar Alexander II was blown to bits by a bomb thrown by a terrorist group known as 'The People's Will' (see page 20). In a society in which state oppression was met with revolutionary terrorism, there was no moderate middle ground on which a tradition of ordered political debate could develop.

The Russian Orthodox Church

The tsars were fully supported in their claims to absolute authority by one of the great pillars of the Russian system, the Orthodox Church. This was a branch of Christianity that, since the fifteenth century, had been entirely independent of any outside authority such as the papacy. Its detachment from foreign influence had given it an essentially Russian character. The great beauty of its

Key terms

Liberal ideas
Notions that called for limitations on the powers of rulers and governments and greater freedom for the people. The noun 'liberals' came to refer to those who wanted political or social change in Russia, but who believed that it could be achieved by reforming rather than destroying the tsarist system.

Okhrana
The tsarist secret police whose special role was hunting down subversives who challenged the tsarist regime. It stood outside the law, had unlimited powers of arrest and was answerable only to the tsar.

Political activists
Those who believe that it is not enough simply to talk and write about altering the system; change can be achieved only by direct action.

Key terms

Reactionary
Resistant to any form of progressive change.

God's anointed
The ceremony of anointing the tsar with holy oil at his coronation symbolised that he governed by divine right.

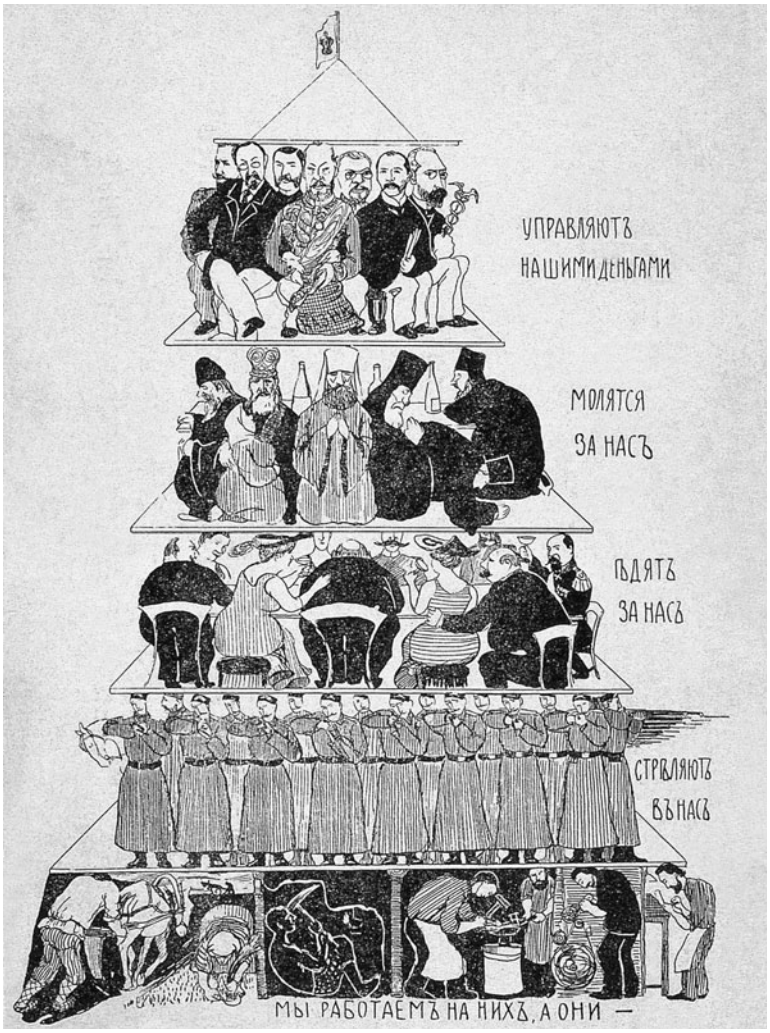
liturgy and music had long been an outstanding expression of Russian culture. However, by the late nineteenth century it had become a deeply conservative body, opposed to political change and determined to preserve the tsarist system in its **reactionary** form. How detached the Orthodox Church was from Russia's growing industrial population was illustrated by the statistic that in 1900 a Moscow suburb with 40,000 people had only one church and one priest.

The Church did contain some priests who strongly sympathised with the political revolutionaries, but, as an institution, it used its spiritual authority to teach the Russian people that it was their duty to be totally obedient to the tsar as **God's anointed**. The catechism of the Church included the statement that 'God commands us to love and obey from the inmost recesses of our heart every authority, and particularly the tsar'.

Key question
How unbalanced was the distribution of the classes in Russian society?

The social structure of tsarist Russia

The striking features of the social structure were the comparatively small commercial, professional and working classes and the great



A mocking socialist cartoon of 1900 showing the social pyramid in imperial Russia. The Russian caption for each layer reads (in ascending order):
'We work for them while they …'
'… shoot at us.'
'… eat on our behalf.'
'… pray on our behalf.'
'… dispose of our money.'

Having studied the cartoon, comment on how accurately and fairly it portrays the relationship between the various social classes in tsarist Russia.

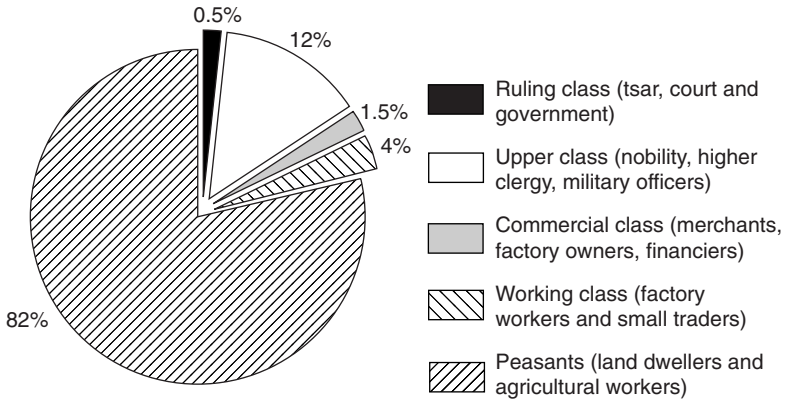


Figure 1.2: The class distribution of the Russian population, 1897

preponderance of peasants in the population. This is depicted in Figure 1.2, which shows the class distribution of the population as measured by Russia's 1897 census.

The Russian economy

Key question
Why was the Russian economy so undeveloped?

The remarkable difference in size between the urban professional and working classes and the rural peasants illustrated a critical feature of imperial Russia – its slow economic development. The low numbers of urban workers was a sign that Russia had not achieved the major industrial growth that had taken place in the nineteenth century in such countries as Germany, Britain and the USA.

This is not to say that Russia was entirely without industry. The Urals region produced considerable amounts of iron, and the chief western cities, Moscow and St Petersburg, had extensive textile factories. Most villages had a smelting works, which enabled them to produce iron goods, and most peasant homes engaged in some form of cottage industry, producing wooden, flaxen or woollen goods to supplement their income from farming. However, these activities were all relatively small scale. The sheer size of Russia and its undeveloped transport system had limited the chances for industrial expansion.

A further restriction had been the absence of an effective banking system. Russia found it hard to raise **capital** on a large scale. It had not yet mastered the art of successful borrowing and investment, techniques that help to explain why expansion had been so rapid in western countries. Russia's financial sluggishness had discouraged the rise of **entrepreneurialism**.

Key terms

Capital
The essential supply of money that provides the means for investment and expansion. No economy can grow without it.

Entrepreneurialism
The dynamic attitude associated with western commercial and industrial activity in this period.

Agrarian economy
The system in which food and goods are produced on the land by arable and dairy farming, and then traded.

Agriculture in tsarist Russia

Russia's unenterprising industrial system was matched by its inefficient pattern of agriculture. Even though four-fifths of the population were peasants, a thriving **agrarian economy** had failed

to develop. Indeed, the land in Russia was a source of national weakness rather than strength. Not all the empire's vast acres were good farming country. Much of Russia lay too far north to enjoy a climate or a soil suitable for crop growing or cattle rearing. Arable farming was restricted mainly to the Black Earth region, the area of European Russia stretching from the Ukraine to Kazakhstan.

The great number of peasants in the population added to the problem. There was simply not enough fertile land to go round. Under the terms of the Emancipation Decree of 1861, the ex-serfs were entitled to buy land, but they invariably found the price too high. This was caused both by a shortage of suitable farming territory and by the government's taxation of land sales, imposed in order to raise the revenue needed to compensate the landowners for the losses caused by emancipation. The only way the peasants could raise the money to buy land was by borrowing from a special fund provided by the government. Consequently, those peasants who did manage to purchase property found themselves burdened with large mortgage repayments that would take them and their families generations to repay.

Key date
Emancipation of the serfs. This reform had abolished serfdom – a Russian form of slavery in which the landowner had total control over the peasants who lived or worked on his land: 1861

The peasant problem

Among Russia's governing class, which was drawn from less than one per cent of the population, there was a deeply ingrained prejudice against granting rights to the mass of the people. Over 80 per cent of the population were peasants. They were predominantly illiterate and uneducated. Their sheer size as a social class and their coarse ways led to their being regarded with a mixture of fear and contempt by the governing elite, who believed that these dangerous **'dark masses'** could be held in check only by severe repression. This was what Nicholas II's wife, the Empress Alexandra, meant by saying that Russia needed always to be 'under the whip.'

Key term
'Dark masses'
The dismissive term used in court and government circles to describe the peasants.

The existence in the second half of the nineteenth century of an uneducated peasantry, suspicious of change, and living with large debts and in great poverty, pointed to the social, political and economic backwardness of Imperial Russia. Various attempts to educate the peasants had been made in the past, but such efforts had been undermined by the fear among the ruling class that any improvement in the conditions of 'the dark masses' might threaten its own privileges. It was commonplace for officials in Russia to speak of the 'safe ignorance' of the population, implying that any attempt to raise the educational standards of the masses would prove highly dangerous, socially and politically.

The Russian army

Key question
What function did the Army serve in tsarist Russia?

One common method of keeping the 'dark masses' in check was to conscript them into the Russian armed services. The lower ranks of the army and navy were largely filled by

conscription, which was also regularly used as a form of punishment for law-breakers. Ordinary Russians dreaded this sentence; they knew that life in the armed forces was a brutal experience for the common soldier or sailor. The Russian army was notorious in Europe for the severity of its discipline and the grimness of the conditions in which its soldiers lived. Special military camps had been set up in the remoter regions of the empire, which operated as penal colonies rather than as training establishments. The rigours of service life had accounted for the deaths of over one million soldiers in peacetime during the reign of Nicholas I (1825–55).

It was a widespread belief in Russia that, as a large empire, the nation needed a large army. Throughout the nineteenth century, the imperial forces were kept at a strength of around one and a half million men. The cost of maintaining the army and the navy accounted on average for 45 per cent of the government's annual expenditure. This was by far the largest single item of state spending, and, when compared with the four per cent devoted to education, shows how unbalanced government priorities were.

Key terms

Conscription
The forcing of large numbers of peasants to join the armed services.

Commissions
Official appointments of individuals to the various officer ranks.

Nepotism
A corrupt practice in which those distributing positions and offices give them to their family or friends rather than to people of merit.

Weaknesses within the army

The higher ranks of the army were the preserve of the aristocracy. **Commissions** were bought and sold, and there was little room for promotion on merit. This weakened it as a fighting force, but the truth of this tended to remain hidden because, with the exception of the Crimean War (1854–6), Russia was not engaged in a major conflict with a western European power for a whole century after 1815. The army's active service was essentially a matter of putting down national risings or serious disturbances within the empire or on its frontiers. There were frequent border clashes with Turkey throughout the nineteenth century, and, at various times, Russian forces saw action in Poland, Armenia and Persia.

Key date

The Crimean War, which led to defeat for Russia at the hands of the French and British: 1854–6

The bureaucracy (civil service)

Key question
What was the fundamental weakness of the tsarist bureaucracy?

Ironically, it was in the area where there had been the largest attempted reform that the greatest corruption had developed. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Peter I (1683–1725) had tried to modernise Russia by establishing a full-scale civil service with the aim of maintaining central government control throughout the empire.

However, by the middle of the nineteenth century, many Russian critics had begun to condemn this civil service as a corrupt bureaucracy whose **nepotism** and incompetence were the principal reasons for Russia's backwardness. Writing in 1868, Alexander Herzen, a leading revolutionary thinker, claimed that the bureaucracy had become 'a kind of civilian priesthood'; privileged, grasping and self-seeking. He accused the officials who ran Russia of 'sucking the blood of the people with thousands of greedy, unclean mouths'.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Herzen asserted, tsarist Russia was run by a bureaucratic class that, for all its incompetence, still possessed the power to control the lives of the

Key term

Militia
A group of local citizens called together and given arms when a crisis requires the use of organised force to control the situation.

Russian masses. At local and national levels, the law, the government, the police and the **militia** were in the hands of a set of men whose first thought was their own convenience and advantage. Against this injustice the ordinary citizen had no redress, since any challenge to the system was lost in bureaucratic procedures.

Herzen's savage attack provided powerful ammunition for those in Russia who wished to ridicule and undermine the tsarist system itself. However, it is important to remember that Herzen was a revolutionary propagandist intent on painting the blackest picture he could of tsardom. Efforts were made in the nineteenth century to reform the administration and limit its abuses.

Summary diagram: The land, the people and tsardom

The Land Russia's geography Its great size	**The People** The social structure Tiny dominant elite The 'dark masses' 80 per cent peasant population
The Economy Undeveloped industry Backward agriculture	**The Tsarist System** Autocratic government Reactionary Church Corrupt bureaucracy Oppressive army

Key question
Why was it so difficult for Russia to reform itself?

2 | The Problem of Reform in Imperial Russia

Many members of the ruling class accepted that major reforms were needed if Russia was to overcome its social and economic backwardness. However, a major barrier to reform was a basic disagreement within the government elite over Russia's true character as a nation. Since the days of Peter the Great there had been serious differences between **'Westerners'** and **'Slavophiles'**. Their dispute made it difficult to achieve reform in an ordered and acceptable way.

Another bar to planned reform was the autocratic structure of Russia itself. Change could come only from the top. There were no representative institutions, such as a parliament, with the power to alter things. The only possible source of change was the tsar. From time to time, there were **progressive** tsars (see page 4). Yet it was hardly to be expected that any tsar, no matter how enlightened, would go so far as to introduce measures that might weaken his authority.

The result was that reform in Russia had been piecemeal, depending on the inclinations of the individual tsar, rather than a systematic programme of change. It is notable that the significant periods of reform in Russia were invariably a response to some form of national crisis or humiliation. This was certainly true of the reforms introduced in Alexander II's reign (1855–81). His accession coincided with the defeat of Russia at the hands of France and Britain in the Crimean War. The

Key terms

'Westerners'
Believed that if Russia wished to remain a great nation it would have to adopt the best features of the political and economic systems of the countries of Western Europe.

'Slavophiles'
Regarded western values as corrupting. Urged the nation to preserve itself as 'holy Russia', by glorying in its Slav culture and its separate historical tradition.

shock of this prompted the new tsar into adopting a reform programme.

Local government reform

Alexander II's reforms began with the Emancipation of the Serfs in 1861, followed three years later by the setting up of a network of elected rural councils, known as the ***zemstvos***. Although these were not truly democratic, they did provide Russia with a form of representative government, no matter how limited, which offered some hope to those who longed for an extension of political rights. The authorities complemented their introduction of the *zemstvos* by re-emphasising the valuable role played in the countryside by the ***mir***, which government officials saw as a local organisation that would provide an effective means of keeping order, as well as a cheap method of collecting taxes and mortgage repayments.

Legal reforms

In addition, a number of legal reforms were introduced with the aim of simplifying the notoriously cumbersome court procedures whose delays had led to corruption and injustice. Of even greater importance was Alexander II's relaxation of the controls over the press and the universities. Greater freedom of expression encouraged the development of an **intelligentsia**.

The limited nature of the reforms

Alexander II was not a supporter of reform simply for its own sake. He saw it as a way of lessening opposition to the tsarist system. He said that his intention was to introduce reform from above in order to prevent revolution from below. His hope was that his reforms would attract the support of the intelligentsia. In this he was largely successful. Emancipation, greater press and university freedoms, and the administrative and legal changes were greeted with enthusiasm by progressives.

However, no matter how progressive Alexander II himself may have appeared, he was still an autocrat. It was unthinkable that he would continue with a process that might compromise his power as tsar. Fearful that he had gone too far, he abandoned his reformist policies and returned to the tsarist tradition of oppression. His assassination by a group of Social Revolutionaries, known as the People's Will (see page 4) led to even more severe measures being imposed by his successor, Alexander III (1881–94). These were so oppressive that they earned the title 'the Reaction'.

When Nicholas II came to the throne in 1894 it appeared that he intended to continue the repressive policies of his predecessor. Many of the intelligentsia felt betrayed. Despairing of tsardom as a force for change, a significant number of them turned to thoughts of revolution.

Key terms

Progressive
Refers to those tsars who were prepared to introduce reform.

Zemstvos
These local councils were elected bodies, but, since the voting regulations were weighed heavily against the poor, the *zemstvos* were very much in the hands of the landowners.

Mir
The traditional village community to which people of a locality belonged.

Intelligentsia
This was not so much a single class or group as a cross-section of the educated, literate and more enlightened members of Russian society who had been influenced by western ideas and wanted to see Russia adopt progressive changes. This made them critical of the tsarist regime.

Key dates

The reign of Alexander II: 1855–81

The reign of Alexander III, who became notorious for the harshness of his rule: 1881–94

Key measures of 'the Reaction'

The Statute of State Security, 1881

- Special government-controlled courts were set up that operated outside the existing legal system.
- Judges, magistrates and officials who were sympathetic towards liberal ideas were removed from office.
- The powers of the *Okhrana*, the tsarist secret police, were extended, and censorship of the press was tightened.

At its introduction in 1881, this Statute was described as temporary but it remained in place until 1917.

The University Statute, 1887

Brought the universities under strict government control.

The Zemstva Act, 1890

Decreased the independence of the local councils and empowered government officials to interfere in their decision-making.

Key question
Would Nicholas II be a reformer or a reactionary?

The early reign of Nicholas II, 1894–1905

Nicholas II came to the throne in 1894. It was an irony of history that at the very time when Russia most needed a tsar of strength and imagination it was a man of weakness and limited outlook who ruled the nation. Whatever his private virtues (he was, for example, a devoted husband and father), he never showed the statesmanship the times required. There are two main aspects to Nicholas II's reign:

- The problems he faced as tsar at a particularly critical stage in Russian history.
- The growth of opposition in Russia to the tsarist system.

The most pressing question facing Russia at the start of Nicholas' reign was whether Imperial Russia could modernise herself sufficiently to be able to compete with the other European nations. Would the new tsar be a reformer or a reactionary? There was little doubt what the answer would be. Reform had a bad name by the time Nicholas became tsar. Furthermore, his upbringing and education made him suspicious of change. It was no surprise that he continued the repressive policies he had inherited. This further angered the intelligentsia and the critics of the tsarist regime; they began to prepare to challenge tsardom.

Key terms

Participatory government
A process by which ordinary people choose their government by electing it into office, but retain the right to vote that government out if it does not serve their interests.

Autocracy
The absolute rule of one person – in Russia this meant the tsar.

Nicholas II's upbringing

As a young man, Nicholas had been tutored at court by Konstantin Pobedonostsev, a man of enormous influence in late Imperial Russia. Pobedonostsev was the chief minister in the Russian government from 1881 to 1905 and also the Procurator (lay head) of the Synod, the governing body of the Russian Orthodox Church. Known as 'the Grand Inquisitor' because of his repressive attitudes, Pobedonostsev was an arch-conservative who had a deep distaste for all forms of democracy. He dismissed the idea of **participatory government** as 'the great lie of our time'. To his mind, **autocracy** was the only possible government for Imperial Russia. Nicholas took to heart the lessons he learned from Pobedonostsev.

Russification

A policy of particular note that had begun under Alexander III and which Nicholas II carried on was **Russification**. This was a severely enforced policy of restricting the influence of the non-Russian national minorities within the empire by emphasising the superiority of all things Russian. The aim was to impose Russian ways on all the peoples within the nation.

Officials everywhere in the empire now had a vested interest in maintaining the dominance of Russian values at the expense of the other national cultures. Discrimination against non-Russians, which had previously been a hidden feature of Russian public life, became more open and vindictive in the 1890s. The nationalities that suffered most from this were the Baltic Germans, the Poles, the Finns, the Armenians and the Ukrainians. State interference in their education, religion and culture became widespread and systematic.

Anti-Semitism

Perhaps the greatest victims of Russification were the Jews. Over 600 new measures were introduced, imposing heavy social, political and economic restrictions on the Jewish population. Since the majority of Jews lived in discrete districts or '**ghettos**', they were easily identifiable scapegoats who could be blamed for Russia's difficulties. Anti-Semitism was deeply ingrained in tsarist Russia. **Pogroms** had long disfigured Russian history. A group of ultra-conservative Russian nationalists, known as the 'Black Hundreds', were notorious for their attacks upon Jews. During the reign of Nicholas II the number of pogroms increased sharply. This was proof of the tsarist regime's active encouragement of the terrorising of the Jews. But what was disturbingly noticeable was the eagerness with which local communities followed the lead from above in organising the blood-lettings.

The response to Nicholas II's policies

The tight controls that Nicholas II tried to impose did not lessen opposition to tsardom. The reverse happened; despite greater police interference, opposition became more organised. A number of political parties, ranging from moderate reformers to violent revolutionaries, came into being. The government's policies of reaction and Russification produced a situation in which many political and national groups grew increasingly frustrated by the mixture of coercion and incompetence that characterised the tsarist system.

Russification was remarkably ill-judged. At a critical stage in its development, when cohesion and unity were needed, Russia chose to treat half its population as inferiors or potential enemies. The persecution of the Jews was especially crass. It alienated the great mass of the five million Jews in the Russian population, large numbers of whom fled in desperation to western Europe and North America, carrying with them an abiding hatred of tsardom. Those who could not escape stayed to form a large and disaffected community within the empire. It was no coincidence that the

Key question
What was Russification intended to achieve?

Key terms

Russification
Russian was declared to be the official first language; this meant that all legal proceedings, such as trials, and all administration had to be conducted in Russian. Public office was closed to those not fluent in the language.

Ghettos
Particular areas where Jews were concentrated and to which they were restricted.

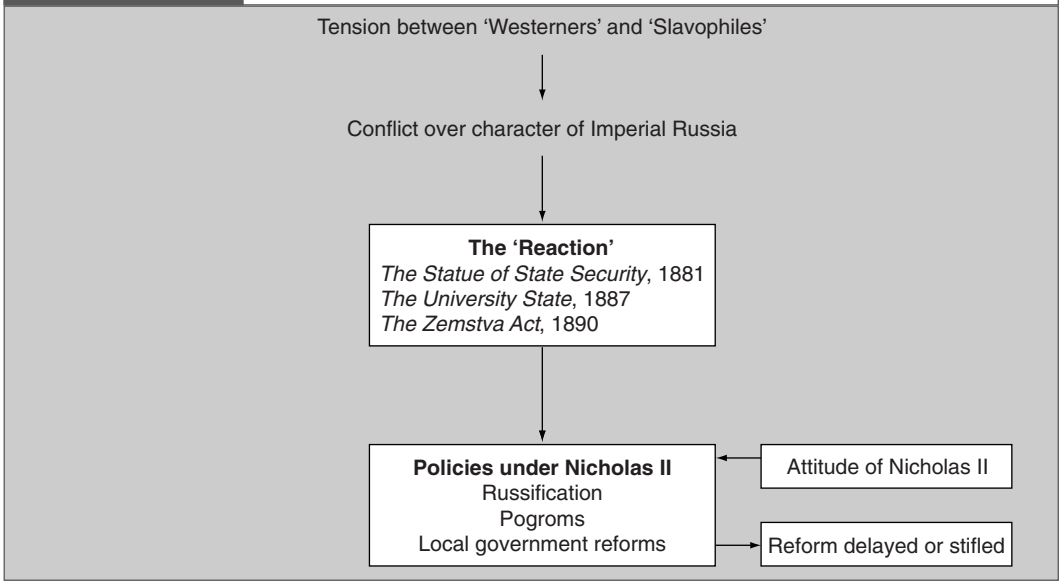
Pogroms
Fierce persecutions that often involved the wounding or killing of Jews and the destruction of their property.

Key date
Formation of the Jewish Bund: 1897

1890s witnessed a large influx of Jews into the various anti-tsarist movements in Russia. In 1897, Jews formed their own revolutionary 'Bund' or union.

Yet, the remarkable fact was that, for all the bitterness created by these policies, the period was one of rapid economic expansion. For a time it seemed that Russia might become a modern industrial nation. This was largely due to the work of two outstanding ministers – Count Sergei Witte, who served during the early part of Nicholas II's reign, and Peter Stolypin, who held office during the middle years (see pages 41–5). In the face of resistance from the very regime they were trying to serve, Witte and Stolypin sought to modernise Russia.

Summary diagram: The problem of reform in Imperial Russia



Key question
What methods did Sergei Witte use to develop the Russian economy?

3 | Economic Reform 1893–1914

In the 1890s, Russian industry grew so rapidly that the term **the 'great spurt'** was used to describe the period. A major reason for the exceptional growth was the increase in the output of coal in the Ukraine and of oil in the Caucasus. Economic historians are agreed that, although this sudden acceleration was the result of **private enterprise**, it was sustained by deliberate government policy.

However, the motives of the tsarist government were military rather than economic. It is true that the capitalists (financiers and factory owners) did well out of the spurt, but it was not the government's primary intention to help them. Economic expansion attracted the tsar and his ministers because it was a means of improving the strength of the Russian armed forces. A growing industry would produce more and better guns, equipment and ships.

The outstanding individual involved in Russia's development at this time was Sergei Witte. As Minister of Finance from 1892 to 1903, he set himself the huge task of modernising the Russian economy to a level where it could compete with the advanced

Key terms
The 'great spurt' The spread of industry and the increase in production that occurred in Russia in the 1890s.
Private enterprise Economic activity organised by individuals or companies, not the government.

nations of the West. To help bring this about, he invited foreign experts and workers to Russia to advise on industrial planning. Engineers and managers from France, Belgium, Britain, Germany and Sweden played a vital role in the 'great spurt'.

State capitalism

It was Witte's belief that modernisation could be achieved only through **state capitalism**. He was impressed by the results of the industrial revolutions in western Europe and the USA, and argued that Russia could successfully modernise by planning along the same lines. He admitted that, given the backwardness of Russia, this presented particular difficulties. He likened the current relationship of Russia with the advanced economies of Europe to that of a colony and its mother country. 'Russia is a colony for all industrially developed states, generously providing them with the cheap products of her soil and buying dearly the products of their labour.' It was Russia's task, therefore, to decolonise herself and begin to produce and trade as an equal. Russia must not remain 'the handmaiden' of the advanced industrial states.

Witte judged that Russia's greatest need was to acquire capital for investment in industry. To raise this, he negotiated large loans and investments from abroad, while imposing heavy taxes and high interest rates at home. At the same time as he encouraged the inflow of foreign capital, Witte limited the import of foreign goods. Protective **tariffs** were set up as a means of safeguarding Russia's young domestic industries, such as steel production. In 1897, the Russian currency was put on the **gold standard**. The hope was that this would create financial stability and so encourage international investment in Russia. The aim was largely successful but it penalised the consumers at home since they had to pay the higher prices that traders introduced to keep pace with the increased value of the rouble. Furthermore, prices tended to rise as a result of tariffs making goods scarcer.

Key terms

State capitalism
The direction and control of the economy by the government, using its central power and authority.

Tariffs
Duties imposed on foreign goods to keep their prices high and, therefore, discourage importers from bringing them into the country.

Gold standard
The system in which the rouble, Russia's basic unit of currency, had a fixed gold content, thus giving it strength when exchanged with other currencies.

The importance of the railways

Much of the foreign capital that Witte was successful in raising was directly invested in railways. He believed that the modernisation of the Russian economy ultimately depended on developing an effective railway system. His enthusiasm was an important factor in the extraordinary increase in lines and rolling stock that took place between 1881 and 1913. It would not be an exaggeration to describe this as a transport revolution (see Figure 1.3).

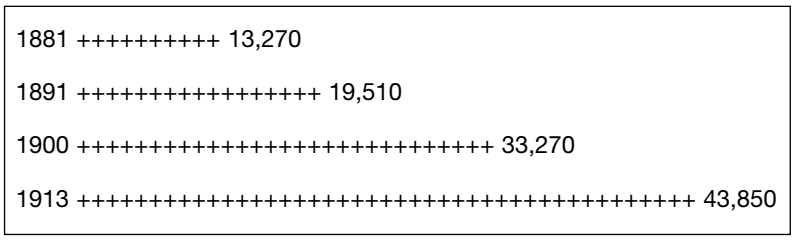


Figure 1.3: The growth of Russian railways (in miles of track)

Witte's special project was the Trans-Siberian Railway, which was constructed between 1891 and 1902. The line stretched for 3750 miles from Moscow to Vladivostok (see the map on page 3) and was intended to connect the remoter regions of the central and eastern empire with the industrial west, and so encourage the migration of workers to the areas where they were most needed. However, it promised more than it delivered. Sections of it were still incomplete in 1914 and in the event it did not greatly improve east–west migration. The Trans-Siberian Railway proved more impressive as a symbol of Russian enterprise than as a project of real economic worth.

One of Witte's main hopes was that the major improvements in transport would boost exports and foreign trade. The trade figures suggest that his hopes were largely fulfilled (see Table 1.2 and Figure 1.4).

Table 1.2: The Russian economy: annual production (in millions of tons)

	Coal	*Pig iron*	*Oil*	*Grain**
1890	5.9	0.89	3.9	36
1900	16.1	2.66	10.2	56
1910	26.8	2.99	9.4	74
1913	35.4	4.1	9.1	90
1916	33.8	3.72	9.7	64

*European Russia only

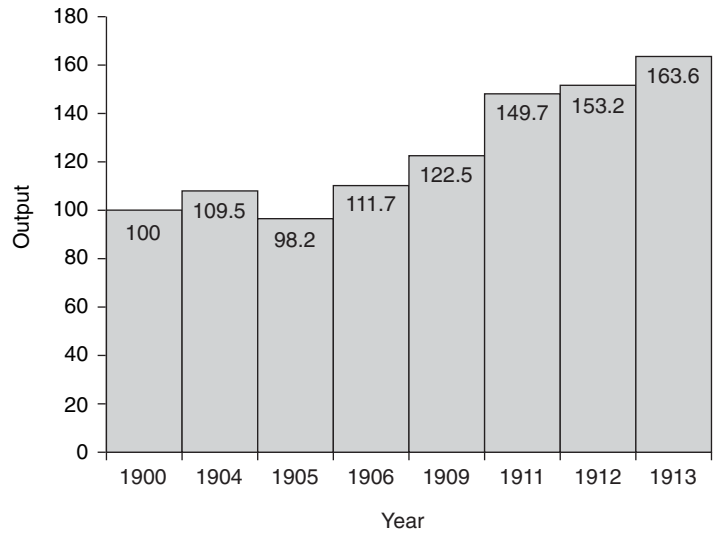


Figure 1.4: Industrial output in the Russian Empire (base unit of 100 in 1900)

Key term

Per capita
Literally the amount 'per head' – this is calculated by dividing the amount produced by the number of people in the population. On this basis, although overall production rose during this period, the average amount produced by each person dropped.

These figures of increased production are not so impressive when it is remembered that Russia was experiencing a massive growth in population. **Per capita** production was lower than the overall figures suggested (see Table 1.3 on page 16).

Table 1.3: Population of imperial Russia 1885–1913

	1885	*1897*	*1913*
European Russia	81,725,200	93,442,900	121,780,000
Caucasus	7,284,500	9,289,400	12,717,200
Siberia	4,313,700	5,758,800	9,894,500
Steppes and Urals	1,588,500	2,465,700	3,929,500
Central Asia	3,738,600	5,281,000	7,106,000
Total	98,650,500	116,237,800	155,422,200

Nevertheless, Russia was enjoying real economic growth. Figure 1.5 shows how favourably its industrial output compared with other European countries. Again, one has to be cautious in interpreting the data. Given its backwardness, Russia was starting from a much lower level of production. For example, although its 96.8 per cent growth looks to be over twice that of Britain's, it was playing catch-up and had a long way to go.

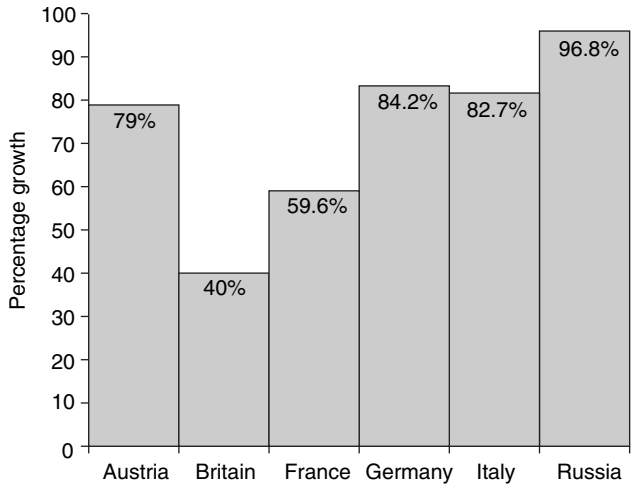


Figure 1.5: Growth in national product 1898–1913

Witte's problems

Key question
How successful were Witte's policies?

There is no doubt that Witte's policies had a major impact on the expansion of the Russian economy. However, what can be questioned is whether the results were wholly beneficial for Russia. Critics have pointed to three drawbacks in his economic reforms:

- He made Russia too dependent on foreign loans and investments.
- In giving priority to heavy industry he neglected vital light engineering areas, such as machine tool production, which would have helped to modernise manufacturing.
- He paid no attention to Russia's agricultural needs.

Yet, any criticism of Witte should be balanced by reference to the problems he faced. The demands of the military commanders that their transport and equipment needs should have priority in economic planning too often interfered with his schemes for railway construction and the building of new industrial plant. Moreover, his freedom of action was restricted by the resistance to

change that he met from the court and the government. The main purpose of his economic policies was to make the nation strong and thus protect tsardom against the disruptive forces in Russian society, but he was disliked by the royal court and the government, which seldom gave him the support he needed. In 1903, the tsar forced him to resign.

Witte was not an easy man to get on with and he made enemies easily, but in ability he towered above all the other ministers and officials in the government. His tragedy was that despite his great talents, which, if properly recognised, might have led Russia towards peaceful modernisation, he was never fully trusted by the people of the tsarist court and system he was trying to save.

The end of the 'great spurt'

Key question
What problems followed Russia's falling back into recession?

The improvement of the Russian economy in the 1890s was not simply the result of the work of Witte. It was part of a worldwide industrial boom. However, by the turn of the century, the boom had ended and a serious international **trade recession** had set in. The consequences for Russia were especially serious. The industrial expansion at the end the century had led to a ballooning of the population of the towns and cities (see Table 1.4). This increase had not been organised or supervised; the facilities for accommodating the influx of workers were wholly inadequate. The result was acute overcrowding.

Key term
Trade recession
A serious fall in the demand for goods, which leads to production being cut back and workers being laid off.

Table 1.4: Growth of population in Russia's two main cities

	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

Initially, the peasants who had left the land to take work in the urban factories accepted their grim conditions because of the higher wages they received. But when boom turned to recession there was widespread unemployment. The authorities in the towns and cities found themselves facing large numbers of rootless workers who had had their expectations of a better life raised, only to be dashed by harsh economic realities. The regular presence of thousands of disaffected workers on the streets of St Petersburg and Moscow played an important part in the growth of serious social unrest in Russia between 1900 and 1917.

The recession did not prove permanent. The period from 1908 to 1914 saw an overall increase in industrial output of 8.5 per cent. Table 1.5 shows this growth.

Table 1.5: Economic growth in Russia, 1908–14

	1908	*1914*
State revenues (in roubles)	2 billion	4 billion
Number of banks	1,146	2,393
Number of factories	22,600	24,900
Number of workers	2,500,000	2,900,000

Nevertheless, against the bright picture these figures paint has to be set the darker aspect. Few workers gained from the industrial and financial expansion. Weak trade unions and minimal legal protection left the workforce very much at the mercy of the employers. Little of the greater amount of money in circulation reached the pockets of the workers. Although the rate of inflation rose by 40 per cent between 1908 and 1914, the average industrial wage rose from 245 to only 264 roubles per month (i.e. seven per cent) in the same period.

Of course, a national average does not tell the whole story. Some workers did better than others; for example, wages were a third higher in St Petersburg than in Moscow. Nonetheless, the strike statistics compiled by the Ministry of Trade (Table 1.6) show the scale of the dissatisfaction with the conditions.

Table 1.6: Number of strikes

Year	*Number*
1905	13,995
1908	892
1910	222
1911	466
1912	2,032
1913	2,404
1914	3,574

Key debate

There is a lively debate among historians over the question:

How strong had the Russian economy become by 1914?

There are those who suggest that, until the First World War intervened, Russia was in the process of developing into a **modern industrial state**. They cite the figures of increased industrial production, growth of the labour force and expansion of foreign investment.

Other historians, while accepting these figures, argue that, compared to developments in other countries, Russian growth was too limited to provide a genuine industrial base. They further stress that in 1914 four-fifths of the population were still peasants, a fact that undermines the claim that there had been significant industrial development.

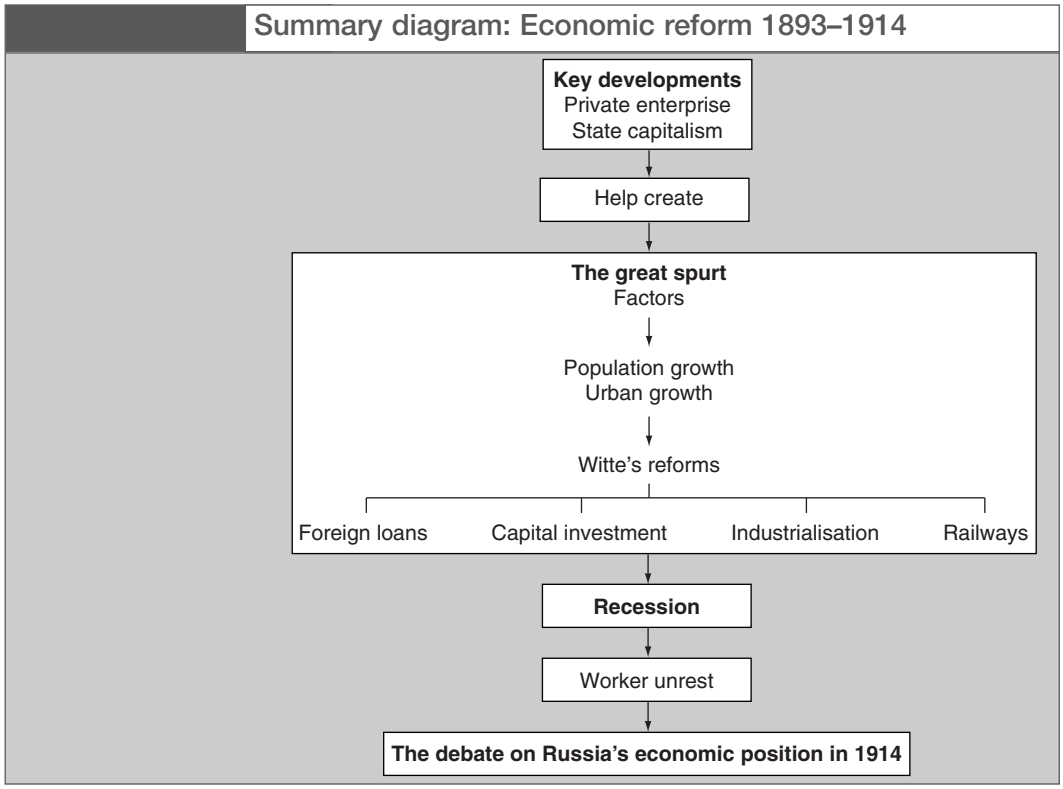
In the end, no final answer can be given to the question as to how the economy would have developed had the war and the Revolution not intervened. There are too many ifs and buts. The comment of Alex Nove, the outstanding western authority on the subject, is particularly telling in this context. He says that there are convincing arguments on either side of the question as to whether Russia would have become a modern industrial state:

> If the growth rates characteristic of the period 1890–1913 for industry and agriculture were simply projected over the succeeding 50 years, no doubt citizens would be leading a reasonable existence. However, this assumes that the imperial authorities would have successfully made the adjustment necessary to govern in an orderly manner a rapidly developing and changing society.

However, Nove wisely adds that, fascinating though the debate is, 'there must surely be a limit to the game of what-might-have-been'.

Key term

Modern industrial state
The term describes a nation whose economic development enables it to compete on equal terms with other advanced countries. This invariably means having a strong industrial base and sufficient capital to undertake progressive social reforms.



4 | The Opponents of Tsardom

Two main groups opposed to tsardom can be identified in Nicholas II's reign – revolutionaries and **reformers** (liberals). Within each of these groups there were sub-divisions. The opposition never formed a single coherent movement and rarely acted in unison.

Key term
Reformers
Strong critics of the tsarist system who believed it could be changed for the better by pressure from without and reform from within.

a) Revolutionaries

The revolutionaries comprised three major forces – the Populists, the Social Revolutionaries and the Social Democrats. They all believed that Russia could not progress unless the tsarist system was destroyed through revolution.

Key question
How did Populism help to stimulate a revolutionary atmosphere in late Imperial Russia?

The Populists

This group regarded the future of Russia as being in the hands of the peasants who made up the overwhelming mass of the population. The peasants must take the lead in transforming Russia, beginning with the overthrow of the tsarist system itself.

As a revolutionary movement, Populism dated from the 1870s. As with all the significant political movements that came into being in this period, the **Populist** leaders were drawn, not from the peasants, but from the middle and upper classes. These leaders regarded it as their duty to educate the uninformed peasantry into an awareness of its revolutionary role. This involved 'going to the people', a policy by which the educated Populists went from the universities into the countryside to live for a period with the peasants in an attempt to turn them into revolutionaries.

Key term
Populists
Narodniks (from the Russian word for 'the people').

The policy was seldom a success. The peasants tended to regard the students as airy-fairy thinkers and prattlers who had no knowledge of real life. In desperation, some Populists turned to terrorism, as the only way of achieving their aims. In 1879, a group calling itself 'The People's Will' was founded with the declared intention of murdering members of the ruling class. This group, which was reckoned to be no more than 400 strong, gained notoriety two years later when it successfully planned the assassination of Alexander II, who was blown to pieces by a bomb. However, this act weakened rather than strengthened the Populist movement. The murder of a tsar who had initiated many reforms seemed to discredit the idea of reform itself and so justified the repression imposed in the wake of the assassination.

The importance of Populism lay in its methods rather than in its ideas. Its concept of a peasant-based revolution was unrealistic; the Russian peasantry were simply not interested in political revolution. What was lasting about Populism was the part it played in establishing a violent anti-tsarist tradition. All the revolutionaries in Russia after 1870 were influenced, if not inspired, by the example of the Populist challenge to tsardom.

The Social Revolutionaries (SRs)

Key question
What were the main ideas of the Social Revolutionaries (SRs)?

The Social Revolutionary Party grew directly out of the Populist movement. The economic spurt of the 1890s had produced a quickening of interest in political and social issues. Seeing this as an opportunity to gain recruits from the rapidly growing urban workforce, the Populists began to agitate among the workers. The intention was to widen the concept of **the 'people'**, so that it encompassed not simply the peasants but all those in society who had reasons for wishing to see the end of tsardom.

An important figure in the reshaping of Populist strategy was Victor Chernov, who played a key part in the formation of the Social Revolutionary Party in 1901 and became its leader. He was a member of the intelligentsia, and sought to provide a firmer base for Populism than its previous passionate but vague ideas had produced. However, as with all the revolutionary groups in tsarist Russia, the SRs were weakened by disagreements among themselves. Leon Trotsky, who was later to play a major role as a revolutionary, pointed to this division when he described the SRs as being made up of two competing groups: '**Left Social Revolutionaries** and the **Right Social Revolutionaries**'.

Between 1901 and 1905, it was the terrorist faction that dominated. During those years the SRs were responsible for over 2000 political assassinations, including Plehve, the Interior Minister, and the tsar's uncle, the Grand Duke Sergei. These were spectacular successes but they did little to bring about the desired link with the urban workers.

The 1905 Revolution, which saw the first serious open challenge to tsardom in Nicholas II's reign (see page 33), brought more gains to the liberals than to the revolutionaries. One effect of this was that the more moderate Right SRs gained greater influence over party policy. This began to show dividends. From 1906, the SRs experienced a growing support from the professional classes, from the trade unions and from the All-Russian Union of Peasants,

Key terms

The 'people'
That part of the population that the SRs believed truly represented the character and will of the Russian nation.

Left Social Revolutionaries
Wanted to continue the policy of terrorism inherited from 'The People's Will'.

Right Social Revolutionaries
The more moderate members. Believed in revolution as the ultimate goal, but were prepared to work with other parties for an immediate improvement in the conditions of the workers and peasants.

Key term

'Revolutionary socialism'
The belief that change could be achieved only through the violent overthrow of the tsarist system.

which had been set up in 1905. At its first Congress in 1906, the SR Party committed itself to **'revolutionary socialism'** and gave a special pledge to the peasants that it would end 'the bourgeois principle of private ownership by returning the land to those who worked it'.

It was their land policy that largely explains why the SRs remained the most popular party with the peasants. However, at the time, the Congress decisions brought disruption rather than unity. The left wing protested that the party's programme ignored the industrial workers, while the right asserted that Congress policy was unworkable in current Russian conditions. Chernov tried to hold the factions together, but from 1906 onwards the SRs were a collection of radical groups rather than a united party. Nevertheless, until they were outlawed by the Bolsheviks after the 1917 Revolution (see page 124), the SRs remained the party with the largest popular following in Russia.

The Social Democrats (the SDs)

Key question
What was the impact of Marxism on the SDs?

The Social Democrats (short for the All-Russian Social Democratic Workers Party) came into being in 1898; their aim was to achieve revolution in Russia by following the ideas of Karl Marx (1818–83). Marx was a German revolutionary, who had advanced the idea that human society operated according to scientific principles. Just as the physical universe was governed by the laws of chemistry and physics, so too, the behaviour of human beings was determined by social laws. These could be scientifically studied and applied. Marx claimed that the critical determinant of human behaviour was **class struggle**, a process that operated throughout history. He referred to this process as **the dialectic**.

Key terms

Class struggle
A continuing conflict at every stage of history between those who possessed economic and political power and those who did not – in simple terms 'the haves' and 'the have-nots'.

The dialectic
The violent struggle which takes place in nature and in human society between opposites.

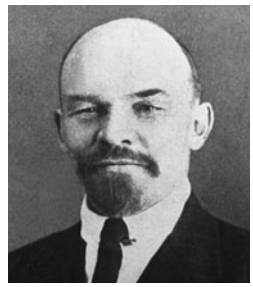
The proletariat
The exploited industrial workers who would triumph in the last great class struggle.

The bourgeoisie
The owners of capital, the boss class, who exploited the workers but who would be overthrown by them in the revolution to come.

For revolutionaries in the nineteenth century, the most exciting aspect of Marx's analysis was his conviction that the contemporary industrial era marked the final stage of the dialectical class struggle. Human history was about to reach its culmination in the revolutionary victory of the **proletariat** over the **bourgeoisie**, which would usher in 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'. This dictatorship would be the last but one stage of history in which the workers, having overthrown the bourgeoisie in revolution and taken power, would hunt down and destroy all the surviving reactionaries. It would be a violent and bloody affair but, once these final class enemies had been obliterated, all conflict would end and the perfect, harmonious society would emerge.

The attraction of Marx for Russian revolutionaries is easy to understand. His ideas had been known in Russia for some time, but what gave them particular relevance was the 'great spurt' of the 1890s. This promised to create the industrial conditions in Russia that would make a successful revolution possible. The previously unfocused hopes for revolution could now be directed on the industrial working class.

Profile: V.I. Lenin 1870–1924



1870 – Lenin born as Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov to a minor aristocratic family of Jewish ancestry
1887 – His brother's execution intensified Lenin's revolutionary attitude
1897 – Exiled to Siberia, took the name Lenin (the most famous of the 160 aliases he used as a revolutionary)
1900 – Joined SD Party
1902 – Wrote *What Is To Be Done?*
1903 – Led the Bolshevik breakaway movement in the SD
1905 – Returned to Russia in December but played no part in the Revolution
1906–17 – In exile abroad
1917 – Returned to Petrograd following the February Revolution
– Led the Bolsheviks in a successful *coup* in October (see pages 99–108)
1917–20 – Led the Bolsheviks in consolidating their hold on Russia
1918 – Injured in an SR attempt on his life
1921 – Introduced NEP to save Russia from starvation (see pages 151–5)
1922–3 – Suffered a number of severe strokes that left him speechless
1924 – Died

Lenin had been on the tsarist authorities' list of 'dangerous persons' since he was 17. The execution of his elder brother in 1887 for his part in an attempted assassination of Alexander III had made Lenin himself politically suspect. He lived up to his reputation. By the age of 20, his study of Marx's writings had turned him into a committed Marxist for whom revolution was a way of life. By the age of 30, his dedication to the cause of revolution in Russia had led to arrest, imprisonment and internal exile. Indeed, he was in exile in Siberia when the SD Party was formed in 1898.

Key date
Foundation of the All-Russian Social Democratic Workers Party: 1898

The first Marxist revolutionary of note in Russia was George Plekhanov, sometimes referred to as 'the father of Russian Marxism'. He had translated Marx's writings into Russian and had worked to promote the idea of proletarian revolution. It was under his leadership that the SD Party was formed in 1898. Despite his pioneering work, a number of the members soon became impatient with Plekhanov. They found him too theoretical in his approach; they wanted a much more active revolutionary programme. The outstanding spokesman for this viewpoint was Vladimir Ulyanov, better known as Lenin, the revolutionary name he adopted.

Lenin's impact on the SDs

When Lenin returned from exile to western Russia in 1900, he set about turning the SDs into his idea of what a truly revolutionary party must be. With a colleague, Julius Martov, he founded a party newspaper, *Iskra* (the Spark), which he used as the chief means of

putting his case to the party members. Lenin criticised Plekhanov for being more interested in reform than revolution. He said that under Plekhanov the SDs, instead of transforming the workers into a revolutionary force for the overthrow of capitalism, were following a policy of '**economism**'. Lenin wanted living and working conditions to get worse, not better. In that way the bitterness of the workers would increase, and so drive the Russian proletariat to revolution.

Key term
'Economism' Putting the improvement of the workers' conditions before the need for revolution.

In 1902, Lenin wrote his strongest attack yet on Plekhanov in a pamphlet called, *What Is To Be Done?* In it he berated him for continuing to seek allies among as broad a group of anti-tsarist elements as possible. Lenin insisted that this would lead nowhere. Revolution in Russia was possible only if it was organised and led by a party of dedicated, professional revolutionaries.

For Lenin, revolution was not a haphazard affair; it was a matter of applied science. The teachings of Karl Marx had already provided the key to understanding how revolutions operated. It was the task of those select members of the SD party who understood scientific Marxism to lead the way in Russia. The workers could not be left to themselves; they did not know enough. They had to be directed. It was the historical role of the informed members of the SD party to provide that direction. Only they could rescue the Russian working class and convert it to true socialism.

Key question
What led to the divide in the SD Party?

The Bolshevik–Menshevik split

The dispute between Lenin and Plekhanov came to a head during the second congress of the SD Party in 1903. Plekhanov tried to avoid confrontation, but Lenin deliberately made an issue of who had the right to belong to the Social Democratic Party. His aim was to force members to choose between Plekhanov's idea of a broad-based party, open to all revolutionaries, and his own concept of a small, tightly knit and exclusive party. The congress that met in a number of different places, including Brussels and London, was a heated affair, which frequently descended into a series of slanging matches over points of procedure. The London police, who had been asked by the Russian authorities to keep an eye on proceedings, tended to find the SDs a comical bunch. Their reports spoke of funny foreign gentlemen all speaking at the same time and trying to out-shout each other.

Key date
The SDs split into the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks factions: 1903

No matter how much the SDs may have amused the London bobbies, they took themselves very seriously. A deep divide developed between Lenin and his *Iskra* co-editor, Julius Martov, who shared Plekhanov's viewpoint about membership. Their quarrel was as much to do with personality as with politics. Martov believed that behind Lenin's tactics was a fierce determination to become dictator of the party. The following was typical of their exchanges:

> *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.
>
> *Lenin* – 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.

In a series of votes, the SD congress showed itself to be evenly divided between Lenin and Martov. However, after a particular set of divisions had gone in his favour, Lenin claimed that he and his supporters were the majority. This led to their being called **Bolsheviks** while Martov's group became known as **Mensheviks**. Initially, the main point dividing Bolsheviks and Mensheviks was simply one of procedure. However, following the split in 1903 the differences between them hardened into a set of opposed attitudes. These are shown in Figure 1.6.

Menshevik view	Issue	Bolshevik view
Russia not yet ready for proletarian revolution – the bourgeois stage had to occur first.	*Revolution*	Bourgeois and proletarian stages could be telescoped into one revolution.
A mass organisation with membership open to all revolutionaries.	*The?party*	A tight-knit, exclusive, organisation of professional revolutionaries.
Open, democratic discussion within the party – decisions arrived at by votes of members.	*Decision-making?*	Authority to be exercised by the Central Committee of the party – this was described as **'democratic centralism'**.
• Alliance with all other revolutionary and bourgeois liberal parties. • Support of trade unions in pursuing better wages and conditions for workers ('economism').	*Strategy?*	• No co-operation with other parties. • 'Economism' dismissed as playing into hands of bourgeoisie. • Aimed to turn workers into revolutionaries.

Figure 1.6: Main differences between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks

By 1912 the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks had become two distinct, conflicting Marxist parties. Lenin deliberately emphasised the difference between himself and Martov by resigning from the editorial board of *Iskra* and starting his own journal, *Vyperod* (Forward), as an instrument for Bolshevik attacks upon the Mensheviks. A Bolshevik daily paper, *Pravda* (the Truth), was first published in 1912.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks

The later success of Bolshevism in the October Revolution has tempted writers to overstate the importance of Lenin in the period before 1917. For example, Trotsky, who joined Lenin in 1917 after having been a Menshevik, argued in his later writings that the Bolsheviks had been systematically preparing the ground for revolution since 1903. But the fact was that during the years 1904–17 Lenin was largely absent from Russia. He lived variously in Finland, France, Switzerland and Austria, and his visits to Russia

Key terms

Bolsheviks
From *bolshinstvo*, Russian for majority.

Mensheviks
From *menshinstvo*, Russian for minority.

'Democratic centralism'
The notion developed by Lenin that true democracy in the Bolshevik Party lay in the obedience of the members to the authority and instructions of the leaders. The justification for this was that while, as representatives of the workers, all Bolsheviks were genuine revolutionaries, only the leaders were sufficiently educated in the science of revolution to understand what needed to be done. In practice, democratic centralism meant the Bolsheviks doing what Lenin told them to do.

Key question
How strong were the Bolsheviks before 1917?

were rare and fleeting. Although he continued from exile to issue a constant stream of instructions to his followers, he and they played only a minor role in events in Russia before 1917.

Bolshevik tactics before 1917

Lenin and his fellow exiles set up training schools for revolutionaries who were then smuggled back into Russia to infiltrate worker organisations such as the trade unions. The Bolsheviks who remained in Russia spent their time trying to raise money for their party. This frequently involved direct terrorism and violence; post offices were favourite targets for Bolshevik attack. In one notorious episode in Tiflis in Georgia, a Bolshevik gang bomb-blasted their way into a post office, killed some 20 people before making off with a quarter of a million roubles (around £500,000 in today's values). The money stolen in such raids was used to finance the printing of masses of handbills, leaflets and newspapers attacking the tsarist regime and calling for revolution.

Yet, the truth was that, despite such activities, Lenin's revolutionaries were regarded by the authorities during this period as merely a fringe group of extremists. Interestingly, the Bolsheviks were not listed by the police as a major challenge to the tsarist system. In the pre-1914 period the numerical strength of the Bolsheviks varied between 5000 and 10,000; even in February 1917 it was no more than 25,000. Before 1917, the Mensheviks invariably outnumbered them. Numbers, of course, are not everything. Determination is arguably more important. Whatever the apparent lack of influence of Lenin's Bolsheviks before 1917, the fact is that when a revolutionary situation developed in 1917 it was they who proved the best prepared to seize the opportunity to take over government (see page 105). The Bolsheviks' readiness was one of Lenin's major political achievements.

Key question
What had encouraged the growth of a liberal movement in tsarist Russia?

b) The Liberals

Until the issuing of the October Manifesto in 1905 (see page 38) political parties had been illegal in Russia. This had not actually prevented their formation, but it had made it very difficult for them to develop as genuinely democratic bodies. There was no tradition of open debate. Since they were denied legal recognition, they often resorted to extreme methods in order to spread their ideas. As a result, during the brief period of their permitted existence from 1905 to 1921, before they were again outlawed, the Russian political parties proved to be suspicious and intolerant of each other. This made co-operation and collective action difficult to organise. Yet, although they were to have a short and inglorious life, the Russian liberal parties should not be ignored. In historical study, losers deserve as much attention as winners.

The economic boom of the 1890s saw the rapid development of a small but ambitious class of industrialists, lawyers and financiers. It was among such social groups that liberal ideas for the modernising of Russia began to take hold. There was also often a strong national element in Russian liberalism. The national

minorities viewed the liberal movement as a means of advancing their claim to be independent of Russian imperial control. Two principal liberal parties came to prominence in the pre-1914 period – the Octobrists and the Kadets.

The Octobrists

This group dated from the issuing of the tsar's manifesto of October 1905, which created the **duma**. The Octobrists were moderates who were basically loyal to the tsar and his government. They believed in the maintenance of the Russian empire and regarded the manifesto and the establishment of the duma as major constitutional advances.

The Octobrists were mainly drawn from the larger commercial, industrial and landowning interests. Their leading members were Alexander Guchkov, a factory owner, and Mikhail Rodzianko, a large landowner, both of whom were later to take a major part in the Provisional Government of 1917 (see page 92). How relatively restricted the Octobrists were in their aims can be gauged from their programme, issued in November 1905, which called for:

> Unity amongst those who sincerely want the peaceful renewal of Russia and the triumph of law and order in the country, who reject both stagnation and revolution and who recognise the need for the establishment of a strong and authoritative regime, which, together with the representatives of the people, could bring peace to the country through constructive legislative work.

The limited aims of the Octobrists led to their being dismissed by revolutionaries as bourgeois reactionaries who were unwilling to challenge the existing system. This was not wholly accurate. In the dumas, the Octobrists frequently voiced serious criticisms of the short-sightedness or incompetence of the tsarist government. They may not have wanted the overthrow of tsardom, but they were very willing to point out its failings.

Key question
How critical were the Octobrists of the tsarist system?

Key terms

Duma
The Russian parliament, which existed from 1906 to 1917 (see page 44).

Constitutional monarchy
A system of government in which the king or emperor rules but governs through elected representatives who have authority to countermand his decisions.

The Constitutional Democrats (Kadets)

The Constitutional Democrats (also known as 'the Party of the People's Freedom') also came into being as a party at the time of the 1905 Revolution. The Kadets, the largest of the liberal parties, wanted Russia to develop as a **constitutional monarchy** in which the powers of the tsar would be restricted by a democratically elected constituent (national) assembly. They believed that such a body, representative of the whole of Russia, would be able to settle the nation's outstanding social, political and economic problems. Lenin dismissed this as bourgeois political naivety, but there is no doubt that the dream of a constituent assembly remained a source of excitement and inspiration to Russian reformers in the period before the 1917 Revolution.

The Kadets were the party of the liberal *intelligentsia*, containing progressive landlords, the smaller industrial entrepreneurs and members of the professions. Academics were prominent in the party, as typified by the Kadet leader, Paul Milyukov, who was a professor of history. In the duma, the Kadets proved to be the

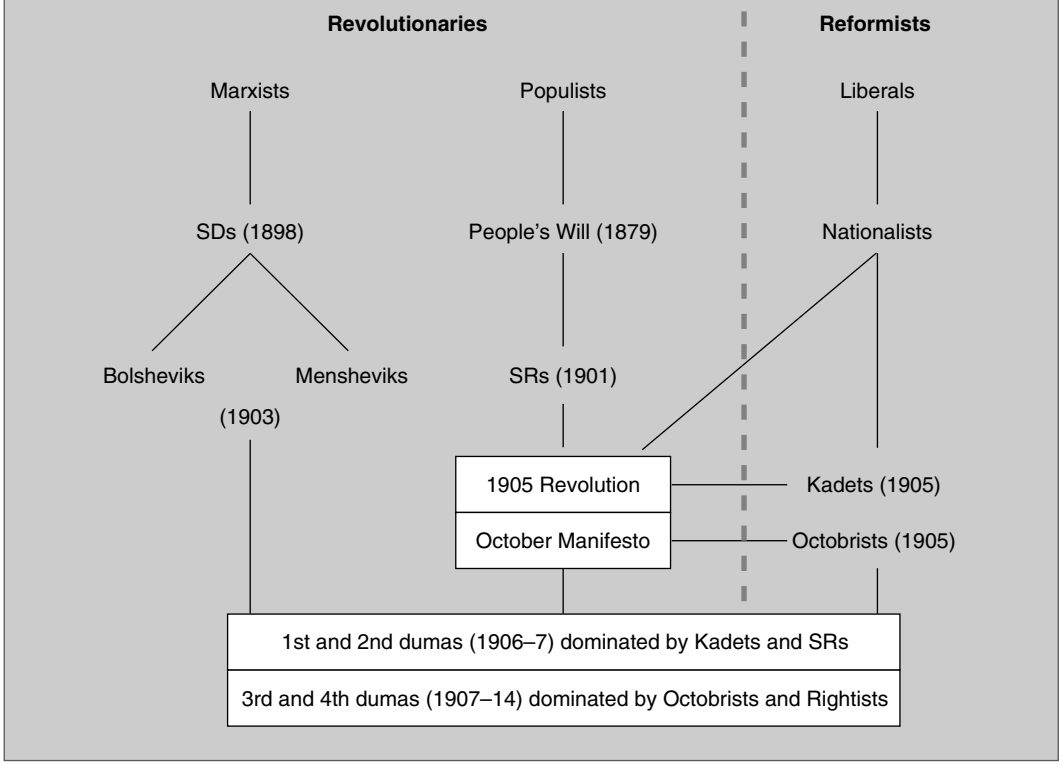
Key question
How sweeping was the Kadet Programme for the reform of tsarist Russia?

most outspoken critics of the tsarist system. They were to play a significant role in the events surrounding the February Revolution in 1917 (see page 75).

The Kadet Programme

- An All-Russian Constituent Assembly.
- Full equality and civil rights for all citizens.
- The ending of censorship.
- The abolition of the mortgage repayments on land.
- The recognition of trade unions and the right to strike.
- The introduction of universal, free education.

Summary diagram: The opponents of tsardom



Study Guide: AS Questions

In the style of AQA

(a) Explain why the Social Democratic Workers Party split in 1903. (12 marks)

(b) How important was the Bolshevik threat to Tsardom in the reign of Nicholas II? (24 marks)

Exam tips

The cross-references are intended to take you straight to the material that will help you answer the questions.

(a) The material you need will be found on pages 23–4. 'Explain why' means that you have not merely to describe the split but also to say how it came about:

- Was the division deliberately brought about by Lenin?
- Was it a clash of ideas or personalities?

You should provide a range of factors and show how these link together. You will be expected to show some judgement in your answer.

(b) You will need to plan your answer carefully. You must decide whether the Bolsheviks posed a major threat to Tsardom or whether it was only a small one – perhaps in comparison to other threats. Pages 19–27 will help you.

- We know that the Bolsheviks were going to come to power in 1917, but they did so only after the tsarist system had already fallen.
- A brief reference to the chief aims of the major parties – the SRs, Octobrists, Kadets – would enable you to make comparisons about the threat that they and the Bolsheviks represented. How anti-tsarist were they?
- How strong and how popular were the Bolsheviks before 1917? Are we perhaps in danger of exaggerating their influence because of their later success?
- How important is the evidence that the tsarist authorities did not regard the Bolsheviks as the greatest threat they faced?
- What importance do you attach to the determination and ruthlessness of the Bolsheviks?

When you have decided on the argument you will follow ensure that your paragraphs link well to the question, your points are supported by factual evidence and that you reach a suitably supported conclusion at the end of your essay.

In the style of Edexcel

To what extent did the Russian economy improve in the period 1894–1914? (30 marks)

Exam tips

The cross-references are intended to take you straight to the material that will help you answer the question.

The key words to note in planning your answer to this question are 'economy' and 'improve'. There is no need to deal with material that relates to political or social improvement. In order to deal with 'improvement' you must be able to make comparisons: in what ways did aspects of the economy improve? The question also asks you for a judgement about 'extent'. In order to assess the extent of improvement you should be able to comment on the significance of any improvement and also to identify any areas where improvement cannot be seen.

Your plan could be grouped into three sections:

- The state of the economy in 1894: industry and agriculture (pages 6–7).
- Evidence of improvement: the 'great spurt' in industry – coal and oil output (pages 13–14); investment (page 14); railway development (pages 14–15); higher national production (pages 15–16); the growth in the labour force (pages 15–16).
- Evidence of limitations: Witte's neglect of light engineering and of agricultural needs (page 16); trade recession and unemployment (page 17); low per capita output (pages 15–16).

In coming to an overall conclusion you need to take into account the extent to which there was progress overall in the economy in spite of the recession (page 17) and the extent to which Russia was developing into a modern industrial state in the period before 1914 (page 18).

This is an area where there is lively debate among historians (page 18), so it really is a question where there are no correct answers – it is a genuine opportunity for you to balance arguments on both sides and reach your own conclusion.

2 From War to War 1904–14

POINTS TO CONSIDER

The period 1905–14 was a testing time for Imperial Russia. At issue was the question of whether it could become a modern state. In 1905 the tsarist system was shaken by the most open challenge it had yet faced. It survived, but only by making concessions to its opponents. A parliament was granted and political parties were legalised. Whether such concessions weakened or strengthened tsardom is the underlying theme of this chapter, which sees Imperial Russia wrestling with its internal and external enemies. The key areas examined are:

- The Russo-Japanese war 1904–5
- The 1905 revolution
- The government's response to 1905: Stolypin and land reform
- The government's response to 1905: the dumas 1906–14
- Growing tensions in Russia 1911–14
- Whether 1894–1914 was tsardom's last chance

Key dates

1904–5	Russo-Japanese war
1905	Revolution
	October Manifesto
1906	Fundamental Laws issued
	First duma
1906–11	Stolypin's years as Chief Minister
1907	Second duma
1907–12	Third duma
1912	Lena Goldfields episode
1912–14	Fourth duma
1914	Germany declares war on Russia

1 | The Russo-Japanese War 1904–5

Key question
Why did Russia go to war with Japan?

The foreign policy that Nicholas II inherited and continued was largely determined by the size of the Russian empire. The protection of its many frontiers was a constant preoccupation. In 1904, Nicholas II faced his first major test in foreign affairs when his country went to war with its far-eastern neighbour, Japan. It was a war largely of Russia's own making.

The Russian government had three main motives in going to war with Japan in 1904:

- To pursue an expansionist policy in the Far East, to make up for what it saw as its relative decline in Europe (see page 58).
- To obtain an ice-free port, something for which Russia had yearned for centuries, all its major ports being unusable in the winter months when they froze.
- To distract attention from Russia's domestic troubles by rallying the nation in a patriotic struggle.

In regard to the last motive, it used to be thought that Viacheslav Plehve, the Interior Minister, was the main force pushing for war. His words 'We need a small, victorious war to avert a revolution' were often quoted. However, research has shown that Plehve was deliberately misrepresented by his political opponent, Witte. We now know that Plehve was reluctant to go to war, whereas Witte, wishing to see Russia expand economically into the Far East, knew full well that this made conflict with Japan a very strong possibility.

The path to war

The Russians looked on Japan as an inferior nation and no match for themselves. They expected an easy victory. Pretexts for war

Figure 2.1: Map showing the main areas of the Russo-Japanese war

were not hard to find. Territorial disputes between Russia and Japan over Korea and Manchuria were long-standing. In 1904, the Russian government curtly rejected Japanese proposals for the settlement of the two countries' rival claims to Korea. The Russian hope was that this would provoke a military response from the Japanese. It did: Japan opened hostilities by attacking the Russian fleet in Port Arthur.

The course of the conflict

Key question
Why did Russia perform so badly in the war?

The war itself soon showed that Russia had greatly underestimated the strength of Japan. It was not the backward state the Russians had imagined. Under the Emperor Meiji (1869–1914), Japan had embarked upon a series of major reforms aimed at rapid modernisation along Western lines. The Japanese army and navy were far better prepared and equipped than the Russian forces and won a series of striking victories over them. For Russia the conflict was a tale of confusion and disaster. After a long siege, Port Arthur fell to Japan in January 1905. The following month, the Japanese exploited their advantage by seizing the key Manchurian town of Mukden.

The final humiliation for Russia came at sea. The Russian Baltic fleet, dispatched to the Far East in 1904, took eight months to reach its destination, only to be blown out of the water immediately on its arrival by the Japanese fleet at Tsushima in May 1905. Such defeats obliged the tsarist government to make peace. In the Treaty of Portsmouth, Russia agreed to withdraw her remaining forces from Manchuria and accepted Japanese control of Korea and Port Arthur.

Key dates

Start of Russo-Japanese War: February 1904

Russia lost Port Arthur to Japan: January 1905

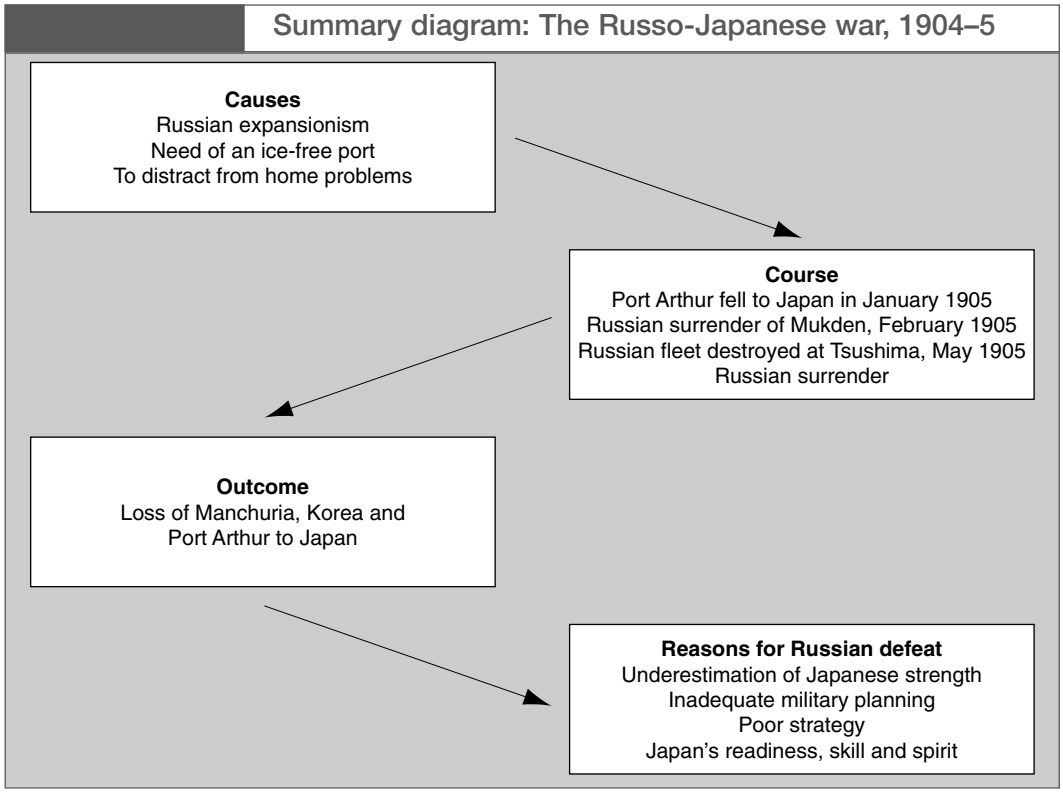
Russian fleet destroyed at Tsushima: May 1905

Signing of Russo-Japanese peace treaty: September 1905

Russia's defeat

Russia lost the war not because her troops fought badly, but because her military commanders had not prepared effectively. They understood neither the enemy they were fighting nor the territory in which the struggle took place. Their unimaginative strategy allowed the Japanese to outmanoeuvre the Russian forces. The distance over which men and materials had to be transported from western Russia made it impossible to provide adequate reinforcements and supplies. The Trans-Siberian Railway, still incomplete in a number of sections, proved of little value. Russia's defeat at the hands of a small, supposedly inferior, Asian country was a national humiliation.

Within Russia, the incompetence of the government, which the war glaringly revealed, excited the social unrest that it had been specifically designed to dampen. Russia's dismal performance was a potent factor in the build up of tension which led to an open challenge to tsardom – the 1905 Revolution.



Key question
How far was the tsarist government responsible for the 1905 Revolution?

2 | The 1905 Revolution

The reasons for the revolution

The situation created by the government's policy of political repression was graphically described by Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), the great Russian novelist and philosopher. In 1902, in an 'Open address to Nicholas II', he detailed the persecution under which Russia groaned. Prisons were overflowing with convicts innocent of any real crime, the city streets were full of soldiers ready to shoot the people on a whim, and the censors' power stretched everywhere denying freedom of religious and political expression. Things were no better in the countryside where famine was a constant source of peasant misery.

Presiding over this grim scene was a government that squeezed money from the people through heavy taxation but was incapable of providing leadership. The result, Tolstoy told the tsar, was 'the general dissatisfaction of all classes with the government and their open hostility against it'. Tolstoy's depressing conclusion was that 'it is impossible to maintain this form of government except by violence'.

The bleak picture that Tolstoy painted did not necessarily mean that confrontation, still less revolution, was unavoidable. After all, if oppression is applied firmly enough it prevents effective challenges to government. What weakened the tsarist regime in the period before 1917 was not its tyranny but its incompetence. It is certainly true that the crisis that occurred in Russia in 1905 was

in large measure due to the mishandling of the situation by the tsar and his government. This was shown by the speed with which the government reasserted its authority once it had recovered its nerve.

The year 1905 marked the first time the tsarist government had been faced by a combination of the three main opposition classes in Russia – the industrial workers, the peasantry, and the reformist middle class. This was the broad-based revolt that most revolutionaries had been awaiting. Yet, when it came, it was accidental rather than planned. Despite the efforts of the various revolutionary parties to politicise events, the strikes and demonstrations in the pre-1905 period had been the result of economic rather than political factors. They had been a reaction to industrial recession and bad harvests. It was the tsarist regime's ill-judged policies that turned the disturbances of 1905 into a direct challenge to its own authority.

The course of events

Bloody Sunday

Key question
What pattern did the 1905 Revolution follow?

Bloody Sunday: January 1905 — Key date

The 1905 Revolution began with what has become known as Bloody Sunday. On 22 January, Father Georgy Gapon, an Orthodox priest, attempted to lead a peaceful march of workers and their families to the Winter Palace in St Petersburg. The marchers' intention was to present a loyal petition to the tsar, begging him to use his royal authority to relieve their desperate conditions.

However, the march induced panic in the police forces in the capital. The marchers were fired on and charged by cavalry. There are no precise casualty figures, but estimates suggest that up to 200 marchers may have been killed with hundreds more being injured. The deaths were depicted by opponents of the tsarist regime as a deliberate massacre of unarmed petitioners. Although Nicholas II was in fact absent from St Petersburg when these events took place, they gravely damaged the traditional image of the tsar as the 'Little Father', the guardian of the Russian people. In the midst of the death and confusion, Gapon had repeatedly cried out: 'There is no God any longer. There is no Tsar'.

Disorder spreads

The immediate reaction to Bloody Sunday in Russia at large was a widespread outbreak of disorder, which increased as the year went on. Strikes occurred in all the major cities and towns. Terrorism against government officials and landlords, much of it organised by the Social Revolutionaries, spread to the countryside.

The situation was made worse by Russia's humiliation in the war against Japan (see page 32). The government was blamed for Russia's defeat, which led to further outrages, including the assassination of Plehve by SR terrorists. Public buildings in towns and large private estates in the country were attacked. Land and properties were seized by the peasants,

who then squatted in the landlords' houses. An important factor motivating the peasants was the fear that the government was about to repossess the homes of those families who had failed to pay off the mortgages taken out in the post-emancipation years (see page 7).

Profile: Father Gapon 1876–1906

1876 – Born
1903 – Helped found the Assembly of Russian Workers
1904 – Involved in organising a mass strike
1905 – January – Led workers march to present a petition to the tsar
– February – Fled to Geneva after Bloody Sunday massacre
– December – Returned to St Petersburg
1906 – March – Murdered

Key term

Double-agent
A government agent who pretends to be spying for the opposition against the authorities but who reports plans and secrets back to the authorities.

Gapon himself remains an intriguing character about whom mystery still hangs. There were strong suspicions that he was an *Okhrana* **double-agent**. Sometimes he genuinely sympathised with the workers, as suggested by his efforts in organising the Assembly of Russian Factory and Plant Workers. He said he wanted to 'build a nest among the factory and mill workers where a truly Russian spirit would prevail'. Yet, on other occasions, he was willing to inform on those he led and to betray them to the authorities.

At the time of Bloody Sunday he appeared to be sincere in his wish to lead the workers in protest; indeed, he ignored a direct order from the authorities to call off the march. Having escaped serious injury or arrest during the suppression of the protest, he immediately fled from Russia to join a group of Social Democratic revolutionaries in Geneva. It was there that he met Lenin with whom he had a series of intense discussions. Lenin's wife, Krupskaya, recorded that her husband learned a great deal about Russian peasant problems from his talks with Gapon. For his part, Lenin tried to convert Gapon to Marxism.

Yet, by the end of 1905, Gapon had returned to St Petersburg, declaring that he no longer believed in revolution and that he wished to help the government track down its enemies. This may have been a ruse. Perhaps he intended to infiltrate government circles as an SD spy. His exact intentions will never be known. The only hard fact is that in March 1906 he was murdered, apparently by *Okhrana* agents, although even this is unclear.

Modern historians tend to agree that Gapon was naïve politically and became involved in events he never fully grasped.
A contemporary was once asked whether Gapon was a supporter of constitutionalism. He replied, 'Support it? He can't even say it'. Whatever Gapon's real intentions may have been, his lack of understanding of political realities made him a fascinating but ultimately powerless participant in the 1905 Revolution.

The unrest and the government's difficulties in containing it encouraged the non-Russian minorities to assert themselves. Georgia declared itself an independent state, the Poles demanded **autonomy** and the Jews pressed for equal rights.

Key term
Autonomy National self-government.

In May, the Kadets, led by Milyukov, persuaded the majority of the liberal groups to join them in forming a 'Union of Unions', with the aim of organising a broad-based alliance that would include the peasants and the factory workers. A 'Union of Unions' declaration was issued, which referred to the government as 'a terrible menace' and called for a constituent assembly to replace 'the gang of robbers' now in power.

The *Potemkin* mutiny

Key question
Why was mutiny such a serious threat to the tsarist regime?

The summer of 1905 brought the still more disturbing news for the tsarist authorities of mutinies in the army and navy. The rank and file soldiers in the army were peasants who were naturally reluctant to attack their own kind – workers on strike or rebellious peasants in the countryside. There were several instances of troops disobeying orders to shoot unarmed strikers or to use force to drive peasants from the properties they had occupied.

Key dates
'Union of Unions' formed: May 1905
Potemkin mutiny: June 1905

In June there were even worse tidings for the government. The crew of the battleship *Prince Potemkin*, of the Black Sea naval squadron, mutinied while at sea. The incident began as a protest by the sailors at having to eat rotting food and drink foul water; particular horrors were *borsch*, a thin soup made from mouldy beetroots, and evil-smelling scraps of meat crawling with maggots. The sailors elected a representative, Peter Vakulenchuk, to approach the captain with their complaints. The captain's immediate response was to have the man shot. In retaliation, the crew attacked the officers, killed several of them and then took over the ship. This was a desperate act and could have worked only if the other ships in the squadron had mutinied also. But they did not; despite the equally grim conditions in the other ships, the captains managed to maintain control. The crew of the *Potemkin* were on their own.

Hoping to arouse support on land, they sailed to the port of Odessa where a serious anti-government strike was taking place. The strikers welcomed the crew as heroes and formally honoured the body of Vakulenchuk by laying it on an elevated platform and surrounding it with flowers. It was a defiant gesture of solidarity but it enraged the authorities who could not tolerate strikers and mutineers making common cause. Troops were ordered to disperse the crowds who had gathered in the harbour at the foot of a deep and wide flight of steps. With bayonets fixed, the soldiers marched resolutely down the steps trampling on those who fell in front of them and driving hundreds into the sea. The civilian death toll ran into thousands.

The massacre forced the *Potemkin* to leave Odessa. Since no other ships had sided with them, the crew decided to cut their

losses. They sailed around the Black Sea looking for a safer area to land. Eventually they abandoned the ship in a Romanian port, hoping to find sanctuary for themselves in this remoter part of the Russian empire.

Although the mutiny was restricted to one ship, there was no doubt the affair was deeply troubling to the Russian authorities. A government that cannot rely on the loyalty of its armed services, particularly in time of war, is in a very vulnerable position. The end of the Russo-Japanese War in August did little to ease the situation. Indeed, Witte feared that the returning troops would join the revolution. If this happened, he said, 'then everything would collapse'.

This figure is not available online for copyright reasons

There are no photographs of the *Potemkin* mutiny. These two stills are taken from the feature film *The Battleship Potemkin,* made in 1925 by Sergei Eisenstein, the pro-Bolshevik director. The images from his silent film are so powerful that they have conditioned the way we visualise the actual event itself.

Nicholas II had shown his distaste for Sergei Witte years earlier when he had relieved him of his post as Finance Minister after ten years loyal service (see page 17). However, it was to Witte that the tsar now turned in June 1905. Witte's first task was to negotiate peace terms with the Japanese. With this successfully completed, he then became Chairman of the Council of Ministers, the effective head of the tsar's government. Yet, Witte remained frustrated by the inability of the tsar and his ministers to understand the crisis Russia was in. He referred to government policy as a 'mixture of cowardice, blindness and stupidity'. Nevertheless, he remained at his post driven by a sense of duty to do his best to steer the regime through its difficulties.

Soviets

By the autumn of 1905, the industrial unrest had grown into a general strike. It was in this atmosphere that a development of particular moment occurred. In a number of cities, most notably in St Petersburg and Moscow, workers formed themselves into an elected **soviet**. The soviets began as organisations to represent the workers' demands for better conditions, but their potential as bases for political agitation was immediately recognised by revolutionaries. The Menshevik, Lev Trotsky, became chairman of the St Petersburg soviet and organiser of several strikes in the capital.

Key dates

St Petersburg Soviet formed: October 1905

Moscow Soviet formed: November 1905

Tsar issued the October Manifesto: October 1905

Government recovery

Key question

What steps did the government take to deal with the challenge facing it?

By October the tsar was faced by the most united opposition in Romanov history. But at this critical juncture the regime began to show the sense of purpose that it had so far lacked. Concession was unavoidable, but by giving ground the government intended to divide the opposition forces which confronted it. The liberals were the first to be appeased. On Witte's advice, the tsar issued the October Manifesto in which he accepted the creation of a **legislative duma**.

Since the Manifesto, which Witte had written, also contained a promise to introduce a range of civil rights, including freedom of speech, assembly and worship, and the legalising of trade unions, the liberals could claim a remarkable success. Their appetite for reform was satisfied, at least temporarily.

The peasants were the next to be pacified by an announcement in November that the mortgage repayments which had so troubled them were to be progressively reduced and then abolished altogether. The response was an immediate drop in the number of land-seizures by the peasants and a decline in the general lawlessness in the countryside.

Having won over the liberals and peasants, the government was now seriously opposed by only one major group – the industrial workers. Here the policy was one not of concession but of suppression. The government felt strong enough to attempt to crush the soviets. Despite the mutinies earlier in the year, the troops who returned from the Far East at the end of the war proved loyal enough to be used against the strikers. After a five-day siege, the headquarters of the St Petersburg soviet were stormed and the ringleaders, including Trotsky, were arrested. The destruction of the Moscow soviet was even more violent. Lenin, who had been slow to take advantage of the 1905 Revolution, arrived in Moscow in December, only in time to witness the flames of the gutted soviet buildings, set ablaze by government troops.

With the worst of the troubles clearly over by the spring of 1906, Nicholas II again revealed his contempt for Witte by summarily dismissing him. Witte was to live another nine years but he was never again to hold a prominent position in Russian public affairs. That the tsar believed he could dispense with the services of one of the few truly able men in the government was another indication how out of touch Nicholas was with Russia's real needs.

Key terms

Soviet
Russian word for a council made up of elected representatives.

Legislative duma
A parliament with law-making powers.

Key question
Were the events of 1905 really a revolution?

The significance of the 1905 Revolution

A notable feature of the 1905 Revolution was how minor a part was played by the revolutionaries. Hardly any of them were in St Petersburg or Moscow when it began. Revolution occurred in spite, rather than because, of them. With the exception of Trotsky, none of the SDs made an impact on the course of events. This throws doubt on the notion of 1905 as a revolution.

There is the further fact that in a number of important respects tsardom emerged from the disturbances stronger rather than weaker. Despite its disastrous failure to win the war against Japan, which produced protest throughout Russia and united the classes in opposition, the tsarist regime survived 1905 remarkably unscathed. The mutinies in the armed services did not spread and did not continue after the war. Loyal troops returned to destroy the soviets. The readiness of the liberals and the peasants to accept the government's political and economic bribes indicated that neither of those groups was genuinely ready for revolution.

Key date
Tsar promulgated the Fundamental Laws: April 1906

It is true that the tsar appeared to grant significant concessions in the October Manifesto, but these were expedients rather than real reforms. The duma was not intended to be, nor did it become, a limitation on the tsar's autocratic powers. This was evident from the Fundamental Laws, which Nicholas II promulgated in April 1906:

> The Sovereign Emperor possesses the initiative in all legislative matters. The Fundamental Laws may be subject to revision in the State Council and the State Duma only on His initiative. The Sovereign Emperor ratifies the laws. No law can come into force without his approval.

The lesson of the 1905 Revolution

What 1905 showed was that as long as the tsarist government kept its nerve and the army remained loyal, the forces of protest would find it very difficult to mount a serious challenge.

The events of 1905 also raised questions about the extent to which the liberals wanted change in Russia. Few of them enjoyed their experience of mixing with the workers during the Revolution. They found proletarian coarseness unattractive and were frightened by the primitive forces they had helped to unleash. One middle-class proprietor, who had thrown his house open to the strikers, remarked on the difficulty of sustaining his belief in the goodness of people who abused his hospitality by molesting his daughters, urinating on his carpets and stealing everything they could carry. Peter Struve, who had been a Marxist before joining the Kadets in 1905, spoke for all frightened liberals when he said 'Thank God for the tsar, who has saved us from the people'.

Lev Trotsky reflected that 1905 had failed as a revolution because the protestors were disunited and inexperienced. Moreover, the liberals had backed out of the revolution and betrayed the workers by leaving them to be crushed by government troops. He concluded that the tsarist system 'although with a few broken ribs, had come out of the experience of 1905 alive and strong'.

Summary diagram: The 1905 Revolution

Key question
What was Stolypin aiming to achieve in his dealings with the peasants?

3 | The Government's Response to 1905: Stolypin and Land Reform

Peter Stolypin was appointed President of the Council of Ministers in July 1906. Like Witte before him, he was dedicated to strengthening tsardom in a time of crisis. He was a political conservative, whose attitude was clearly expressed in the coercive measures he introduced between 1906 and 1911. He declared his guiding principle to be 'suppression first and then, and only then, reform'. However, he also considered that, where possible, reform should be introduced as a way of reducing the social bitterness on which opposition fed. It was in this spirit that he approached the land problem in Russia.

Stolypin started from the conviction that industrial progress by itself could not solve Russia's most pressing need – how to feed the nation's rapidly growing population. Russia had undergone a **'rural crisis'** in the late nineteenth century. The problem had been deepened by a series of bad harvests in the 1890s which left millions hungry; the years 1891 and 1897 had witnessed especially severe famines. The government's land policies following the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 had not helped. The scheme under which state mortgages were advanced to the freed serfs to enable them to buy their properties had not created the peace and harmony that the government had hoped for.

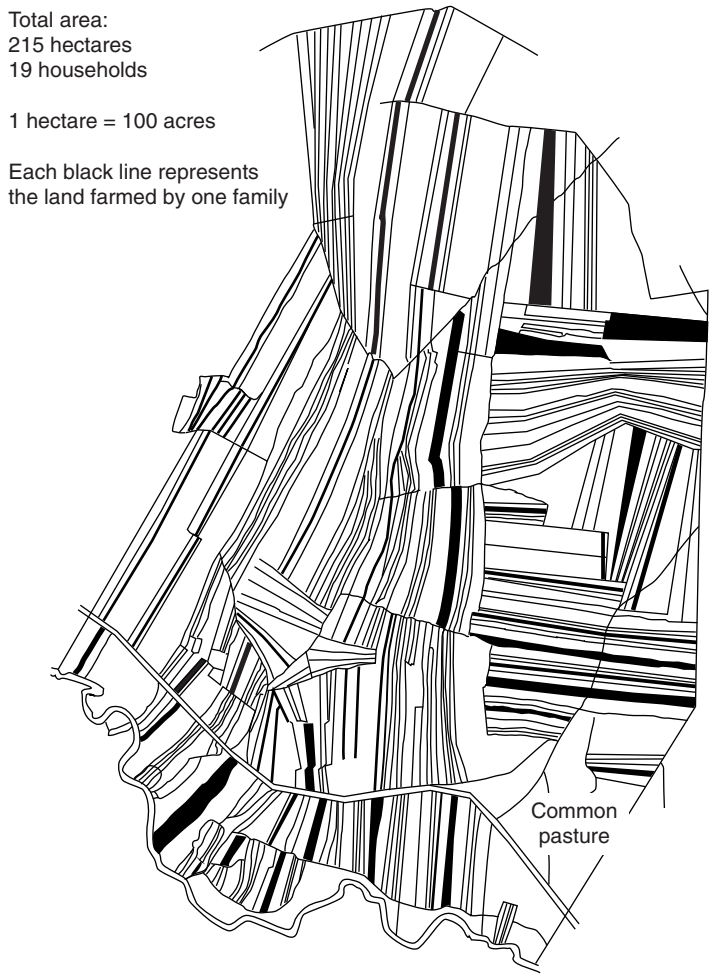
Key term
'Rural crisis'
Refers to the problem of land shortage and over-population in the countryside produced by the huge increase in the number of people living in Russia by the late nineteenth century.

'De-revolutionising' the peasantry

The high price of land, which led to heavy mortgage repayments, had impoverished the peasants. They felt very insecure, which meant that they farmed inefficiently and were a dangerous social force. One of the reasons why the peasants joined the Revolution in 1905 was their fear that the government was about to seize the land of those many mortgage-holders who had fallen behind in their payments. When the government came to understand this fear, it bought off the peasants by announcing that the outstanding repayments would be cancelled. This tactic has been called 'de-revolutionising' the peasants.

The 'wager on the strong'

Stolypin planned to build upon this successful treatment of the peasantry. In 1906–7, he introduced measures to restore the peasants' sense of security. Farmers were urged to replace the inefficient strip system (see page 42) with fenced fields, based on the pattern that existed in western Europe. A special Land Bank was established to provide funds for the independent peasant to buy his land. Stolypin defined his policy as a 'wager on the strong'. His intention was to create a layer of prosperous, productive peasants whose new wealth would turn them into natural supporters of the tsarist system. His reforms also included schemes for large-scale voluntary resettlement of the peasants, the aim being to populate the empire's remoter areas, such as Siberia, and turn them into food-growing areas.



Strip farming as practised in central Russia *c*.1900. The land was divided into small individually cultivated sections. The weakness of the system was that the lack of space and closeness to other strips prevented the farmer from being efficient; he could not protect or improve his crops and livestock or expand his output.

Key debate

Did Stolypin's land reforms have any realistic chance of success?

Historians disagree over how realistic Stolypin's policies were. The standard view of most scholars in this field has been that he had little real chance of reforming agriculture since the Russian peasantry was so backward and he had so little time to change things.

Others, however, have argued that, while it is true that the **conservatism** of most peasants prevented them from embracing progressive change, Stolypin was right, nonetheless, in thinking that he could wager on 'the strong' since there was, indeed, a layer of strong peasant farmers. This argument is based on evidence drawn from tsarist tax returns, which show that a significant minority of peasants were paying increasingly higher taxes in the 1890s, a sign that their farming was producing high profits.

Key term

Conservatism Suspicion of change, and, therefore, resistance to it.

The conclusion, therefore, is that the traditional picture of a totally depressed peasantry is misleading since it takes too little notice of the agricultural advances being made in parts of Russia.

The problem is that, even if one accepts as fact that there was a progressive element among the peasants, there is no certainty that this would have been enough to modernise Russian agriculture. Even in advanced economies land reform takes time to work. Stolypin was well aware that, in a country as relatively backward as Russia, the changes would take even longer to become effective. He spoke of needing 20 years for his 'wager on the strong' to bring results. In the event, his assassination in 1911 allowed him personally only five years, and the coming of the war in 1914 allowed Russia only eight.

However, the doubt remains whether, even without the interruption of murder and war, his peasant policy would have succeeded. The deep conservatism of the mass of the Russian peasants made them slow to respond. In 1914, the strip system was still widespread. As Table 2.1 shows, only about 10 per cent of the land had been consolidated into farms. Most peasants were reluctant to leave the security of the commune for the uncertainty of individual farming. Furthermore, by 1913 the government's own Ministry of Agriculture had itself begun to lose confidence in the policy.

Table 2.1: Number of peasant households that opted to set up independent farms (out of an estimated total of 10–12 million households)

1907	48,271
1908	508,344
1909	579,409
1910	342,245
1911	145,567
1912	122,314
1913	134,554
1914	97,877

One notable feature of Stolypin's land policy was his effective working relations with the duma. The understanding which he developed with the Octobrists, the largest party in the third duma (see page 44), allowed him to pursue his reforms with little obstruction from the other deputies. His success here hinted at how much co-operation might have developed between government and progressive opinion had the tsarist regime been willing to trust its own ministers.

4 | The Government's Response to 1905: The Dumas 1906–14

The tsar's granting of a duma in the October Manifesto was the most striking of the concessions made to the liberals. It remained to be seen what role this new parliament, the first in Russian

history, would play. There were four dumas in the years between the 1905 Revolution and the February Revolution of 1917 (see page 75). The four elections produced the results shown in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Duma election results

Party or group	*1st Duma 1906*	*2nd Duma 1907*	*3rd Duma 1907–12*	*4th Duma 1912–17*
SDs (Mensheviks)	18	47	–	–
SDs (Bolsheviks)	–	–	19	15
SRs	–	37	–	–
Labourists	136	104	13	10
Kadets	182	91	54	53
Octobrists	17	42	154	95
Progressists	27	28	28	41
Rightists	8	10	147	154
National parties	60	93	26	22
Others	–	50	–	42
Total	448	518	441	432

The first duma, April–June 1906

Key question
Why was the first duma unsuccessful?

Key date
First duma: 1906

The high hopes of the liberals that the granting of the duma marked a real constitutional advance were dashed even before it first met. Having survived the challenge of the 1905 Revolution, the tsarist regime quickly recovered its confidence. Early in 1906, it successfully negotiated a substantial loan from France. This lessened the likelihood of the dumas being able to exercise a financial hold over the government.

A still greater limitation on the duma's influence was the tsar's promulgation of the Fundamental Laws, which was timed to coincide with the opening of the duma. In addition to declaring that 'Supreme Autocratic Power' belonged to the tsar, the Laws announced that the duma would be **bi-cameral**; one chamber would be an elected lower house, the other would be a state council, the majority of whose members would be appointed by the tsar.

The existence of a second chamber with the right of veto deprived the elected duma of any real power. Taken together with the declaration that no law could come into being without the tsar's approval, these restrictions made it clear that the tsarist regime had no intention of allowing the concessions it had made in 1905 to diminish its absolute authority.

The Vyborg appeal

The result was that the duma met in a mood of bitterness. The elections had returned an assembly that was dominated by the reformist parties. They immediately voiced their anger at what they regarded as the government going back on its promises. They demanded that the rights and powers of the duma be increased. Ivan Goremykin, the chief minister, told them that their demands were 'inadmissible' and Nicholas II was reported as saying, 'Curse the duma. It is all Witte's doing'. After two months of bitter wrangling, the tsar ordered the duma to be dissolved.

Key terms

Labourists
The SRs as a party officially boycotted the elections to the first duma, but stood as Labourists.

Progressists
A party of businessmen who favoured moderate reform.

Rightists
Not a single party; they represented a range of conservative views from right of centre to extreme reaction.

Bi-cameral
A parliament made up of two chambers or houses, an upper and a lower.

In frustration, 200 Kadet and Labourist deputies reassembled at Vyborg in Finland where they drew up an 'Appeal', urging the people of Russia to defy their government in two main ways by:

- refusing to pay taxes
- disobeying conscription orders.

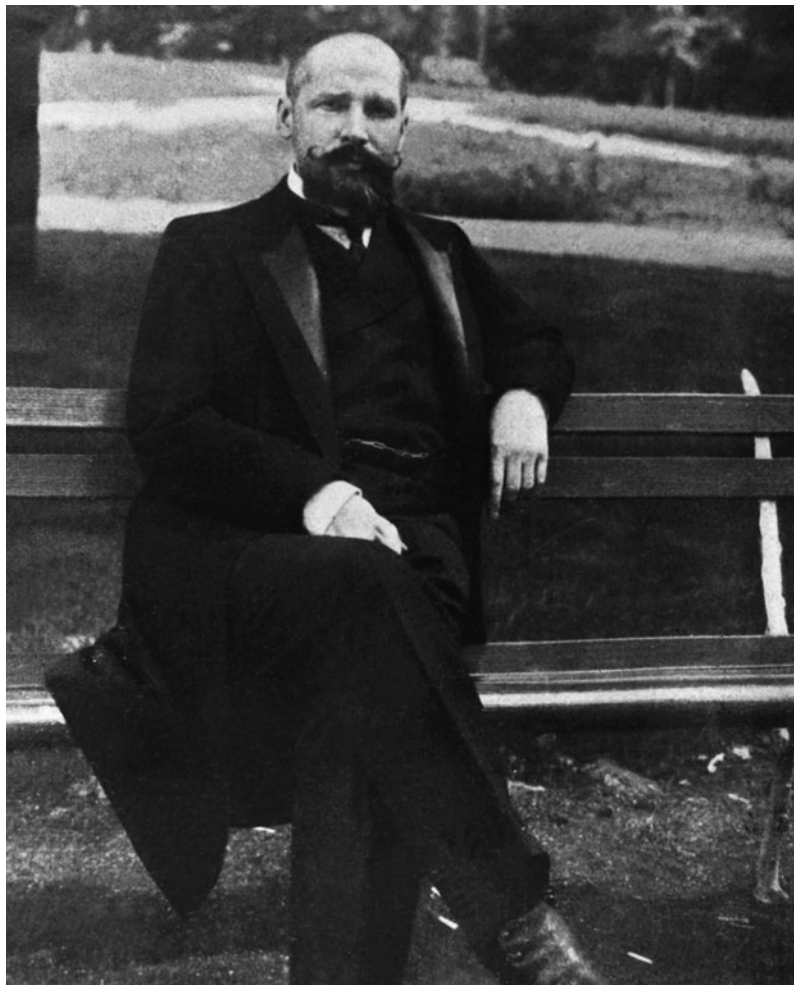
The rebellious Kadets who issued the Appeal had made a serious tactical error. The response from the Russian people was not widespread **passive disobedience** but scattered violence. This provided the government with a ready excuse for retaliation. The tsar appointed Stolypin as chief minister to act as his strong man. The Vyborg group of deputies was arrested and debarred from re-election to the duma.

This was the prelude to Stolypin's introduction of a policy of fierce repression, which he sustained until his assassination in 1911. **Martial law** was proclaimed and a network of military courts, with sweeping powers, was used to quell disturbances wherever they occurred. Between 1906 and 1911 there were over 2500 executions in Russia, a grim detail that, in a piece of black humour, led to the hangman's noose being nicknamed 'Stolypin's necktie'.

Key terms

Passive disobedience
A tactic in which opponents of a government show their disfavour not by violent challenge but by refusing to obey particular laws.

Martial law
The placing of the whole population under direct military authority.



Peter Stolypin. His last words, after being fatally shot in the presence of Nicholas on 1 September 1911 while attending the opera at the Kiev Theatre, were reported to be, 'It's all over. I am happy to die for the Tsar'. There were rumours that his assassin, Dmitri Bogrov, who was hanged for his crime on 10 September, was a secret government agent. Why do you think government agents might have been involved in the assassination?

THE DEATH OF THE FIRST-BORN.

'Mother Russia weeping over the death of the first-born'. A dramatic representation of the failure of the first duma.

The Kadet failure in 1906 had serious long-term effects. Although the Kadet Party survived under the leadership of Milyukov, it never really recovered from its humiliation. The liberal cause had discredited itself, thus allowing both the left and the right to argue from their different standpoints that Russia's salvation could not be gained through moderate policies but only by revolution or extreme reaction.

The second duma, February–June 1907

Key question
Why was the second duma even more critical of the government than the first?

Key date
Second duma: 1907

The immediate result of the Vyborg fiasco was that, in the elections for the second duma, the Kadets lost half their seats. These were filled by the SDs and the SRs, who between them returned over 80 deputies. This made the new assembly strongly anti-government. Indeed, the SRs proclaimed dramatically that it was 'the duma of the people's wrath'. However, since the right-wing parties had also increased their numbers, there was considerable disagreement within the duma, as well as between it and the government.

Whatever the internal divisions among the parties, the mood of the duma was undeniably hostile to the government. Stolypin, who, despite his stern repression of social disorder, was willing to work with the duma in introducing necessary reforms, found his land programme strenuously opposed. The tsar was particularly

incensed when the duma directed a strong attack on the way the imperial army was organised and deployed. The SD and SR deputies were accused of engaging in subversion and Nicholas ordered that the assembly be dissolved. Deputies scuffled and shouted out in protest as the session was duly brought to an end.

Key question
Why was the third duma less hostile to the government?

The third duma, November 1907–June 1912

Despite the opposition shown by the first two dumas, the tsar made no attempt to dispense with the duma altogether. There were two main reasons for this. The first related to foreign policy. The tsar was keen to project an image of Russia as a democratic nation. He was advised by his foreign ministers, who at this time were in trade talks with France and Britain, that Russia's new commercial allies were greatly impressed by his creation of a representative national parliament.

The second reason was that the duma had been rendered docile by the government's doctoring of the electoral system. Stolypin introduced new laws that restricted the vote to the propertied classes. The peasants and industrial workers lost the franchise. The consequence was that the third and fourth dumas were heavily dominated by the right-wing parties (as Table 2.2 on page 44 shows), a reversal of the position in the first two dumas in which the radical parties had held a large majority. Any criticisms of tsardom were now much more muted.

With the balance of the parties redressed in this way, Stolypin found the third duma more co-operative, which enabled him to pursue his land reforms without opposition from the deputies (see page 41). This is not to say that the duma was entirely subservient. It exercised its right to question ministers and to discuss state finances. It also used its **committee system** to make important proposals for modernising the armed services. Among the bills it approved were social-reform measures that included setting up schools for the children of the poor and **national insurance** for industrial workers.

Key terms

Committee system
A process in which the duma deputies formed various committees to discuss and advise on particular issues.

National insurance
A system of providing workers with state benefits, such as unemployment pay and medical treatment, in return for the workers contributing regularly to a central fund.

Key question
Did the fourth duma serve any real purpose?

The fourth duma, November 1912–August 1914

After 1917, it was usual for historians to follow the lead of the Bolsheviks in dismissing the later dumas as having been merely rubber stamps of government policy. However, modern scholars tend to be less dismissive. Although the fourth duma was less openly obstructive than the earlier ones had been, it still voiced criticism of the tsar's government. Interestingly, a Moscow *Okhrana* report in 1912 blamed the tension in Russia on the awkward and searching questions continually being asked in the duma about government policy.

> People can be heard speaking of the government in the sharpest and most unbridled tones. Influenced by questions in the duma and the speeches which they called forth there, public tension is increasing still more. It is a long time since even the extreme left has spoken in such a way, since there have been references in the duma to 'the necessity of calling a Constituent Assembly and overthrowing the present system by the united strength of the proletariat'.

Key dates

Third duma: 1907

Fourth duma: 1912–14

Historians also emphasise the progressive work of the duma in providing state welfare and suggest that it was only the blindness of the tsarist government that prevented the dumas from making a greater contribution to the development of Russia. A strong piece of evidence that supports this view is a duma resolution of 1913 pointing out how seriously the government was damaging its own position by refusing to acknowledge what was happening in Russia:

> The Ministry of the Interior systematically scorns public opinion and ignores the repeated wishes of the new legislature. The duma considers it pointless to express any new wishes in regard to internal policy. The Ministry's activities arouse dissatisfaction among the broad masses who have hitherto been peaceful. Such a situation threatens Russia with untold dangers.

Summary diagram: The government's response to 1905: the dumas 1906–14

	Character	*Achievements*
1st duma 1906	Dominated by reformist parties	Short lived – little achieved
2nd duma 1907	Clash between revolutionaries and right-wing parties	Dissolved in disorder – little achieved
3rd duma 1907–12	Election rigged by Stolypin to produce more co-operative deputies from moderate parties	Committees did achieve effective work in social reform
4th duma 1912–14	Dominated by right-wing parties again willing to co-operate	Social reform work continued, but prepared to criticise government

The debate on the role of the dumas

Were they ever more than a talking shop?

How valuable was their committee work?

How significant were they as critics of tsardom?

5 | Growing Tensions in Russia 1911–14

Key question
Why was there mounting political and social strain in this period?

It was Stolypin's tragedy, as it had been Witte's, that his abilities were never fully appreciated by the regime he tried to serve. Following his murder in 1911, the various ministers the tsar appointed were distinguished only by their ineptitude. Since they

Key date
Stolypin assassinated: September 1911

lacked political imagination, their only course was further repression. Between 1911 and 1914 the regime's terror tactics were part cause, part effect, of a dramatic increase in public disorder, which gradually returned to the proportions of 1905. The number of strikes listed as 'political' by the Ministry of Trade and Industry rose from 24 in 1911 to 2401 in 1914.

The Lena Goldfields incident, 1912

The Moscow *Okhrana* report that had referred to the role of the duma in creating tension went on to cite the 'shooting of the Lena workers' as the major reason why the 'people can be heard speaking of the government in the sharpest and most unbridled tones'. The mention of the Lena workers was a reference to the notorious incident that occurred in 1912 in the Lena Goldfields in Siberia. Demands from the miners there for better pay and conditions were resisted by the employers, who appealed to the police to arrest the strike leaders as criminals.

The issue thus became the much larger one of trade union rights in Russia. When the police moved into Lena, the strikers closed ranks and the situation rapidly worsened, resulting in troops firing on and killing or injuring a large number of miners. The *Okhrana* appeared to have acted as ***agents provocateurs*** in order to identify the organisers of the strike.

Key term
Agents provocateurs
Government agents who infiltrate opposition movements with the deliberate aim of stirring up trouble so that the ringleaders can be exposed.

Anger among the moderates

Even the moderate parties began to despair of the government's dealing effectively with the problems that confronted Russia. The Octobrist leader, Alexander Guchkov, told his party conference in 1913 that their attempts to achieve 'a peaceful, painless transition from the old condemned system to a new order' had failed. He warned that the blindness of the tsar's government was daily driving the Russian people closer to revolution.

Guchkov's warning was to come true in 1917. What delayed the revolution he forecast by four years was Russia's entry into the First World War in 1914 (see Chapter 3).

6 | The Key Debate

An absorbing question which continues to interest historians is:

> Did the two decades between the accession of Nicholas II and the start of the First World War mark the period when the tsarist regime threw away its last chance of escaping revolution?

Of crucial importance in this question are the attempted reforms of Sergei Witte and Peter Stolypin. It is helpful to regard the work of these two ministers as complementary, Witte being concerned with the development of industry in Russia, Stolypin with agriculture. This is not to suggest that the two men co-operated in

a common policy. Indeed, Witte was deeply jealous of Stolypin and the two men did not get on. But they did share a basic aim – the preservation of the tsarist system. What makes their attempted reforms so important is that, had the tsarist government and bureaucracy been willing to support Witte and Stolypin in their efforts to modernise Russian industry and agriculture, this might have prevented the build-up of the social and political tensions which culminated in the 1917 Revolution.

'Might' is the key word here because it is never possible to be absolutely certain how history would have developed had things occurred differently. Nevertheless, there is a strong case for suggesting that Witte and Stolypin represented the last hope that tsardom could save itself by its own efforts.

Resistance to reform

The economic policies of Witte and Stolypin and the introduction of the duma were important advances, but they were not enough to alter the essentially reactionary character of the tsarist system. The government remained hostile towards reform. The industrial spurt of the 1890s had offered an opportunity for Russia to modernise herself, but a sustained policy of modernisation required not simply economic progress but a willingness to accept political change as well. This the tsar was never willing to give. His resistance to change would have mattered less if the system had operated efficiently. But the tsarist autocracy was both oppressive and inefficient, thereby alienating the progressive elements in society, who could see no possibility of real advance in Russia as long as government and administration remained in the hands of incompetents.

It was this that undermined the work of the few enlightened ministers, such as Witte and Stolypin, within the government. They were reformers but they were also loyalists. Indeed, it was their loyalty to the system that led them to consider reform as a way of lessening the opposition to it. The irony was that they were not trusted by the representatives of the very system they were trying to preserve. It is for this reason that historians have suggested that in failing to recognise the true worth of Witte and Stolypin, the tsarist regime unwittingly destroyed its last chance of survival. By 1914, all the signs were that imperial Russia was heading towards a major confrontation between intransigent tsardom and the forces of change. It was to be the war of 1914–17 that would determine what form that conflict would take.

Study Guide: AS Questions

In the style of AQA

(a) Explain why the dumas of 1906–14 in Russia were ineffective. (12 marks)

(b) How important were the reforms carried out by the government in Russia between 1906 and 1914 in maintaining the stability of the tsarist regime? (24 marks)

Exam tips

The cross-references are intended to take you straight to the material that will help you answer the questions.

(a) You should re-read pages 43–8 before answering this question. When you have done so, make a list of reasons as to why the dumas were unable to get their programmes put into effect. You might refer to expectations (on the part of the Tsar and the dumas) and the issue of trust and faith on both sides. You should also refer to specific issues, for example, the Vyborg manifesto and the party composition of the dumas. In writing your answer you should try to show a range of relevant factors and the inter-relationship between these. Try to decide what the most important factor was and how all the other points link to this.

(b) You will not only need to assess the contribution of government reforms to the stability of the regime, but also consider other factors. Your job is to decide whether the government reforms were a major or lesser contributor and offer a reasoned and balanced argument in support of your viewpoint. You may consider that the regime was not as stable as it appeared on the surface and such comment would also help show your understanding of the issues (pages 41–3 and 49–50). Don't forget that 'reforms' can mean many things. You will need to address the reforms of the economy and agriculture as well as the policies pursued by ministers with respect to government. Your final essay should be argued throughout and lead to a supported conclusion.

In the style of Edexcel

How accurate is it to describe the constitutional and land reforms of the years 1906–14 in Russia as significant? (30 marks)

Exam tips

The cross-references are intended to take you straight to the material that will help you answer the question.

The key words to note in planning your answer to this question are 'significant' and 'reforms'. In order to deal with 'reforms' you must select measures which sought to deal with problems and grievances.

The two areas of major reform are the constitutional reforms of the 1905 October Manifesto which granted a legislative duma (page 38) and Stolypin's measures to deal with the rural crisis (pages 41–3). In each case, if you feel that reforms did not achieve enough to be called significant, then your essay will flow better if you deal first with what was achieved and then with the limitations.

- What position will you plan to take on Stolypin's land reforms? Be clear about where your essay is going before you start to write. You could argue that they were significant in the scope of what was attempted and in their vision for transforming the Russian agricultural system (pages 41–3). Or you could argue that they were not significant because their effects were limited and little had been achieved by 1914 (page 43).
- What position will you plan to take on the constitutional reforms? It is important not to dismiss the work of the dumas too readily. See pages 47–8 for new thinking in this area. On the plus side you could make use of the following points:
  - An elected legislative assembly was in place for the first time (page 43–4).
  - Dumas met throughout the period and questioned ministers (page 47).
  - The committee system developed as a means for achieving reform (page 47).
  - Social reforms were enacted (pages 47–8).

The following points will enable you to deal with the limitations of the constitutional reform:

- The Tsar's Fundamental Laws limited the powers of the duma (page 44).
- The first two dumas were abruptly dismissed and later dumas were elected on a restricted franchise (pages 44 and 46–7).

The nature of government action that limited the freedom of action during the period is relevant. You could make use of the following:

- government resistance to reform (pages 44–50)
- evidence throughout the period of government repression that limited the freedom of political parties, trade unions and individual opponents of the regime
- Stolypin's repressive policies (pages 41 and 45)
- the growth of repression in the years 1911–14 (page 49).

In coming to your own conclusion you will need to balance the limitations of reform (what was actually achieved) against the consideration that the initial concessions made to the liberals in 1905 and Stolypin's proposed land reforms represented huge proposed changes to Russia in the early twentieth century. Bearing that in mind, even if the reforms fell short of what was originally planned, are you going to decide that these reforms were, or were not, 'significant'?

In the style of OCR B

Answer **both** parts of your chosen question.

(a) How is the outbreak of the 1905 Revolution best explained? [Explaining actions.] (25 marks)

(b) What was it about a duma that made the establishing of a parliamentary system so important to liberal reformers? [Explaining ideas, attitudes, beliefs and circumstances.] (25 marks)

Exam tips

General Introduction

You always have two pairs of questions and you have to answer both parts of one pair. In your chosen pair, each question will be different so each needs full and separate treatment. Each question in your pair is equally weighted so spend equal time on part **(a)** and part **(b)**. Both must be answered with an essay.

All questions in this exam paper require an answer that explains and makes sense of the past. Your task is to construct that historical explanation. The information in the square brackets below each question identifies for you the kind of explanation that you need to start working with. To prepare a good answer for each essay, you have to work through four stages:

- Identify the various factors that explain the question set. There will always be more than one and they will be a mixture of ideas, actions and events.
- Work out the role that each factor played.
- Decide which factor or factors were more important than the others so that you can explain why, and back up your claims with supporting evidence.
- Establish why and how some of those factors influenced others – again, with supporting evidence so you can justify your arguments.

Explanation goes well beyond reciting the facts to weigh them up and offer judgements.

Work through each of those four steps in rough and you have got your essay plan. Write up each stage and you have got your essay – well structured and focused on the question. If you only complete the first step your answer will be just a basic list of ideas, actions and events so it will not score well. If you complete the second and third steps your answer will have arranged those ideas, actions and events according to their relative importance. The explanation of the issue set will be quite advanced so it will score in level 4 (16–20 marks) if you really have explained things carefully. To reach the top (21–5 marks), you have to go one stage further and simultaneously explain the interaction of component ideas, actions and events – not just putting them in rank order of importance, but establishing cause and effect from one to another. Do all of that and you will have given an excellent answer and constructed a strong historical explanation that makes real sense of the past and shows

that you don't merely know what happened but understand what was going on, and why. The guidance in the chapters provided is not built around the only possible answer to each question – there is never only one answer in history. They are examples to show you how to construct a successful historical explanation.

(a) Given the command phrase ('How … best explained?'), your essay needs to develop a hierarchy of explanations, establishing relative importance between specific causal actions, ideas and attitudes. Equally, you must consider interactions between individual events and attitudes/beliefs in helping to bring about the revolution.

This question requires you to start with a focus on intentional explanation: so the core of your essay will be a set of overlapping circles explaining attitudes to the state of Russia at this time. These should include: economic and social conditions and circumstances, failure in the war with Japan, issues of government and monarchy. Make sure you distinguish between the attitudes of different groups, e.g. peasants, industrial workers, revolutionaries, the liberal intelligentsia – and make clear each group was not a single block, all thinking exactly the same way (e.g. differences between landholding and landless peasants). Equally, show why 1905 was special – opposition was far from new, but the main groups had never come together before. Finally, you can bind things together with the causal influence and impact of accident – government incompetence created a situation in which protest uniting economic grievances with political problems and constitutional issues became possible.

(b) This question lends itself to starting in the empathetic mode considering ideas and beliefs – not a straight explanation of the ideas of liberals and the autocracy, but an explanation of the particular significance of parliamentary democracy to liberals. That means issues of authority – the authority of the autocracy in a state without any form of representative or democratic government. Bring Octobrists in, but pay most attention to the Kadets. Set the context correctly – economic development had created a small, but growing middle class which looked to parliamentary government to safeguard and extend their various interests (personal, class, political, business).

Check your focus stays on an empathetic explanation of *why* ideas were held. Liberals wanted a constitutional democracy because they believed that it was the best thing for Russia as well as for themselves. They saw Russia as backward, economically and socially as well as politically. They looked outside Russia at the successful states of their world (notably Britain, France, the USA) and saw one fundamental characteristic: democracy. Central to a democracy is representative government and that means an elected parliament. If Russia had such a body it would have a

constitution, civil rights, a free press, universal education and the other features of life in a modern state they valued. In their view, a parliamentary system was the way Russia's many problems could be solved – so show the Kadets in action, e.g. Milyukov's campaigns in various dumas. The Fundamental Laws sabotaged the duma system, yet the Kadets kept up the fight (sometimes getting it wrong, e.g. the Vyborg Appeal). The Kadets were the loudest opponents of tsarism from 1906, and were prominent in the February Revolution.

3 War and Revolution 1914–17

POINTS TO CONSIDER

This chapter considers five principal interlocking themes:

- The long-term reasons why Russia went to war in 1914
- The short-term reasons for war
- The effect that the war had on the internal situation in Russia
- The growth of opposition to tsardom
- The February Revolution in 1917

Key dates

1914	June 28	Assassination of Franz Ferdinand at Sarajevo
	July 28	Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia
	July 30	Russian full mobilisation orders given
	August 1	Germany declared war on Russia Suspension of fourth duma
1915	June–July	Fourth duma reconvened
	June 25	The Progressive Bloc formed in the duma
	August 22	Nicholas II made himself Commander-in-Chief of the Russian armies
1916	December 1	Rasputin murdered by a group of aristocrats
1917	February 18–March 4	February Revolution
	February 18	Strike began at Putilov factories in Petrograd
	February 23	International Women's Day saw the beginning of widespread workers' demonstrations
	February 25	A general strike began
	February 27	Unofficial meeting of duma coincided with the first meeting of the Petrograd Soviet
	February 28	Nicholas II prevented from returning to Petrograd
	March 2	Provisional Government formed from the duma committee Tsar signed abdication decree
	March 4	Tsar's abdication publicly proclaimed

1 | Russia's Entry into the First World War: Long-term Reasons

Key question
What shaped Russia's attitude towards the outside world?

As an empire covering a huge land mass, tsarist Russia had always been concerned about the security of its borders, but its greatest anxiety was in regard to its European frontiers. Russia believed that the greatest potential threat came from its neighbours in central and south-eastern Europe.

Three particular developments in Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century had alarmed Russia:

- The growth of a united Germany – Russia feared that the unification of Germany in 1871 meant that central Europe was dominated by a powerful and ambitious nation, eager to expand eastwards.
- The formation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1867 – Russia was concerned that Austria would build on its new strength as a joint empire by an expansionist policy in south-east Europe.
- The decline of the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire – Russia's worry was that as Turkey weakened it would be increasingly challenged by aggressive national movements seeking independence from Turkish rule. This threatened Russian interests in **the Balkans**.

Key term
The Balkans
The area of south-eastern Europe (fringed by Austria-Hungary to the north, the Black Sea to the east, Turkey to the south and the Aegean Sea to the west), which had largely been under Turkish control.

Figure 3.1: Russia and its neighbouring states of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Turkey

Two main considerations influenced Russia's attitude towards the Balkans.

- The first had a long tradition attached to it. As a predominantly Slav nation, Russia had always regarded it as her duty to protect the Slav Christian peoples of the Balkans from oppression by their Turkish Islamic masters.
- The second was a commercial concern. Seventy-five per cent of Russia's grain exports (which accounted for 40 per cent of her total foreign trade) were shipped through the Straits of the Dardanelles (see Figure 3.2). It was, therefore, necessary to ensure that the Straits did not come under the control of a hostile power capable of interrupting the passage of Russian ships from the Black Sea into the Mediterranean.

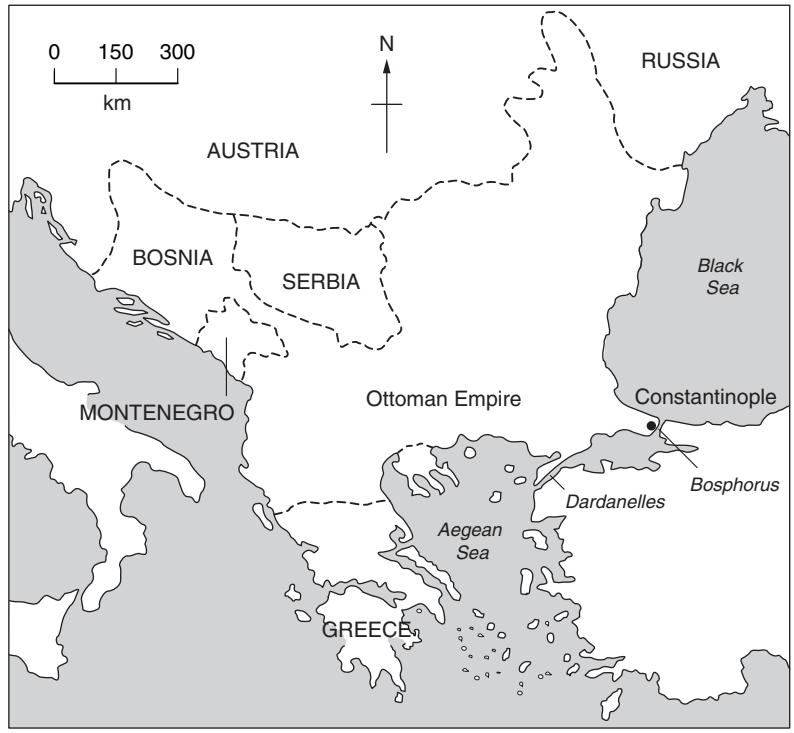


Figure 3.2: The Dardanelles and the Balkans

Key question
What factors drew Russia away from Germany but closer to France and Britain?

Russia's Relations with Germany, France and Britain

In the quarter century before 1914, Russia's response to the shifts and turns of European diplomacy was consistently defensive. She was reluctant to take the diplomatic initiative, but was willing to enter into alliances that protected her western borders and possessions. In particular, she was concerned that her traditional control over Poland, a **buffer state** between Russia and Germany, should not be weakened.

Key term
Buffer state
An area that lies between two states and so providing protection for each against the other.

The unified Germany that came into being in 1871 dominated the European scene for a generation. Chancellor Otto von Bismarck achieved this largely by developing an alliance system. In order to encourage the European powers to make agreements with

Germany, he played upon their fears of becoming isolated. All the major powers came to accept the need for a diplomacy that guaranteed that they would not be left friendless should war threaten.

However, in 1890, Bismarck was dismissed by the new German Kaiser, William II. Under its new ruler, Germany adopted a more aggressive form of diplomacy that hardened international attitudes and led eventually to the splitting of Europe into two opposed, armed camps. William II showed every intention of joining with Austria in asserting German influence in the Balkans and the Near East. This frightened the Russian government into looking for agreements with other powers so as to counter-balance the Austro-German threat.

The Franco-Russian Convention, 1892

To avoid isolation, Russia turned first to France. These two countries had not been on good terms, but a common fear of German aggression now outweighed their traditional dislike of each other. In the Franco-Russian Convention, signed in 1892, each partner promised to give military support to the other should it go to war with Germany. Economic co-operation also brought them closer. France was the major foreign investor in Russia's 'great spurt' in the 1890s (see page 13).

The Triple Entente, 1907

The original alliance between France and Russia expanded into a **Triple Entente** with the inclusion of Britain in 1907. This, too, was something of a diplomatic revolution. Anglo-Russian relations had been strained for decades. Imperial rivalries in Asia and Britain's resistance to what it regarded as Russia's attempts to dominate the eastern Mediterranean had aroused mutual animosity.

Key term

Triple Entente
Not a formal alliance, but a declared willingness by three powers to co-operate with each other.

However, by the turn of the century, Germany had embarked on an expansive naval programme that Britain interpreted as a direct threat to is own security and to its empire. Britain's response was to form an understanding with Germany's major western and eastern neighbours, France and Russia. In the Anglo-French Entente of 1904, Britain and France had already agreed to abandon their old rivalry. It made diplomatic sense for Russia and Britain to do the same.

Consequently, in 1907 they agreed to settle their past differences by recognising each other's legitimate interests in Afghanistan, Persia and Tibet. No precise agreement was reached regarding military co-operation but there was a general understanding that such co-operation would follow in the event of war.

A key experience that had helped convince Russia of the wisdom of entering into foreign alliances had been her defeat in the 1904–5 war against Japan. This strongly suggested that her plans for eastward expansion had been misplaced. It re-directed her attention towards the west and made her keener still to form protective agreements with friendly European powers.

Key question
Why did Russia's relations with Austria-Hungary become increasingly strained?

Russia's relations with Austria-Hungary

In 1908, Austria-Hungary made a startling move by annexing the Balkan state of Bosnia. When, Izvolski, the Russian Foreign Minister, protested, he was urged by his Austrian counterpart, Aehrenthal, to accept the take-over as a means of creating greater stability in the Balkan region. Izvolski eventually agreed, in return for Austria-Hungary's promise that it would acknowledge Russia's unrestricted right to the use of the Straits, and would persuade the other European powers to do the same. Russia kept her side of the bargain by recognising Austria-Hungary's takeover of Bosnia. The Austrians, however, did not honour their promise; they made no effort to encourage the international recognition of Russian rights in the Straits.

The question of Serbia

From this time onwards, relations between Russia and Austria-Hungary steadily deteriorated. A key issue dividing them was the position of Serbia. Bosnia contained many Serbs and its annexation by Austria-Hungary in 1908 aroused fierce Serbian nationalism. Russia, viewing itself as the special defender of Serbia and its Slav people, backed it in demanding compensation. Germany sided aggressively with Austria-Hungary and warned Russia not to interfere.

The crisis threatened for a time to spill over into war. However, in 1909 none of the countries involved felt ready to fight. Russia backed off from an open confrontation, while at the same time stating clearly that she regarded Germany and Austria-Hungary as the aggressors.

The Balkan Wars

Between 1909 and 1914 Russia continued to involve herself in the complexities of Balkan nationalist politics. The aim was to prevent Austria-Hungary from gaining a major advantage in the region. The tactic was to try to persuade the various nationalities in the region to form a coalition against Austria-Hungary. Russia had some success in this. Balkan nationalism led to a series of conflicts, known collectively as the Balkan Wars (1912–13). These were a confused mixture of anti-Turkish uprisings and squabbles between the Balkan states themselves over the division of the territories they had won from the Turks.

On balance, the outcome of these wars favoured Russian rather than Austro-Hungarian interests. Serbia had been doubled in size and felt herself more closely tied to Russia as an ally and protector. However, such gains as Russia had made were marginal. The international issues relating to Turkish decline and Balkan nationalism had not been resolved. The events of 1914 were to show how vulnerable Imperial Russia's status and security actually were.

2 | Russia's Entry into the First World War: Short-term Reasons

Key question
How was Russia drawn into war in 1914?

None of the long-term causes made war inevitable. Their importance was that they maintained Russia's anxieties and predisposed her to regard Germany and Austria-Hungary with deep suspicion. When crises occurred, therefore, they were more likely to lead in conflict. This is not to say that the tsarist government was looking for war in 1914. Russia's experience ten years earlier against Japan had made her wary of putting herself at risk again, and her foreign policy after 1905 had been essentially defensive. She had joined France and Britain in the Triple Entente as a means of safeguarding herself against the alliance of the **Central Powers**. However, the events that followed the assassination in June 1914 of Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, by **Serbian nationalists** made it virtually impossible for Russia to avoid being drawn into a European conflict.

A critical factor at this point was Russia's perception of herself as the protector of the Slav peoples of the Balkans. Sazonov, the tsar's Foreign Secretary in 1914, described the link between the commitment to defend Slav nationalism in the Balkans and Russia's long-standing strategic interests. He claimed that

> Russia's sole and unchanging object was to see that those Balkan peoples should not fall under the influence of powers hostile to her. The ultimate aim of Russian policy was to obtain free access to the Mediterranean, and to be in a position to defend her Black Sea coasts against the threat of the irruption of hostile naval forces through the **Bosphorus**.

Key terms

Central Powers
Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey.

Serbian nationalists
Activists struggling for Serbia's independence from Austria-Hungary.

Bosphorus
The narrow waterway linking the Black Sea with the Dardanelles (see map on page 59).

Key date
Assassination of Franz Ferdinand at Sarajevo: 28 June 1914

A month after Franz Ferdinand's murder, Austria-Hungary, with German encouragement, declared war on Serbia. Russia still expected to be able to force the Austrians to withdraw, without herself having to go to war. She hoped that if she mobilised this would act as a deterrent to Austria. This was not unrealistic. Despite Russia's defeat by Japan, her armies were still regarded as formidable. German generals often spoke of 'the Russian steam-roller', a reference to the immense reserves of manpower on which it was calculated that Russia could draw.

With tension building, Nicholas II made a personal move to avoid war with Germany. In July he exchanged a series of personal telegrams with his cousin, Kaiser William II, regretting the growing crisis in Russo-German relations and hoping that conflict could be avoided. But although these 'Willy–Nicky' exchanges, written in English, were friendly, there was a sense in which the two emperors were being carried along by events beyond their control.

Russia's mobilisation plans

It was at this stage that the great length of Russia's western frontier proved to be of momentous significance. The Russian military high command had two basic mobilisation schemes:

- Partial – based on plans for a limited campaign in the Balkans against Austria-Hungary.
- Full – based on plans for a full-scale war against both Germany and Austria-Hungary.

"THE STEAM-ROLLER."

AUSTRIA. "I SAY, YOU KNOW, YOU'RE EXCEEDING THE SPEED LIMIT!"

A British cartoon of 1914 showing Franz Joseph, the Austro-Hungarian Emperor fleeing from the chasing Russian 'steam-roller.' In pre-1914 Germany and Austria-Hungary, the image of Russia as a steam-roller that could crush their armies was a powerful and frightening one. What influence do you think this fear had on the preparation of German war plans down to August 1914?

Both forms of mobilisation depended on detailed and precise railway timetabling aimed at transporting huge numbers of men and vast amounts of material. The complexity of the timetables meant that the adoption of one type of mobilisation ruled out the use of the other. Horse-drawn wagons and marching men can change direction in an instant; trains cannot. Russia's fear in July 1914 was that if she mobilised only partially it would leave her defenceless should Austria's ally, Germany, strike at her Polish borders (see the map on page 58).

On the other hand, full mobilisation might well appear to Germany as a deliberate provocation. The German government did, indeed, warn Sazonov that if Russia mobilised Germany would have to do the same.

Germany's mobilisation plans

Here a vital fact intervened and made war unstoppable. Germany had no room for manoeuvre. According to German contingency plans, if Russia mobilised, Germany would have to go to war. There would no longer be a choice. The German 'Schlieffen Plan' was based on the concept of eliminating the danger to Germany of a two-front war against France and Russia by a lightning knock-out blow against France. Speed was of the essence. Germany could not play a game of diplomatic bluff; it had to strike first.

When, therefore, on 30 July after a long hesitation, Nicholas chose to sign the Russian full mobilisation order, he had taken a more fateful decision than he could have realised. What had been intended as a diplomatic move that would leave Russia free to hold back from war was the step that precipitated war. On 31 July Germany demanded that the Russians cease their mobilisation. On 1 August, having received no response, Germany declared war on Russia. Four days later Austria-Hungary did the same.

Key dates

Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia: 28 July 1914

Russian full mobilisation orders given: 30 July 1914

Germany declared war on Russia: 1 August 1914

Summary Diagram: Russia's entry into the First World War: short-term reasons

Line-up of opposed alliances

Central Powers	*Triple Alliance*
Germany	Russia
Austria-Hungary	France
Turkey	Britain

Events in Serbia

Austro-Hungarian ultimatum to Serbia following Franz Ferdinand's assassination in June 1914 resisted by Russia

↓

Germany backed Austria-Hungary

↓

The crisis did not make war unavoidable but Russian and German mobilisation plans did

Mobilisation plans

Russian	**Germany**
Choice between partial or full mobilisation	Schlieffen Plan ruled that if it mobilised it went to war

Consequence

When tsar signed full mobilisation order, Germany had no choice but to declare war on Russia

Key question
How did Russia respond to the demands of war?

3 | Russia at War

Whatever the tsar's previous uncertainties may have been, once war was declared, he became wholly committed to it. By 1917 the war would prove to be the undoing of tsardom, but in 1914 the outbreak of hostilities greatly enhanced the tsar's position. Nicholas II became the symbol of the nation's resistance in its hour of need. Watching the great crowds cheering the tsar as he formally announced that Russia was at war, the French ambassador remarked: 'To those thousands the tsar really is the autocrat, the absolute master of their bodies and souls'. At a special session of the duma, all the deputies, save for the five Bolshevik representatives, fervently pledged themselves to the national struggle.

Setback for the Bolsheviks

It was the same story in all the warring countries. The socialist parties abandoned their policies and committed themselves to the national war effort. Lenin was bitter in his condemnation of 'these class traitors'. He called on all true revolutionaries 'to transform the imperialist war everywhere into a civil war'. But the prevailing mood in Russia and Europe was all against him.

The early stages of the war were dark days for Lenin's Bolsheviks. Vilified as traitors and German agents for their opposition to the war, they were forced to flee or go into hiding. Lenin, who was already in exile in Poland, made his way with Austrian help into neutral Switzerland. Had the war gone well for Russia there is every reason to think that the Bolshevik Party would have disappeared as a political force.

Russia's problems

But the war did not go well for Russia, and the reason was only partly military. The basic explanation for her decline and slide into revolution in 1917 was an economic one. Three years of **total war** were to prove too great a strain for the Russian economy to bear. War is a time when the character and structure of a society are put to the test in a particularly intense way. The longer the war lasts, the greater the test. During the years 1914–17, the political, social and economic institutions of Russia proved increasingly incapable of meeting the demands that war placed upon them.

Key term
Total war
A struggle in which the whole nation – its people, resources and institutions – is involved.

This does not prove that Russia was uniquely incompetent. The pressure of total war on all countries was immense and it should be remembered that of the six empires engaged in the First World War – Germany, Austria, Turkey, Russia, France and Britain – only the last two survived.

Differing estimates have been made of Russia's potential for growth in 1914. But however that is assessed, the fact remains that the demands of the 1914–18 war eventually proved too heavy for Russia to sustain. The impact of the war on Russia can be conveniently studied under six headings.

- Inflation
- Food supplies
- Transport
- The army
- The role of the tsar
- Morale

Inflation

Key question
How was Russia's financial position damaged by the war?

Russia had achieved remarkable financial stability by 1914. Her currency was on the gold standard (see page 14) and she had the largest gold reserves of any European country. This happy position was destroyed by the war. Between 1914 and 1917 government spending rose from four million to 30 million roubles. Increased taxation at home and heavy borrowing from abroad were only partially successful in raising the capital Russia needed. The gold standard was abandoned, which allowed the government to put more notes into circulation. In the short term this enabled wages to be paid and commerce to continue, but in the long term it made money practically worthless. The result was severe inflation, which became particularly acute in 1916. In broad terms, between 1914 and 1916 average earnings doubled while the price of food and fuel quadrupled (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Wartime inflation

Prices (to a base unit of 100)		*Notes in circulation (to a base of 100)*	
July 1914	100	July 1914	100
January 1915	130	January 1915	146
January 1916	141	January 1916	199
January 1917	398	January 1917	336

Food supplies

Key question
How did the war disrupt the supply of food?

The **requisitioning** of horses and fertilisers by the military for the war effort made it difficult for peasants to sustain agricultural output. However, the decline in food production should not be exaggerated. It was not an immediate problem. Indeed, during the first two years of the war Russia's grain yield was higher than it had been between 1912 and 1914. It was not until 1916 that it began to fall. Part of the reason was that inflation made trading unprofitable, and so the peasants stopped selling food and began hoarding their stocks.

What increased the problems for the ordinary Russian was that the army had first claim on the more limited amount of food being produced. The military also had priority in the use of the transport system. They commandeered the railways and the roads, with the result that food supplies to civilian areas became difficult to maintain.

Hunger bordering on famine was a constant reality for much of Russia during the war years. Shortages were at their worst in the towns and cities. **Petrograd** suffered particularly badly because of its remoteness from the food-producing regions and because of the large number of refugees who swelled its population and increased the demand on its dwindling resources. By early 1917, bread rationing meant that Petrograd's inhabitants were receiving less than a quarter of the amount that had been available in 1914.

Key terms

Requisitioning
State authorised takeover of property or resources.

Petrograd
For patriotic reasons, soon after the war began, the German name for the capital, 'St Petersburg', was changed to the Russian form, 'Petrograd'

Transport

Key question
Why did the Russian transport system prove inadequate in wartime?

It was the disruption of the transport system rather than the decline in food production that was the major cause of Russia's wartime shortages. The growth of the railways, from 13,000 to

44,000 miles between 1881 and 1914 (see page 14), had been an impressive achievement, but it did not meet the demands of war. The attempt to transport millions of troops and masses of supplies to the war fronts created unbearable pressures. The signalling system on which the railway network depended broke down; blocked lines and trains stranded by engine break-down or lack of coal became commonplace.

Less than two years after the war began, the Russian railway system had virtually collapsed. By 1916, some 575 stations were no longer capable of handling freight. A graphic example of the confusion was provided by Archangel, the northern port through which the bulk of the Allied aid to Russia passed. So great was the pile-up of undistributed goods that they sank into the ground beneath the weight of new supplies. Elsewhere there were frequent reports of food rotting in railway trucks that could not be moved. One of the tsar's wartime prime ministers later admitted: 'There were so many trucks blocking the lines that we had to tip some of them down the embankments to move the ones that arrived later'.

By 1916 Petrograd and Moscow were receiving only a third of their food and fuel requirements. Before the war Moscow had received an average of 2200 wagons of grain per month; by February 1917 this figure had dropped to below 700. The figures for Petrograd told a similar story; in February 1917 the capital received only 300 wagon-loads of grain instead of the 1000 it needed.

Key question
How well did the organisation of the Russian army adapt to the needs of war?

The Army

A striking statistic of the First World War is that Russia, in proportion to her population, put fewer than half the troops into the field than either Germany or France did (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Numbers and percentages of the population mobilised

	1914	*1918*	*Total population*	*% of population mobilised*
Russia	5.3 million	15.3 million	180 million	8.8
Germany	3.8 million	14.0 million	68 million	20.5
France	3.8 million	7.9 million	39 million	19.9
Britain	0.6 million	5.7 million	45 million	12.7

Yet, in total numbers the Russian army was still a mighty force. It was by far the largest army of all the countries that fought in the war. Its crippling weakness, which denied it the military advantage that its sheer size should have given it, was lack of equipment. This was not a matter of Russia's military underspending. Indeed, until 1914 Russia led Europe in the amount and the proportions she spent on defence (see Figure 3.3 on page 68).

The problem was not the lack of resources but poor administration and lack of liaison between the government departments responsible for supplies. Despite its commandeering of the transport system, the military was as much a victim of the poor distribution of resources as the civilian population. In the first two years of the war the army managed to obtain its supply needs, but from 1916 serious shortages began to occur. Mikhail

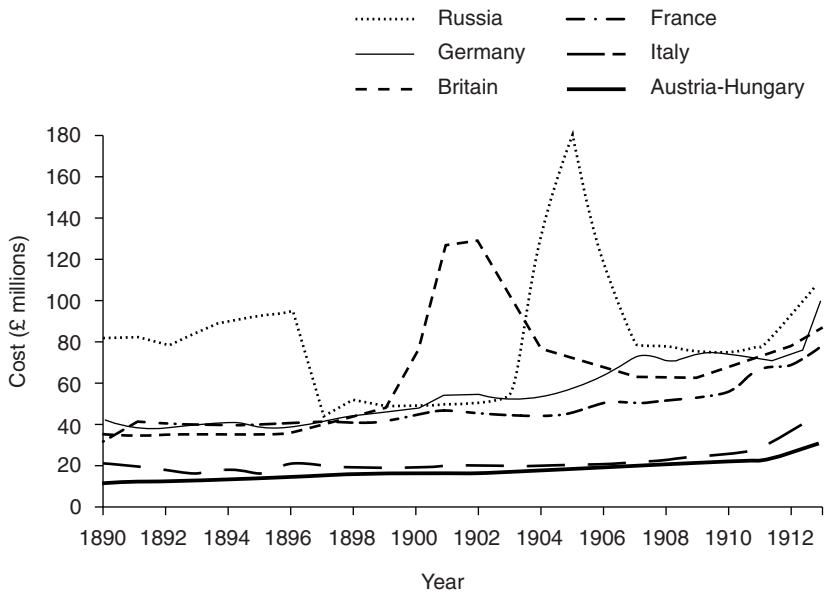


Figure 3.3: Graph showing the comparative defence expenditures of the European powers 1890–1913 (in £ million)

Rodzianko, the president of the duma, who undertook a special fact-finding study in 1916 of conditions in the army, reported to the duma on the widespread disorganisation and its dismal effects:

> General Ruzsky complained to me of lack of ammunition and the poor equipment of the men. There was a great shortage of boots. The soldiers fought barefooted. The hospitals and stations of the Red Cross, which came under my notice, were in excellent condition; but the war hospitals were disorganised. They were short of bandages and such things.
>
> The great evil was, of course, the lack of co-operation between the two organisations. At the front, one had to walk about ten or more **versts** from the war hospitals to those of the Red Cross. The Grand Duke stated that he was obliged to stop fighting temporarily for lack of ammunition and boots.
>
> There was plenty of material and labour in Russia. But as it stood then, one region had leather, another nails, another soles and still another cheap labour. The best thing to do would be to call a congress of the heads of the *zemstvos* and ask for their co-operation.

Key term
Versts
A verst is approximately one-third of a mile.

The role of the tsar

Key question
How did Nicholas respond to the war?

The clear implication in Rodzianko's account was that the strong central leadership, which the war effort desperately needed, was not being provided. This was a view that became increasingly widespread and it was against the tsar that criticisms began to mount.

This was Nicholas II's own fault; in 1915 he had formally taken over the direct command of Russia's armed services. This was a momentous decision. The intention was to rally the nation around him as Tsar of Russia. But it also made him a hostage to fortune.

Key date
Nicholas takes personal command of the Russian army: 22 August 1915

Nicholas II was now personally responsible for Russia's performance in the war. If things went well he took the credit, but if they went badly he was to blame. Lack of success could no longer be blamed upon his appointees.

Key question
How was Russian morale affected during the course of the war?

Morale

The suffering that the food shortages and the dislocated transport system brought to both troops and civilians might have been bearable had the news from the war front been encouraging or had there been inspired leadership from the top. There were occasional military successes, such as those achieved on the south-western front in 1916 when a Russian offensive under General Brusilov killed or wounded half a million Austrian troops, and brought Austria-Hungary to the point of collapse. But the gains made were never enough to justify the appalling casualty lists.

The enthusiasm and high morale of August 1914 had turned by 1916 into pessimism and defeatism. Ill-equipped and under-fed, the 'peasants in uniform' who composed the Russian army began to desert in increasing numbers.

Care should be taken not to exaggerate the effect of the breakdown in morale. Modern research, such as that undertaken by E. Mawdsley and Norman Stone, has shown that the Russian army was not on the verge of collapse in 1917. Mutinies had occurred but these were not exclusive to Russia. The strains of war in 1917 produced mutinies in all the major armies, including the French and British. Stone dismisses the idea of a disintegrating Russian army as a Bolshevik 'fabrication'. With all its problems the Russian armies were still intact as a fighting force in 1917.

Stone also emphasises the vital role that Russia played as an ally of Britain and France in tying down the German army for over three years on the eastern front. An interesting detail, indicating how far Russia was from absolute collapse in 1916, is that in that year Russia managed to produce more shells than Germany. To quote these findings is not to deny the importance of Russia's military crises, but it is to recognise that historians have traditionally tended to overstate Russia's military weakness in 1917.

Summary diagram: Russia at war

Immediate effect
Enhanced the popularity and status of the tsar
Weakened the anti-war Bolsheviks

BUT
'Total war' created major problems for Russia

1. **Inflation** – value of money sharply declined, creating instability and high prices
2. **Food supplies** – dwindled as result of requisitioning and transport disruption – urban areas suffered acute shortages
3. **Transport system** – broke down under stress of war
4. **The army** – fought well but was undermined by poor organisation and lack of supplies
5. **Role of the tsar** – Nicholas II's fateful decision to become Commander-in-Chief made survival of tsardom dependent on military success
6. **Morale** – high at the start among army and civilians but was damaged by lengthening casualty lists at the front and declining supplies at home

4 | The Growth of Opposition to Tsardom

Key question
How did the war encourage the development of opposition to the tsar and his government?

By 1916 all important sections of the population shared the view that the tsar was an inept political and military leader, incapable of providing the inspiration that the nation needed. It is significant that the first moves in the February Revolution in 1917, the event that led to the fall of tsardom, were not made by the revolutionary parties. The Revolution was set in motion by those members of Russian society who, at the outbreak of the war in 1914, had been the tsar's strongest supporters, but who, by the winter of 1916, were too wearied by his incompetence to wish to save him or the barren system he represented.

The duma recalled

Key dates
Duma reconvened: 19 July 1915

The Progressive Bloc formed in the duma: 25 June 1915

In August 1914 the duma had shown its total support for the tsar by voting for its own suspension for the duration of the war. But within a year Russia's poor military showing led to the duma demanding its own recall. Nicholas II bowed before the pressure and allowed the duma to reassemble in July 1915.

One major political mistake of the tsar and his ministers was their refusal to co-operate fully with the non-governmental organisations such as the **Union of *Zemstvos*** and the **Union of Municipal Councils**, which at the beginning of the war had been wholly willing to work with the government in the national war effort. These elected bodies formed a joint organisation, ***Zemgor***. The success of this organisation both highlighted the government's own failures and hinted that there might be a workable alternative to tsardom.

Key terms

Union of *Zemstvos*
A set of patriotic rural local councils.

Union of Municipal Councils
A set of patriotic urban local councils.

Zemgor
The joint body that devoted itself to helping Russia's war wounded.

Formation of a 'Progressive Bloc'

A similar political blindness characterised the tsar's dismissal of the duma's appeal to him to replace his incompetent cabinet with 'a ministry of national confidence' whose members would be drawn from the duma. Nicholas rejected this proposal, and in doing so destroyed the last opportunity he would have of retaining the support of the politically progressive parties. Milyukov, the Kadet leader, complained that the tsar and his advisers had 'brushed aside the hand that was offered them'.

Denied a direct voice in national policy, 236 of the 422 duma deputies formed themselves into a 'Progressive Bloc' composed of the Kadets, the Octobrists, the Nationalists and the Party of Progressive Industrialists. The SRs did not formally join the Bloc but voted with it in all the duma resolutions that criticised the government's handling of the war. Initially, the Bloc did not directly challenge the tsar's authority, but tried to persuade him to make concessions. Nicholas, however, would not budge. He was not willing to listen to the Bloc. It was part of that stubbornness that he mistook for firmness.

One of the Bloc's members, Vasily Shulgin, an ardent monarchist, sorrowfully pointed out how short-sighted the tsar was in viewing the Bloc as an enemy not a friend: 'The whole purpose of the Progressive Bloc was to prevent revolution so as to enable the government to finish the war'. The tragedy for the tsar was that as he and his government showed themselves increasingly incapable of running the war, the Bloc, from having been a supporter, became a source of political resistance. It was another of tsardom's lost opportunities.

Profile: Nicholas II 1868–1918

1868 – Born into the Romanov house
1894 – Became tsar on the death of his father, Alexander III
– Married Princess Alexandra, the German grand-daughter of Queen Victoria
1905 – Granted the October constitution
1906 – Opened the first duma
1913 – Led the celebrations of 300 years of Romanov rule
1914 – Signed the general mobilisation order that led to Russia's entry into the First World War
1915 – Took over personal command of the Russian armed forces
1917 – Tried to return to Petrograd but prevented by rebellious soldiers and workers
– Advised by military high command and duma to stand down
– Abdicated on behalf of the Romanov dynasty
1918 – Murdered with his family in Ekaterinburg on Lenin's orders

The character of Nicholas II is important in any analysis of revolutionary Russia. The evidence suggests that, though he was far from being as unintelligent as his critics asserted, his limited imagination prevented him from fully grasping the nature of the events in which he was involved. When he attempted to be strong, he simply appeared obdurate.

The tsar made a number of crucial errors in his handling of the war, the most significant being his decision in 1915 to take direct command of Russia's armed forces. This in effect tied the fate of the Romanov dynasty to the success or otherwise of Russia's armies.

In 1914 there had been a very genuine enthusiasm for the tsar as representative of the nation. Within three years that enthusiasm had wholly evaporated, even among dedicated tsarists. The fall of Nicholas was the result of weak leadership rather than of savage oppression. He was not helped by his wife's German nationality or by court scandals, of which Rasputin's was the most notorious. But these were minor affairs which by themselves would not have been sufficient to bring down a dynasty.

It is interesting to note the range of comments made about him by those who knew him personally:

'*His character is the source of all our misfortunes. His outstanding weakness is a lack of willpower.*' (Sergei Witte)

'*The tsar can change his mind from one minute to the next; he's a sad man; he lacks guts.*' (Rasputin)

'*My poor Nicky's cross is heavy, all the more so as he has nobody on whom he can thoroughly rely.*' (Empress Alexandra)

'*His mentality and his circumstances kept him wholly out of touch with his people. From his youth he had been trained to believe that his welfare and the welfare of Russia were one and the same thing, so that 'disloyal' workmen, peasants and students who were shot down, executed or exiled seemed to him mere monsters who must be destroyed for the sake of the country.*' (Alexander Kerensky).

'*He has a naturally good brain. But he only grasps the significance of a fact in isolation without its relationship to other facts.*'
(Pobedonostsev)

'*He kept saying that he did not know what would become of us all, that he was wholly unfit to reign. He was wholly ignorant about governmental matters. Nicky had been trained as a soldier. He should have been taught statesmanship and he was not.*'
(Grand Duchess Olga, his sister)

The government continued to shuffle its ministers in the hope of finding a successful team. In the year 1915–16, there were four prime ministers, three foreign secretaries, three ministers of defence and six interior ministers. It was all to no avail. None of them was up to the task. The description by the British ambassador in Petrograd of one of the premiers, Sturmer, might have been fairly applied to all the tsar's wartime ministers:

> Possessed of only a second-class mind, having no experience of statesmanship, concerned exclusively with his own personal interests, and distinguished by his capacity to flatter and his extreme ambition, he owed his appointment to the fact that he was a friend of Rasputin and enjoyed the support of the crowd of intriguers around the empress.

The role of Rasputin

Key question
Why did Rasputin prove such an influential figure in the build-up to revolution?

Gregory Efimovich **Rasputin** (1872–1916) was the individual on whom much of the hatred of the tsarist system came to be focused. By any measure his rise to prominence in Russia was an extraordinary story, but its true significance lay in the light it shed on the nature of tsarist government.

Rasputin was a self-ordained holy man from the Russian steppes, who was notorious for his sexual depravity. This made him fascinating to certain women, who threw themselves at him. Many fashionable ladies in St Petersburg, including the wives of courtiers, boasted that they had slept with him. That Rasputin seldom washed or changed his clothes seemed to add to the attraction. In colloquial terms, it is known as 'liking a bit of rough'.

Key term
Rasputin
By a strange coincidence, in Russian, the word 'rasputin' can also mean lecher.

His behaviour made him bitterly hated at the imperial court to which he was officially invited. Outraged husbands and officials detested this upstart from the steppes. But they could not get rid of him; he enjoyed royal favour. As early as 1907 Rasputin had won himself a personal introduction to the tsar and his wife. The

Key terms

Haemophilia
A condition in which the blood does not clot leaving the sufferer with heavy, painful bruising and internal bleeding, which can be life-threatening.

Starets
Russian for holy man, the nick-name Rasputin was given by the impressionable peasants who believed he had super-human powers.

Confidant
A person in whom another places a special trust and to whom one confides intimate secrets.

'The German woman'
The disparaging term used by anti-tsarists to describe Alexandra.

Key date

Rasputin murdered by a group of aristocrats: 1 December 1916

Empress Alexandra was desperate to cure her son, Alexei, the heir to the throne, of his **haemophilia**. Hearing that Rasputin had extraordinary gifts of healing, she invited him to court. Rasputin did, indeed, prove able to help Alexei whose condition eased considerably when the ***starets*** was with him.

Rasputin did not, of course, have the magical or devilish powers that the more superstitious claimed for him, but he was a very good amateur psychologist. He realised that the pushing and prodding to which Alexei was subjected when being examined by his doctors only made the boy more anxious and feverish. Rasputin's way was to speak calmly to him, stroking his head and arms gently so that he relaxed. This lowered Alexei's fever and lessened his pain. It was not a cure but it was the most successful treatment he had ever had. Alexandra, a deeply religious woman, believed it was the work of God and that Rasputin was His instrument. She made 'the mad monk', as his enemies called him, her ***confidant***.

Scandal inevitably followed. Alexandra's German nationality had made her suspect and unpopular since the outbreak of war, but she had tried to ride out the storm. She would hear no ill of 'our dear friend', as she called Rasputin in letters to Nicholas, and obliged the tsar to maintain him at court. Since Nicholas was away at military headquarters for long periods after 1915, Alexandra and Rasputin effectively became the government of Russia. Even the staunchest supporters of tsardom found it difficult to defend a system that allowed a nation in the hour of its greatest trial to fall under the sway of **'the German woman'** and a debauched monk.

Alexandra was, indeed, German, being born to the house of Hesse Darmstadt. However, after marrying Nicholas, she had made sincere efforts to make Russia her adopted country. She converted to the Orthodox Church, and endeavoured to learn and apply Russian customs and conventions. This counted for little after 1914, when, despite her undoubted commitment to the Russia cause, her enemies portrayed her as a German agent.

Death of Rasputin

In December 1916, in a mixture of spite, resentment and a genuine wish to save the monarchy, a group of aristocratic conspirators murdered Rasputin. His death was as bizarre as his life. Poisoned with arsenic, shot at point-blank range, battered over the head with a steel bar, he was still alive when he was thrown, trussed in a heavy curtain, into the river Neva. His post-mortem showed that he had water in lungs, and so must have still been breathing when finally sucked into the icy waters.

Rasputin's importance

From time to time there have been various attempts to present Rasputin in a more sympathetic light but any new evidence that appears seems to bear out the description given of him above. Where he does deserve credit is for his achievement in reorganising the army's medical supplies system. He showed the common sense and administrative skill that Russia so desperately needed and that his aristocratic superiors in government so

Photo of one of the many pornographic postcards that circulated in Petrograd in 1917. The word 'samoderzhavie' means 'holding'. It is used here as a pun to suggest Rasputin's hold on Russia as well as his physical holding of the Empress. Despite this cartoon and all the scurrilous things said about Rasputin and Alexandra then and since, it is highly unlikely they were ever lovers in a sexual sense. There is certainly no reliable evidence for it.

lamentably lacked. It was his marked competence that infuriated those who wanted him out of the way.

Yet, no matter how much the reactionaries in the court and government might rejoice at the death of the upstart, the truth was that by the beginning of 1917 it was too late to save tsardom. Rasputin's extraordinary life at court and his murder by courtiers were but symptoms of the fatal disease affecting the tsarist system.

Summary diagram: The growth of opposition to tsardom

- The most significant opposition comes from those who had been the tsar's keenest supporters in 1914.
- Duma recalled in August 1915 but tsar not willing to co-operate with it.
- Government also declines to work with patriotic non-government organisations, e.g. *Zemgor* who called for a united national war effort.
- Key significance of Nicholas II's character – mixture of naivety, stubbornness and political myopia – the wrong man in the wrong time.
- Tsar's ministers staggeringly incompetent.
- Tsar rejects notion of working with the Progressive Bloc.
- Tsar's limited powers of judgement blind him to the need to make an accommodation with his natural supporters.
- Another lost opportunity for tsardom.

Rasputin and Alexandra became the focal point of the growing hatred of tsardom. The very fact of Rasputin becoming so prominent within the tsarist system convinced many that the system was not worth saving.

5 | The February Revolution

Key question
Were the events of February 1917 a collapse at the top or a revolution from below?

The rising of February 1917 was not the first open move against the tsar or his government. During the preceding year there had been a number of challenges. The Octobrists in the duma had frequently demanded the removal of unwanted ministers and generals. What made February 1917 different was the range of the opposition to the government and the speed with which events turned from a protest into a revolution. Rumours of the likelihood of serious public disturbances breaking out in Petrograd had been widespread since the beginning of the year. An *Okhrana* report in January 1917 provides an illuminating summary of the situation:

> There is a marked increase in hostile feelings among the peasants not only against the government but also against all other social groups. The proletariat of the capital is on the verge of despair. The mass of industrial workers are quite ready to let themselves go to the wildest excesses of a hunger riot. The prohibition of all labour meetings, the closing of trade unions, the prosecution of men taking an active part in the sick benefit funds, the suspension of labour newspapers, and so on, make the labour masses, led by the more advanced and already revolutionary-minded elements, assume an openly hostile attitude towards the Government and protest with all the means at their disposal against the continuation of the war.

Key term
System of dating
Until February 1918, Russia used the Julian calendar which was 13 days behind the Gregorian calendar, the one in general use in most western countries by this time. That is why different books may give different dates for the same event. This book uses the older dating for the events of 1917.

On 14 February, Rodzianko, the duma president, warned the tsar that 'very serious outbreaks of unrest' were imminent. He added ominously, 'there is not one honest man left in your entourage; all the decent people have either been dismissed or left'. It was this desertion by those closest to the tsar that unwittingly set in motion what proved to be a revolution.

According to the **system of dating** in Imperial Russia, the Revolution occupied the period from 18 February to 4 March 1917. A full-scale strike was started on 18 February by the employees at the Putilov steel works, the largest and most politically active factory in Petrograd. During the next five days, the Putilov strikers were joined on the streets by growing numbers of workers, who had been angered by rumours of a further cut in bread supplies. It is now known that these were merely rumours and that there was still enough bread to meet the capital's basic needs. However, in times of acute crisis rumour often has the same power as fact.

Key dates
Strike began at the Putilov factories in Petrograd:
18 February 1917

International Women's Day, a demonstration organised by socialist groups to demand female equality:
23 February 1917

A general strike began: 25 February 1917

The course of events

23 February happened to be International Women's Day. This brought thousands of women on to the streets to join the protesters in demanding food and an end to the war. By 25 February, Petrograd was paralysed by a city-wide strike. Factories were occupied and attempts by the authorities to disperse the workers were hampered by the growing sympathy among the police for the demonstrators. There was a great deal of confusion and little clear direction at the top. Events that were later seen as having had major political significance took place in an

Some of the demonstrators at the International Women's Day. On the banner is written: 'As long as women are slaves, there will be no freedom. Long live equal rights for women'.

atmosphere in which political protests were indistinguishable from the general outcry against food shortages and the miseries brought by war.

The breakdown of order

The tsar, at his military headquarters at Mogilev, 400 miles from Petrograd, relied for news largely on the letters received from the tsarina, who was still in the capital. When he learned from her about the disturbances, Nicholas ordered the commander of the Petrograd garrison, General Khabalov, to restore order. Khabalov cabled back that, with the various contingents of the police and militia either fighting each other or joining the demonstrators, and his own garrison troops disobeying orders, the situation was uncontrollable.

Khabalov had earlier begged the government to declare martial law in Petrograd, which would have given him the power to use unlimited force against the demonstrators. But the breakdown of ordinary life in the capital meant that the martial law proclamation could not even be printed, let alone enforced. More serious still, by 26 February all but a few thousand of the original 150,000 Petrograd garrison troops had deserted. Desertions also seriously depleted a battalion of troops sent from the front under General Ivanov to reinforce the garrison.

Faced with this near-hopeless situation, Rodzianko on behalf of the duma informed the tsar that only a major concession on the government's part offered any hope of preserving the imperial power. Nicholas, again with that occasional stubbornness that he mistook for decisiveness, then ordered the duma to dissolve. It did so formally as an assembly, but a group of 12 members disobeyed the order and remained in session as a 'Provisional Committee'. This marked the first open constitutional defiance of the tsar. It was immediately followed by the boldest move so far, when Alexander Kerensky, a lawyer and a leading SR member in the duma, called for the tsar to stand down as head of state or be deposed.

The Petrograd Soviet

On that same day, 27 February, another event took place that was to prove as significant as the formation of the Provisional Committee. This was the first meeting of the 'Petrograd Soviet of Soldiers', Sailors' and Workers' Deputies', which gathered in the Tauride Palace, the same building that housed the Provisional Committee. The moving force behind the setting up of the Soviet was the Mensheviks, who, under their local leader, Alexander Shlyapnikov, had grown in strength in Petrograd during the war.

These two self-appointed bodies – the Provisional Committee, representing the reformist elements of the old duma, and the Soviet, speaking for the striking workers and rebellious troops – became the ***de facto*** government of Russia. This was the beginning of what Lenin later called the **'dual authority'**, an uneasy alliance that was to last until October. On 28 February, the Soviet published the first edition of its newspaper *Izvestiya* (the News) in which it declared its determination 'to wipe out the old system completely' and to summon a constituent assembly, elected by **universal suffrage**.

The tsar abdicates

The remaining ministers in the tsar's cabinet were not prepared to face the growing storm. They used the pretext of an electricity failure in their government offices to abandon their responsibilities and to slip out of the capital. Rodzianko, who up to this point had struggled to remain loyal to the official government, then advised Nicholas that only his personal abdication could save the Russian monarchy. On 28 February, Nicholas decided to return to Petrograd, apparently in the belief that his personal presence would have a calming effect on the capital. However, the royal train was intercepted on its journey by mutinous troops who forced it to divert to Pskov, a depot 100 miles from Petrograd.

It was at Pskov that a group of generals from ***stavka***, together with the representatives of the old duma, met the tsar to inform him that the seriousness of the situation in Petrograd made his return both futile and dangerous. They, too, advised abdication.

Nicholas tamely accepted the advice. His only concern was whether he should also renounce the throne on behalf of his son, Alexei. This he eventually decided to do. The decree of abdication that Nicholas signed on 2 March nominated his brother, the Grand Duke Michael, as the new tsar. However, Michael, unwilling to take up the poisoned chalice, refused the title on the pretext that it had not been offered to him by a Russian constituent assembly.

By default the Provisional Committee, which had renamed itself the Provisional Government, thus found itself responsible for governing Russia. On 3 March, the new government officially informed the rest of the world of the revolution that had taken place.

On the following day, Nicholas II's formal abdication was publicly announced. Thus it was that the house of Romanov, which only four years earlier in 1913 had celebrated its tri-centenary as a divinely appointed dynasty, came to an end not with a bang but a whimper.

Key terms

De facto
Literally 'by the fact' – a term used to denote the real situation, as compared to what it should or might be in theory or in law.

'Dual authority'
Lenin first coined this term to describe the balance of power between the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet (see page 90).

Universal suffrage
An electoral system in which all adults have the right to vote.

Stavka
The high command of the Russian army.

Key dates

The formation of the Petrograd Soviet:
27 February 1917

Nicholas II prevented from returning to Petrograd:
28 February 1917

Provisional Committee declares itself a Provisional Government:
2 March 1917

Tsar signed abdication decree:
2 March 1917

Tsar's abdication publicly proclaimed:
4 March 1917

The character of the February Revolution

Key question
Were the events of February really a revolution?

It is difficult to see the events of 18 February to 3 March as an overthrow of the Russian monarchy. What does stand out is the lack of direction and leadership at the top, and the unwillingness at the moment of crisis of the tsarist generals and politicians to fight to save the system. Tsardom collapsed from within. Revolutionary pressure from outside had no direct effect.

The role of the Bolsheviks

It would be more accurate to speak of the 'non-role'. The Bolsheviks, absent from the 1905 Revolution, were also missing when the February Revolution took place. Practically all their leaders were in exile. Lenin, who was himself in Switzerland at the time, had not been in Russia for over a decade. With so many of the leading Bolsheviks out of the country for so long before 1917, and given the difficulties of communication created by the war, their knowledge of the situation in Petrograd in 1917 was fragmentary and unreliable. It is small wonder, therefore, that the events of February took them by surprise. This is borne out by a statement of Lenin's to a group of students in Zurich in December 1916, only two months before the February Revolution. He told his audience of youthful Bolshevik sympathisers that although they might live to see the proletarian revolution, he, at the age of 46, did not expect to do so.

The role of Petrograd

One remarkable feature of the Revolution was that it had been overwhelmingly the affair of one city, Petrograd. Another was the willingness of the rest of Russia to accept it. Trotsky observed:

> It would be no exaggeration to say that Petrograd achieved the February Revolution. The rest of the country adhered to it. There was no struggle anywhere except in Petrograd. Nowhere in the country were there any groups of the population, any parties, institutions, or military units ready to put up a fight for the old regime. Neither at the front nor at the rear was there a brigade or regiment prepared to do battle for Nicholas II.

The February Revolution was not quite the bloodless affair that some of the liberal newspapers in Petrograd claimed. Modern estimates suggest that between 1500 and 2000 people were killed or wounded in the disturbances. But, by the scale of the casualties regularly suffered by Russian armies in the war, this figure was small, which further supported Trotsky's contention that the nation was unwilling to fight to save the old regime.

It should be re-emphasised that it was among tsardom's hitherto most committed supporters that the earliest rejection of the tsar occurred. It was the highest-ranking officers who first intimated to Nicholas that he should stand down. It was the aristocratic members of the duma who took the lead in refusing to disband on the tsar's orders. It was when the army and the police told Nicholas that they were unable to carry out his command to keep the populace in order that his position became finally hopeless.

The strikes and demonstrations in Petrograd in February 1917 did not in themselves cause the Revolution. It was the defection of the tsar's previous supporters at the moment of crisis, compounded by Nicholas II's own failure to resist, that brought about the fall of the Romanov dynasty.

The role of the war

Lenin once observed that a true revolution can occur only when certain preconditions exist; one essential is that the ruling power loses the will to survive. Some time before he formally abdicated, Nicholas had given up the fight. It was not the fact but the speed and completeness of the collapse of tsardom in February 1917 that was so remarkable.

What destroyed tsardom was the length of the war. A short war, even if unsuccessful, might have been bearable, as Russia's defeat by Japan 12 years earlier had shown. But the cumulative effect of a prolonged struggle proved overwhelming. Deaths and casualties by the million, soaring inflation, a dislocated communications system, hunger and deprivation, all presided over by a series of increasingly bewildered and ineffectual ministries under an incompetent tsar: these were the lot of the Russian people between 1914 and 1917. The consequence was a loss of morale and a sense of hopelessness that fatally undermined the once-potent myth of the tsar's God-given authority. By 1917 the tsarist system had forfeited its claim to the loyalty of the Russian people.

6 | The Key Debate

Many historians now interpret the February Revolution as the climax of an 'institutional crisis' in Russia. What they mean by this is that it was not economic difficulty or military failure that brought down tsardom. These were important but they were the symptoms rather than the cause. What produced the 1917 crisis in Russia was the failure of its **institutions** to cope with the problems it faced. Norman Stone writes:

Key term

Institutions The formal structures on which a society depends, e.g. government, the administrative system, the law, education, the economy.

> Russia was not advanced enough to stand the strain of war, and the effort to do so plunged her economy into chaos. But economic backwardness did not alone make for revolution. The economic chaos came more from a contest between the old and the new in the Russian economy. There was a crisis, not of decline … but rather of growth.

Richard Pipes, arguably the greatest modern authority on the Russian Revolution, describes Imperial Russia in 1917 as:

> a power that, however dazzling its external glitter, was internally weak and quite unable to cope effectively with the strains – political, economic, and psychological – which the war brought in its wake ... the principal causes of the downfall in 1917 were political, and not economic or social.

It was an outstanding feature of the major wars of the twentieth century that they put immense pressures on the nations that fought them. The war that Russia entered in 1914 intensified all

the problems from which she had traditionally suffered. Russia's institutional crisis showed up the tsarist system as being politically as well as economically bankrupt.

While this line of thought does not absolve the tsar and his ministers from all responsibility for the collapse of Imperial Russia, it does lessen their blame. If the institutions of which they were a part were inadequate to meet the challenges, then no matter what efforts they might have had made, the problems would have overwhelmed them.

Some key books in the debate

Norman Stone, *The Eastern Front, 1914–1917*, Penguin, 1998.
Richard Pipes, *Three Whys of the Russian Revolution*, Pimlico, 1998.

Summary diagram: The February Revolution

Background

A general unrest and anger in Petrograd but this was not led or directed

↓

The Revolution began as a challenge not by revolutionaries but by traditional supporters of tsardom

Course

Strikes in major factories

↓

International Women's Day protest becomes a bread riot

↓

Disorder spreads throughout the city

↓

Police and garrison troops declare the situation uncontrollable

↓

12 rebellious duma members create the Provisional Committee

↓

Mensheviks set up the Petrograd Soviet

↓

Nicholas tries to return to Petrograd but is prevented by mutinous troops

↓

Army high command advise tsar to abdicate

↓

Nicholas tamely abdicates

↓

Dual authority becomes *de facto* government

Character

Not a revolution from below

↓

Bolsheviks played no part

↓

Revolution started by tsardom's traditional supporters

↓

A failure of leadership and nerve at the top

↓

A revolution of one city – Petrograd

↓

Not the result of a social or political movement but a consequence of war

↓

An institutional crisis?

Study Guide: AS Questions

In the style of AQA

(a) Explain why Russia failed to cope with the military demands of the First World War. (12 marks)

(b) How far was the collapse on the home front in Russia responsible for the revolution of February/March 1917? (24 marks)

Exam tips

The cross-references are intended to take you straight to the material that will help you to answer the questions.

(a) You should be able to provide a variety of factors to explain Russia's military weaknesses. Mismanagement was the key.

- Russia's soldiers fought well, but were poorly led in the main (page 67).
- Russia's communication system proved inadequate for war (page 67).
- Did the economy let the army down? This is not necessarily a straight yes – Russia in 1916 was producing more shells than the Allies (pages 67–8).
- Was a conscript, peasant army led by aristocratic officers capable of sustaining a long war?
- How important were the long casualty lists in weakening morale (page 69)?

But, remember, the Russian army was still a formidable force in 1917.

- Was the Tsar's decision in 1915 to become Commander-in-Chief a turning point (page 68)?
- How significant was the sheer physical size of Russia?

(b) Clearly you need to describe 'the collapse' on the home front (page 75).

- Was it a sudden event or an accumulation of problems?
- What were these problems: political, economic, administrative, social?
- Was any one more important than another? For example, was the government's poor leadership more important than the simple fact of hunger?
- What impact did inflation, food shortages and bad news from the front have?
- Was the scandal over Rasputin a sign that the tsarist system was not worth saving?

For a balanced answer you will also need to look at other reasons for the revolution. These would include long-term factors relating to the problems of tsardom and other more immediate factors such as Russia's defeat on the battlefield. The importance of this is worthy of some debate. The army had certainly lost battles, but there was never one crushing defeat.

Despite mutinies, the Russian army was still largely intact as a fighting force at the beginning of 1917. How much weight do you attach to the tsar's loss of nerve in February?

You will need to assess the range of factors you consider relevant to the outbreak of revolution and form a judgement about their relevant importance. In doing so, it is worth remembering that the February Revolution was not an overthrow but a collapse of tsardom from within.

In the style of Edexcel

How far do you agree that it was misjudgements by Nicholas II after 1911 that caused the collapse of tsardom in 1917?

(30 marks)

Exam tips

The cross-references are intended to take you straight to the material that will help you answer the question.

The key words on which to focus your planning are 'misjudgements of Nicholas' and 'collapse of tsardom'. Note, too that the question begins in 1911. The 'how far' element of the question means that you will have to consider other factors as well as Nicholas' misjudgements.

You will need to show the effects of poor decisions and misjudgements on Nicholas' part, especially his failure to see the need for reform and concessions (pages 70 and 71) resulting in both a growth of opposition and a weakening of the support to help tsardom withstand it (page 74). You could make use of the following information:

- The repressive policies pursued by Nicholas' governments resulted in mounting disorder pre-war (pages 48–9).
- Nicholas' poor choice of government ministers throughout the period: after the death of Stolypin in 1911 (page 48); government instability (page 72); the appointment of Rasputin (page 72).
- Nicholas' weakness in letting court scandals further damage his prestige (pages 72–3).
- Nicholas' refusal during the war to work with non-governmental organisations or with the Progressive Bloc in the duma (page 70) alienated the key sections of society he depended on for support – an aristocratic member of the duma took the lead in 1917 in refusing to disband on the Tsar's orders (page 78).
- Nicholas' misjudgement in putting himself in command and hence becoming closely associated with the war failings (pages 68–9 and 70).

However, you will also need to consider the pressure of the strains of war on Russia (pages 68–9 and 79–80). You could take the view held by some historians that the February Revolution was the climax of an institutional crisis in Russia and that its systems were unable to cope when faced with the pressures of war. In that case Nicholas' misjudgements will be less significant.

What will you choose to argue? Remember to come to an overall conclusion which makes your views clear.

In the style of OCR B

Answer both parts of your chosen question.

(a) How is Russia's decision to go to war in 1914 best explained? [Explaining actions, motives and intentions.] (25 marks)

(b) Why did the Russian monarchy collapse in 1917? [Explaining events and circumstances.] (25 marks)

Exam tips

Read again the General Introduction at the start of the Study Guide to Chapter 2, page 54.

(a) Keep your eye on Russia. Start by explaining motives and actions, or start by explaining states of affairs – and then switch to the other. One effective structure would be to focus your innermost circles on longer-term causes, establishing a state of affairs, and then create your next set of circles around the shorter-term causes before finally considering specific motives and intentions in the summer of 1914.

Explain how St Petersburg was alarmed by potential threats to its western borders from (i) the more aggressive behaviour of Germany post-1890 and (ii) the declining Ottoman position. Explain Russia's interests in the Balkans (not just as 'protector' of the Slavs but, for example, why Vienna's 1908 annexation of Bosnia was alarming) and the importance of Constantinople to Russia's naval and commercial position. Above all, use the empathetic mode to explain why fears of international isolation were so influential in shaping Russian attitudes, tying St Petersburg into alliances with France and Britain. Finally, look at the crisis of June to July 1914. War was not inevitable – you don't just have to explain why Russia went to war, but why it did in 1914.

(b) Starting with a causal explanation, expand into an intentional explanation of motives and actions. Your circles need to explain not just longer-term reasons and shorter-term causes, but the immediate sparks – the question doesn't just ask you why the monarchy collapsed, but why it collapsed in 1917. You could start with Nicholas' abdication and move backwards to show why it came about, or you could move forwards in time to explain how circumstances developed. Whichever path you pick, be clear about explaining the attitudes and intentions of key individuals and groups. The answer involves explaining lots more than 'just' events.

Show why the war had such a damaging impact on Russia: economically, politically, militarily. Mention Rasputin, but remember he was a symbol of what was wrong; no more. His murder didn't save the monarchy. Pay attention to the mood in Russia. Pessimism was everywhere, but don't overdo this. Defeatism was common but not universal while the army was not on the point of collapse. Remember too that the Bolsheviks were irrelevant. Rather, stress the causal issues that drove people onto

the streets in January to February 1917: food shortages and prices. Events in Petrograd were confused. Official authority disintegrated and the tsar buckled not under an organised revolution but in the face of unplanned chaos. The final part of your explanation must therefore focus on a negative: the vacuum within tsarism. Neither the nobles nor the generals fought to defend it. Nicholas abdicated on the advice of his supporters.

4 1917: The October Revolution

POINTS TO CONSIDER

The key aspect of the Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917 is that it was quite distinct in character from the revolution that had preceded it eight months earlier. Whereas the February Revolution had been essentially the collapse of tsardom from within, the October Revolution was a seizure of power by the Bolshevik Party from the Provisional Government. This chapter examines the events leading up to the October Revolution through the following themes:

- The Dual Authority
- The return of the Bolsheviks and the role of Lenin
- The limitations of the Provisional Government
- The events of the October Revolution
- The reasons for the Bolshevik success

Key dates

1917	March 12	Stalin and Kamenev arrived in Petrograd
	March 14	Petrograd Soviet issued its *Address to the people of the whole world*
	April 3	Lenin returned to Petrograd
	April 4	Lenin issued his *April Theses*
	July 3–6	Failure of the 'July Days' Bolshevik uprising
	July 8	Kerensky became Prime Minister
	July 18	Kornilov became Commander-in-Chief
	September 1	Kornilov's march on Petrograd abandoned
	September 25	Bolsheviks gained a majority in Petrograd Soviet
	October 9	Military Revolutionary Committee set up
	October 23	Kerensky moved against the Bolsheviks by attempting to close down *Pravda* and *Izvestiya*
		Lenin instructed the Bolsheviks to begin the rising against Kerensky's government
	October 25	First session of the Congress of Soviets
	October 25–6	Kerensky fled from Petrograd
		Bolsheviks seized the Winter Palace
	October 26	Bolsheviks established *Sovnarkom*
		Lenin claimed power in the name of Congress of Soviets

1 | The Dual Authority

Key question
Was the Provisional Government fatally weakened from the first?

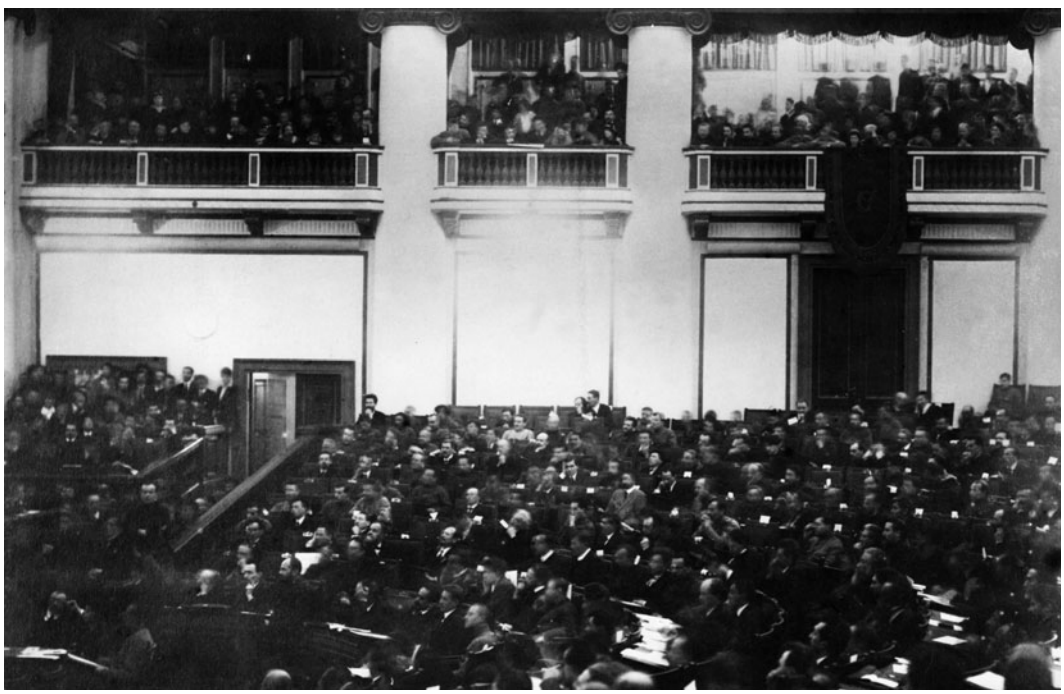
The Provisional Government, led by Prince Lvov, was the old duma in a new form. When Paul Milyukov, the Foreign Minister, read out the list of ministers in the newly formed government someone in the listening crowd called out, 'Who appointed you lot, then?'. Milyukov replied, 'We were appointed by the Revolution itself'.

In that exchange were expressed the two crippling weaknesses of the Provisional Government throughout the eight months of its existence. It was not an elected body. It had come into being as a rebellious committee of the old duma, refusing to disband at the tsar's order. As a consequence, it lacked legitimate authority. It had no constitutional claim upon the loyalty of the Russian people and no natural fund of goodwill on which it could rely. It would be judged entirely on how well it dealt with the nation's problems.

The role of the Petrograd Soviet

The Provisional Government's second major weakness was that its authority was limited by its unofficial partnership with the Petrograd Soviet. It was not that the Soviet was initially hostile. Indeed, at first, there was considerable co-operation between them. Some individuals were members of both bodies. For example, Alexander Kerensky, the SR leader, was for a time chairman of the Soviet as well as a minister in the Provisional Government.

The Soviet did not set out to be an alternative government. It regarded its role as supervisory, checking that the interests of the



An overflowing meeting of the Petrograd Soviet in March 1917. Huge numbers of soldiers and workers, sometimes as many 2000, attended the early meetings. By the autumn this had dropped to a few hundred but the Bolsheviks kept up their numbers, which gave them a disproportionate influence in the Soviet. Why was the presence of the Bolsheviks in the meetings of the Petrograd Soviet so politically important between March and October 1917?

soldiers and workers were fully understood by the new government. However, in the uncertain times that followed the February Revolution, the Provisional Government often seemed unsure of its own authority. This uncertainty tended to give the Soviet greater prominence.

There was also the impressive fact that in the aftermath of the February Revolution soviets were rapidly set up in all the major cities and towns of Russia. Yet, although the soviets were to play an increasingly important role in the development of the Revolution, in the early stages the Bolsheviks did not dominate them. They were not, therefore, necessarily opposed to the Provisional Government. It was significant, however, that even before the Bolshevik influence became predominant, the ability of the Petrograd Soviet to restrict the Provisional Government's authority had been clearly revealed. In one of its first moves as an organisation it had issued its 'Soviet Order Number 1', which read:

> The orders of the military commission of the state duma are to be obeyed only in such instances when they do not contradict the orders and decrees of the soviet.

Importance of the Order

What the Order meant was that the decrees of the Provisional Government in regard to military affairs were binding only if they were approved by the Petrograd Soviet. History shows that unless a government has control of its army it does not hold real power. Order Number 1 made it clear that the Provisional Government did not have such power. It had, therefore, to compromise with the Soviet. Between February and April this arrangement worked reasonably well; there were no serious disputes between the two bodies in the 'dual authority'.

Key question
Why was there so little political conflict in the period immediately after the February Revolution?

Political co-operation

An important factor that helped lessen party differences was the widespread elation in Petrograd in the weeks following the February Revolution. There was an excitement in the air; people on the streets greeted each other enthusiastically as if a new era had dawned. This encouraged a genuine feeling across all the political groups that Russia had entered a period of real freedom. For a time co-operation between opposing parties became much easier to achieve.

There was also a general acceptance that the new liberty that had come with the collapse of tsardom should not be allowed to slip into **anarchy**. This created a willingness to maintain state authority at the centre of affairs. Furthermore, at the beginning, both the Provisional Government and the Soviet contained a wider range of political representation than was the case later. Moderate socialists had a bigger influence than the Social Revolutionaries or Social Democrats in the first meetings of the Soviet, while all parties, apart from the Bolsheviks and the **monarchists**, were represented in the Provisional Government during its early weeks. As the year wore on and the problems mounted, the Provisional Government moved increasingly to the right and the Soviet increasingly to the left. But before that shift occurred there had been considerable harmony.

Key terms

Anarchy
An absence of government or authority, leading to disorder.

Monarchists
Reactionaries who wanted a restoration of tsardom.

Early achievements of the Provisional Government

The fruits of this initial co-operation were shown in a set of progressive measures adopted by the Provisional Government:

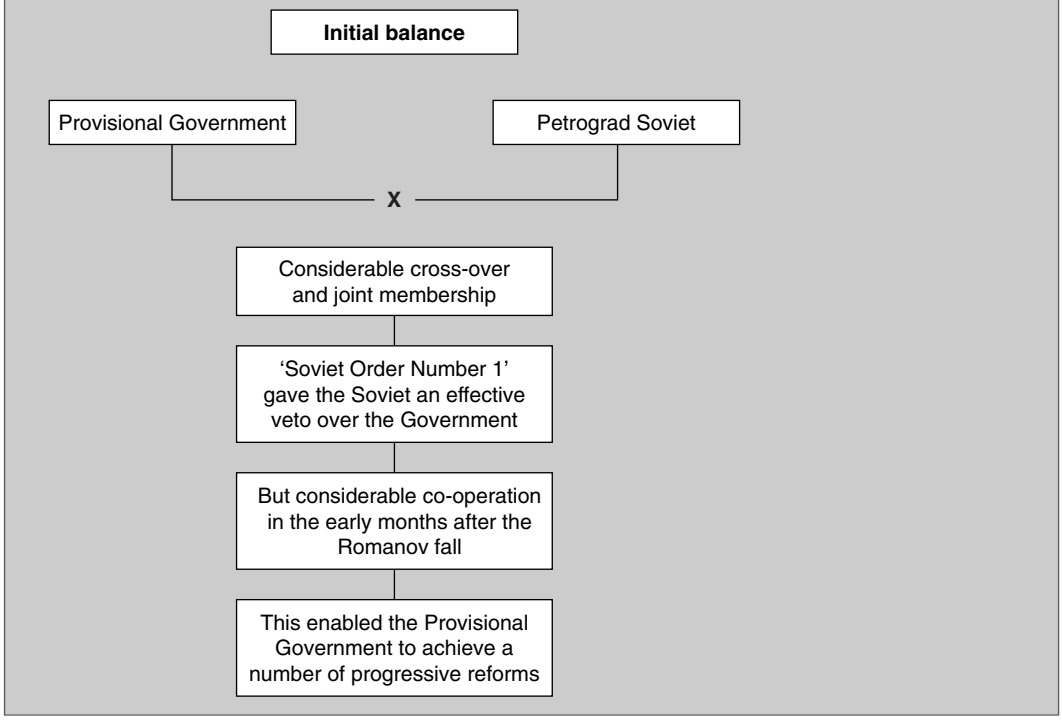
- An amnesty for political prisoners.
- The recognition of trade unions.
- The introduction of an eight-hour day for industrial workers.
- The replacement of the tsarist police with a **'people's militia'**.
- The granting of full civil and religious freedoms.
- Preparations for the election of a constituent assembly.

Noticeably, however, these changes did not touch on the critical issues of the war and the land. It would be these that would destroy the always tenuous partnership of the dual authority, and it would be Lenin who would begin the process of destruction.

Key term

'People's militia' A new set of volunteer law-enforcement officers drawn from ordinary people.

Summary diagram: The dual authority



2 | The Bolsheviks Return

The Impact of Stalin and Kamenev

Once the exiled Bolsheviks learned of Nicholas's abdication they rushed back to Petrograd. Those, like Stalin, who had been in Siberia were the first to return in March. Stalin's return was significant. Because of their standing in the Party, he and his fellow returnee, Lev Kamenev, became the leading voices among the Petrograd Bolsheviks. Initially this duo took an anti-Lenin line. Lenin, who did not reach Petrograd until nearly a month later, still tried to direct things from exile. In his *Letters from Afar* he urged

Key question

What did Stalin and Kamenev think Bolshevik policy should be after the February Revolution?

Key date

Stalin and Kamenev arrive in Petrograd: 12 March 1917

that the war that Russia was fighting should be turned into a class war; Bolsheviks should infiltrate the armies of the combatant nations and encourage the soldiers to turn their weapons against their officers as the first step towards overthrowing their governments. Lenin also instructed the Bolsheviks not to co-operate with the Provisional Government or with the other parties.

Stalin and Kamenev ignored Lenin's instructions. On the war issue, they argued that the best policy was to press for international negotiations to be started. Stalin wrote to the Bolsheviks in Petrograd telling them to 'put pressure on the Provisional Government to announce its willingness to start peace talks at once'. On the question of the Bolsheviks' relations with the Provisional Government, Kamenev insisted that circumstances made co-operation with it essential, at least for the time being, since it was 'genuinely struggling against the remnants of the old regime'. As to the other parties, Kamenev believed co-operation with them made perfect sense. He backed a proposal that it was 'possible and desirable' for the Bolshevik to consider linking again with the Mensheviks.

Clearly, at this juncture, there was a wide divergence of view between Lenin and the other two men. Interestingly, Kamenev appears to have been the dominant partner in his relations with Stalin, who later admitted that, in the period before Lenin arrived, Kamenev dominated Bolshevik discussions in Petrograd. What Kamenev was advancing, and what Stalin went along with, was often referred to as **accommodationism**. It was an approach that Lenin would totally reject once he was back in Petrograd.

Key terms

Accommodationism The idea that the Bolsheviks should accept the situation that followed the February Revolution, co-operating with the Provisional Government, and being prepared to work with the other revolutionary and reforming parties.

Emigrant internationalists Russian revolutionaries living in exile.

Key question
What impact did Lenin's return have on the situation in Petrograd?

Lenin's Return in April

Lenin arrived in Petrograd on 3 April. The manner of his return from Switzerland was a remarkable story in itself. His wife, Krupskaya, recorded it:

> The moment the news of the February Revolution was received, Ilyich [Lenin] was all eagerness to get back to Russia. As there were no legal ways of travelling, illegal ways would have to be used. But what ways? From the moment the news of the Revolution was received, Ilyich had no sleep. His nights were spent building the most improbable plans. Naturally the Germans gave us permission to travel through Germany in the belief that Revolution was a disaster to a country, and that by allowing **emigrant internationalists** to return to their country they were helping to spread the Revolution in Russia. The Bolsheviks, for their part, considered it their duty to bring about a victorious proletarian revolution. They did not care what the German bourgeois government thought about it.

Krupskaya's account was wholly accurate. In the hope that the tsar's fall would be the prelude to the collapse of the Russian armies, the German government arranged for Lenin to return to Russia in a sealed train across occupied Europe.

Was Lenin a German agent?

Since the outbreak of war in 1914 Lenin's opponents had continually accused him of being in the pay of the German government. Their charge had weight. Between 1914 and 1917 the German Foreign Office had given regular financial support to Lenin and the Bolsheviks, in the hope that if they achieved their revolutionary aims they would pull Russia out of the war. As Krupskaya observed, Lenin did not really care what the attitude of the Germans was. It just so happened that, for quite different reasons, what they wanted – the withdrawal of the Russian armies from the war – was precisely what he wanted. However, it made no difference to anti-Bolsheviks that the German reasons were military and Lenin's were political. They considered the German government and the Bolshevik Party to be co-operating in a common cause, the defeat of Russia.

Key dates

Lenin's arrives in Petrograd: 3 April 1917

Lenin issues his *April Theses*: 4 April 1917

Lenin's Impact

There is no doubting the great significance of Lenin's return to Petrograd in April 1917. Before then, the Bolsheviks, led by Kamenev and Stalin, had accepted the events of February, leading to the formation of the dual authority, as part of a genuine revolution. They had been willing to work with the other reformist parties. Lenin changed all that. In his speech on his arrival at Petrograd's Finland Station on 3 April, he declared that February had not been a genuine Revolution; far from giving Russia political freedom, it had created a **'parliamentary-bourgeois republic'**. He condemned the Provisional Government and called for its overthrow in a second revolution.

Key term

'Parliamentary-bourgeois republic' Lenin's contemptuous term for the Provisional Government, which he dismissed as an unrepresentative mockery that had simply replaced the rule of the tsar with the rule of the reactionary duma.

The *April Theses*

The following day he issued his *April Theses*, in which he spelt out future Bolshevik policy. To the bewilderment of those Bolsheviks who had been in Petrograd since February and expected to be praised for their efforts in working with the other revolutionary groups, Lenin condemned all that had happened since the fall of the tsar. He insisted that, since the Bolsheviks were the only truly revolutionary proletarian party, they must:

- abandon all co-operation with other parties
- work for the true revolution entirely by their own efforts
- overthrow the Provisional Government, which was simply the old, class-ridden duma in a new garb
- struggle, not to extend freedom to all classes, but to transfer power to the workers
- demand that authority pass to the soviets.

Lenin had ulterior motives in demanding the soviets take over government. Although he rejected much of what they had done, he saw the soviets as a power-base. In practice they had become an essential part of the structure of post-tsarist government. Lenin calculated that the soviets – the Petrograd Soviet in particular – offered his small Bolshevik Party the means by which it could obtain power in the name of the proletariat. If it could infiltrate and dominate the soviets, the Bolshevik Party would be in a position to take over the state.

The essence of Lenin's argument was summed up in two provocative Bolshevik slogans: 'Peace, Bread and Land' and 'All Power to the Soviets'. But these were more than slogans. They were Lenin's way of presenting in simple, dramatic headings the basic problems confronting Russia:

- 'Peace' – the continuing war with Germany.
- 'Bread' – the chronic food shortage.
- 'Land' – the disruption in the countryside.

He asserted that as long as the Provisional Government stayed in power these problems could not be solved because the ministers governed only in the interests of their own class. They had no wish to end the war, which brought them profits, to supply food to the Russian people, whom they despised, or reform the land-holding system, which guaranteed their property rights and privileges. That is why Lenin wanted 'All Power to the Soviets'. The current ministers must be swept aside and replaced with a government of the soviets. Only then would the people's needs be addressed.

Lenin's analysis was perceptive. The Provisional Government's failure to deal with the three principal issues he had identified was, indeed, to prove its eventual downfall.

Summary diagram: The Bolsheviks return

Conflicting policies

From exile **Lenin** issues *Letter from Afar*
He urges:
– turn the war into an international class conflict ←→
– rejection of Provisional Government
– no co-operation with other parties

Stalin and **Kamenev** return in March
They urge accommodationism:
– acceptance of situation in Petrograd
– co-operation with Provisional Government
– alliance with other parties

Lenin returns in April
↓
He condemns accommodationism
↓
Delivers the *April Theses*
Commits Bolsheviks to overthrow of Provisional Government
Abandonment of all co-operation with other parties

Lenin's strategy for Bolshevik takeover
↓
'Peace, Bread and Land',
'All Power to the Soviets'

Key question
What difficulties beset the Provisional Government?

3 | The Provisional Government and its Problems

From the outset, the Provisional Government was in a troubled position. The main problem was the war. For the Provisional Government after February 1917 there was no choice but to fight on. The reason was not idealistic but financial. Unless it did so it would no longer receive the supplies and **war-credits** from the western allies on which it had come to rely. Tsardom had left Russia virtually bankrupt. No government could have carried on without large injections of capital from abroad. Foreign bankers were among the first to visit Russia after Nicholas's abdication to

Key term
War-credits
Money loaned on easy repayment terms to a country to help it finance its war effort.

ensure that the new regime would carry on the war. The strain that this obligation imposed on the Provisional Government finally proved unsustainable. Its preoccupation with the war prevented the government from dealing with Russia's social and economic problems. It was a paradoxical situation: 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.

Government crisis

The question of the war brought about the first serious rift between the Petrograd Soviet and the Provisional Government. On 14 March the Soviet had issued an *Address to the people of the whole world*, calling for 'peace without annexations or **indemnities**'. The government declared that it accepted the Address, but this appeared, at best, nonsense and, at worst, deliberate deceit, when it became known that Milyukov, the foreign minister, had pledged to the Allies that Russia would fight on until Germany was defeated.

Late in April a series of violent demonstrations occurred in Petrograd directed against Milyukov. These produced a government crisis. Milyukov and Guchkov, the War Minister, resigned early in May. These resignations were an illustration of the divisions within the government as well as of the outside pressures on it. In the reshuffled cabinet, Alexander Kerensky became the War Minister and places were found for leading Mensheviks and SRs. It was hoped that this apparent leftward shift of the Provisional Government would ease its relationship with the Soviet.

However, the opposite happened. The socialists in the government tended to become isolated from the Soviet. This was because in joining the government they had to enter into coalition with the Kadets (see page 26), which opened them to the charge that they were compromising with the bourgeoisie. Lenin wrote of 'those despicable socialists who have sold out to the Government'.

Key date

Address to the people of the whole world issued by the Petrograd Soviet: 14 March 1917

Key term

Indemnities
Payment of war costs demanded by the victors from the losers.

The emergence of Kerensky

Some individuals within the Provisional Government had misgivings about continuing the war, but at no time did the government as a body contemplate withdrawing from it. This would have mattered less had the Russian armies been successful, but the military situation continued to deteriorate, eroding the support the government had initially enjoyed. Lvov stayed as nominal head of the government but it was Kerensky who became the major influence. As War Minister, he campaigned for Russia to embrace the conflict with Germany as a struggle to save the Revolution, requiring the total dedication of the nation. He made a number of personal visits to the front to deliver passionate speeches to the troops. He later described his efforts: 'For the sake of the nation's life it was necessary to restore the army's will to die. "Forward to the battle for freedom. I summon you not to a feast but death". These were the words I used before the troops in the front-line positions.'

The government's troubles increase

This attempt to turn the war into a revolutionary crusade took no account of the real situation. The fact was that Russia had gone beyond the point where it could fight a successful war. Yet, Kerensky persisted. In June, a major offensive was launched on the south-western front. It failed badly. With their already low morale further weakened by Bolshevik agitators who encouraged them to disobey orders, the Russian forces were no match for the Germans, who easily repulsed them and inflicted heavy losses. Whole regiments mutinied or deserted.

General Kornilov, the commander on the south-western front, called on the Provisional Government to halt the offensive and direct its energies to crushing the **political subversives** at home.

The government's troubles were deepened by events on the island of Kronstadt, the naval base situated 15 miles west of Petrograd in the Bay of Finland. Sailors and workers there defied the central authorities by setting up their own separate government. Such developments tempted a number of revolutionaries in Petrograd into thinking that the time and opportunity had come for them to bring down the Provisional Government. The attempt to do so became known as 'The July Days'.

Key terms

Political subversives
Kornilov's term for the Social Democrats and the Social Revolutionaries in Russia.

National minority governments
A number of Russia's ethnic peoples exploited the Provisional Government's difficulties by setting up their own governments, which were independent of central control.

Ukraine
The area in southern Russia containing the largest non-Russian collection of people (23 million) in the empire. It was also the nation's largest food-producing region, hence its great importance.

The July Days

By the summer of 1917 it did, indeed, seem that the government was no longer in control of events. The most ominous signs were:

- the spread of soviets
- worker-control of the factories
- widespread seizure of land by the peasants
- the creation of breakaway **national minority governments** – most notably in the **Ukraine**.

It was the Ukrainian question that helped to provoke the July Days crisis. When the Kadet ministers in the government learned in late June that a Provisional Government deputation in Kiev had offered independence to the Ukraine, they resigned, protesting that only an all-Russian constituent assembly could properly decide such matters.

This ministerial clash coincided with large-scale street demonstrations in Petrograd. Public protests were not uncommon; they had been almost a daily occurrence since February. But, in the atmosphere created by the news of the failure of the south-western offensive and the government's mounting problems, the demonstrations of early July turned into a direct challenge to the Provisional Government.

The rising fails

The rising itself was a confused, disorderly affair. In the course of the three days the demonstrators fell out amongst themselves; those members of the Soviet who seemed reluctant to make a real bid for power were physically attacked. This disunity

made it relatively easy for the Provisional Government to crush the rising. Troops loyal to the government were rushed from the front. They duly scattered the demonstrators and restored order.

It is not entirely clear who started the rising of 3–6 July. A month before, at the first **All-Russian Congress of Soviets**, Lenin had declared that the Bolshevik Party was ready to take power, but the delegates had regarded this as a general intention rather than a specific plan. There were also a number of SRs and other non-Bolshevik revolutionaries in the soviet who, for some time, had been demanding that the Petrograd Soviet take over from the Provisional Government.

Trotsky later referred to the July Days as a 'semi-insurrection' and argued that it had been started by the Mensheviks and SRs. In saying this, he was trying to absolve the Bolsheviks from the blame of having started a rising that failed. The explanation offered afterwards by the Bolsheviks was that they had come heroically to the aid of the workers of Petrograd and their comrades-in-arms, the sailors of Kronstadt, who had risen spontaneously against the government.

The opposite point of view was put at the time by Nikolei Chkheidze, the Menshevik chairman of the Soviet. He argued that the Bolsheviks, having been behind the rising from the beginning, later tried to disclaim responsibility for its failure.

Key date
Failure of the 'July Days': 3–6 July

Key term
All-Russian Congress of Soviets
A gathering of representatives from all the soviets formed in Russia since February.

Anti-government protesters scattering under rifle-fire during the suppression of the July Days. How were the Bolsheviks able to survive their failure in the July Days?

The consequences of the rising

While the origins of the July Days may have been uncertain, the results were not. The abortive rising revealed a number of important facts:

- the opposition movement was disunited
- the Bolsheviks were still far from being the dominant revolutionary party
- the Provisional Government still had the strength to be able to put down an armed insurrection.

Key date
Kerensky becomes Prime Minister: 8 July 1917

This last revelation did much to raise the spirits of the Provisional Government and brought particular credit to Kerensky as War Minister. Two days after the rising had been crushed he became Prime Minister. He immediately turned the heat on the Bolsheviks. *Pravda* was closed down and many of the Bolshevik leaders, including Trotsky and Kamenev, were arrested. Lenin fled to Finland.

Kerensky also launched a propaganda campaign in which Lenin and his party were branded as traitors and agents in the pay of the German high command. A fortnight after the July Days, the Bolshevik Party appeared to have been broken as a political force in Russia. What enabled the Bolsheviks to survive, as the next two sections show, was the critical misjudgements by the Provisional Government over the land question and the Kornilov Affair.

Photo of Lenin clean-shaven and be-wigged, in hiding in Petrograd 1917. Throughout the period April–October 1917, Lenin went in constant fear of being arrested and executed by the Provisional Government. He adopted various disguises, kept continually on the move and frequently fled to Finland. Yet, oddly, as Kerensky later regretfully admitted, the authorities made little concerted effort to capture their chief opponent. This raises the interesting question whether Lenin exaggerated, or the government underestimated, his powers of disruption (see page 107).

The land question

Key question
Why was the government unable to follow an effective land policy?

The Provisional Government had misread the public attitude towards the war. It similarly failed to appreciate the common view on the land question. Land shortage was a chronic problem in Russia. It had been a chief cause of peasant unrest since the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 (see page 7). The February Revolution had led the peasants to believe that they would soon benefit from a major land redistribution following a government takeover of the landowners' estates. When the government did no such thing, the peasants in many parts of Russia took the law into their own hands and seized the property of local landlords. Disturbances in the countryside occurred daily throughout 1917. It would be appropriate to describe this as a national peasants' revolt.

The Provisional Government had no real answer to the land problem. While it was true that it had set up a Land Commission with the object of redistributing land, this body made little progress in handling a massive task. It was doubtful, moreover, whether the government's heart was ever really in land reform. The majority of its members came from the landed and propertied classes. They were unlikely to be enthusiasts for a policy that would threaten their own position. They had supported the February Revolution as a political change, not as a social upheaval. They were quite willing for the estates of the fallen monarchy to go to the peasants, but they had no intention of losing their own possessions in a state land grab. This had been the strength of Lenin's assertion in the *April Theses* that tsardom had been replaced not by a revolutionary but by a bourgeois regime.

The Bolshevik position on the land question

There was a sense in which the land issue was equally difficult for the Bolsheviks. They simply did not have a land policy. As a Marxist party, they had dismissed the peasantry as, in Trotsky's words, 'the pack animal' of history, lacking true revolutionary initiative. By definition, the proletarian revolution was an affair of the industrial working class. Lenin, on his return in April, had declared that it would be pointless for the Bolsheviks, a proletarian party, to make an alliance with the backward peasantry.

However, faced with the fact of peasant land-seizures throughout Russia, Lenin was quite prepared to make a tactical adjustment. Appreciating that it was impossible to ignore the disruptive behaviour of four-fifths of the Russian population, he asserted that the special circumstances of post-tsarist Russia had produced a situation in which the peasants were acting as a truly revolutionary force. This adaptation of Marxist theory thus allowed Lenin to add the Russian peasants to the proletarian cause.

Lacking a land policy of his own, Lenin simply stole the SRs'. 'Land to the Peasants', a slogan lifted straight from the SR programme, became the new Bolshevik catchphrase. What this meant in mid-1917 was that the Bolsheviks recognised the peasant land-seizures as perfectly legitimate This produced a considerable swing to the Bolsheviks in the countryside. It had the further effect of splitting the SRs, a significant number of whom began to align themselves with the Bolsheviks. Known as Left SRs, they sided with the Bolshevik Party on all major issues.

Key question
How real a threat was the Kornilov Affair to the Provisional Government?

Key date
Kornilov becomes Commander-in-Chief: 18 July 1917

The Kornilov Affair

In August, Kerensky's government became involved in the Kornilov Affair, a crisis that undermined the gains it had made from its handling of the July Days, and allowed the Bolsheviks to recover from their humiliation. Parts of the story have been obscured by the conflicting descriptions later given by some of the participants, but there was little doubt as to the intentions of the chief figure in the episode, General Kornilov, the new commander-in-chief.

Kornilov was the type of right-wing army officer who had never accepted the February Revolution. He believed that before Russia could fulfil its patriotic duty of defeating Germany, it must first destroy the socialist enemies within. 'It's time', he said, 'to hang the German supporters and spies, with Lenin at their head, and to disperse the Soviet'.

By late August, the advance of German forces deeper into Russia began to threaten Petrograd itself. Large numbers of refugees and deserters flocked into the city, heightening the tension there and increasing the disorder. Kornilov declared that Russia was about to topple into anarchy and that the government stood in grave danger of a socialist-inspired insurrection. He informed Kerensky that he intended to bring his loyal troops to Petrograd to save the Provisional Government from being overthrown.

Accounts tend to diverge at this point in their description of Kerensky's response. Those who believe that he was involved in a plot with Kornilov to destroy the Soviet and set up a dictatorship argue that Kerensky had at first fully supported this move. It was only afterwards, when he realised that Kornilov also intended to remove the Provisional Government and impose military rule, that he turned against him

Other commentators, sympathetic to Kerensky, maintain that he had not plotted with Kornilov and that his actions had been wholly consistent. They also emphasise that a special Commission of Enquiry into the affair in 1917 cleared Kerensky of any complicity. But,

Kerensky addressing Russian forces in May 1917.

however the question of collusion is decided, it was certainly the case that Kerensky publicly condemned Kornilov's advance. He ordered him to surrender his post and placed Petrograd under martial law. Kornilov reacted by sending an open telegram, declaring:

> People of Russia! Our great motherland is dying. I, General Kornilov declare that under pressure of the Bolshevik majority in the soviets, the Provisional Government is acting in complete accord with the plans of the German General Staff. It is destroying the army and is undermining the very foundations of the country.

Kerensky's response

Fearful that Kornilov would attack, Kerensky called on all loyal citizens to take up arms to defend the city. The Bolsheviks were released from prison or came out of hiding to collect the weapons issued by the Provisional Government to all who were willing to fight. By this strange twist in the story of 1917, the Bolsheviks found themselves being given arms by the very government they were pledged to overthrow.

As it happened, the weapons were not needed against Kornilov. The railway workers refused to operate the trains to bring Kornilov's army to Petrograd. When he learned of this and of a mass workers' militia formed to oppose him, Kornilov abandoned the advance and allowed himself to be arrested. He was to die early in April 1918, killed by a stray shell at the start of the Civil War.

Key date

Kornilov abandons march on Petrograd: 1 September 1917

Bolshevik gains

It was the Bolsheviks who benefited most from the failure of the attempted *coup*. They had been able to present themselves as defenders of Petrograd and the Revolution, thus diverting attention away from their failure in the July Days. What further boosted the Bolsheviks was that, despite the obvious readiness of the people of Petrograd to defend their city, this could not be read as a sign of their belief in Provisional Government. Indeed, the episode had damaged the Provisional Government by revealing its political weakness and showing how vulnerable it was to military threat. Kerensky later admitted that the Kornilov affair had been 'the prelude to the October Revolution'.

Summary diagram: The Provisional Government and its problems

The war
- Government obliged to continue the war in order to maintain loans from the Allies
- Caused first serious split between Soviet and Provisional Government
- Prevented resources being spent on other needs
- Kerensky emerges as committed supporter of the war

National minorities question
Caused ministerial crisis which led to …

… The July Days
Which saw near extinction of Bolsheviks

The land question
- Provisional Government not genuinely committed to land reform
- Enabled Bolsheviks to steal a march and gain peasant support

The Kornilov Affair
- Provisional Government survived but gravely weakened
- Bolsheviks begin recovery
- The prelude to the October Revolution

Key question
What factors enabled the Bolsheviks to gain in strength?

4 | The October Revolution

The political shift in Petrograd

The measure of the Bolsheviks' recovery from the July Days and of their gains from the Kornilov Affair was soon apparent. By the middle of September they had gained a majority in both the Petrograd and Moscow soviets. However, this should not be seen as indicating a large swing of opinion in their favour, but rather as a reflection of the changing character of the soviets.

In the first few months after the February Revolution the meetings of the soviets had been fully attended. Over 2000 deputies had packed into the Petrograd Soviet at the Tauride Palace. But as the months passed enthusiasm waned. By the autumn of 1917 attendance was often down to a few hundred. This was a major advantage to the Bolsheviks. Their political dedication meant that they continued to turn up in force while the members of the other parties attended irregularly. The result was that the Bolshevik Party exerted an influence out of proportion to its numbers. This was especially the case in regard to the composition of the various sub-committees.

Key date
Bolsheviks gain a majority in Petrograd Soviet: September 1917

Broadly what happened in Petrograd following the Kornilov Affair was that the Petrograd Soviet moved to the left while the Provisional Government shifted to the right. This made some form of clash between the two bodies increasingly likely. Lenin put it as a matter of stark choice: 'Either a soviet government or Kornilovism. There is no middle course'.

Lenin's strategy

From his exile in Finland, Lenin constantly appealed to his party to prepare for the immediate overthrow of Kerensky's government. He claimed that his earlier estimate of what would happen had proved wholly correct: that the Provisional Government, incapable of solving the war and land questions, was becoming increasingly reactionary. This left the Soviet as the only hope of true revolutionaries. He further argued that the Bolsheviks could not wait; they must seize the moment while the government was at its most vulnerable. In a sentence that was to become part of Bolshevik legend, Lenin wrote on 12 September: 'History will not forgive us if we do not assume power'.

Lenin's sense of urgency arose from his concern over two events that were due to take place in the autumn, and which he calculated would seriously limit the Bolsheviks' freedom of action. One was the meeting of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets in late October; the other was the November election for the Constituent Assembly. He was convinced that the Bolsheviks would have to take power before these events occurred. If, under the banner 'All Power to the Soviets', the Bolsheviks could topple the Provisional Government before the Congress met they could then present their new authority as a *fait accompli* that the Congress would have no reason to reject.

Key term
Progressives
Those who believed in parliamentary government for Russia.

The elections to the Constituent Assembly presented a different problem. The Assembly was the body on which all **progressives**

and reformers had set their hopes. Once it came into being its moral authority would be difficult to challenge. Lenin told his party that since it was impossible to forecast how successfully they would perform in the elections, they would have to be in power before the results were announced. This would provide the Bolsheviks with the authority to undermine the results should they go against them.

The 'Pre-Parliament'

At the same time as Lenin pressed this policy upon his party, Kerensky tried to make his government less exposed by announcing plans for the creation of a '**Pre-Parliament**' with authority to advise the government. Lenin condemned this as a manoeuvre not to broaden the government's base but to strengthen its grip on power. Acting on his orders, the Bolshevik members of the Soviet who were entitled to attend the Pre-Parliament first derided it and then walked out.

Key terms

'Pre-Parliament' This was to be a body drawn from a variety of parties, and thus be representative of a greater range of political opinion. It was intended to fill the interim before the Constituent Assembly came into being.

Central Committee The decision-making body of the Bolshevik Party.

Lenin returns to Petrograd

Emboldened by the Bolsheviks' success in undermining the Pre-Parliament, Lenin now began urging his party to prepare to overthrow the Provisional Government. Despite the passionate conviction with which Lenin put his arguments to his colleagues, there were Bolsheviks on the **Central Committee** of the party who doubted the wisdom of striking against the Provisional Government at this point.

In an effort to enforce his will, Lenin slipped back into Petrograd on 7 October. His personal presence stiffened Bolshevik resolve, but did not produce total unity. During the next two weeks he spent exhausting hours at a series of Central Committee meetings trying to convince the waverers. On 10 October, the Central Committee pledged itself to an armed insurrection, but failed to agree on a specific date. In the end, by another quirk of fate, it was Kerensky and the government, not the Bolsheviks, who initiated the actual rising.

Kerensky makes the first move

Rumours of an imminent Bolshevik *coup* had been circulating in Petrograd for some weeks, but it was not until an article, written by two members of the Bolshevik Central Committee, appeared in a journal that the authorities felt they had sure proof. The writers of the article, Gregory Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev, argued that it would be a mistake to attempt to overthrow the government in current circumstances. Kerensky interpreted this as indicating that a date had already been set. Rather than wait to be caught off guard, he ordered a pre-emptive attack on the Bolsheviks. On 23 October the Bolshevik newspapers, *Pravda* and *Izvestiya*, were closed down by government troops and an attempted round-up of the leading Bolsheviks began.

The Bolsheviks no longer had a choice; Lenin ordered the planned insurrection to begin.

Key date

Kerensky attempts to close down *Pravda* and *Izvestiya*; Bolshevik rising against the government begins: 23 October 1917

Key date

Petrograd Soviet set up the Military Revolutionary Committee: 9 October 1917

Trotsky's role

That the Bolsheviks had a plan at all was the work not of Lenin but of Trotsky. While it was Lenin who was undoubtedly the great influence behind the October Rising, it was Trotsky who actually organised it. The key to Trotsky's success in this was his chairmanship of the Petrograd Soviet, to which he had been elected in September. On 9 October the Soviet set up the Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC) to organise the defence of Petrograd against a possible German attack or another Kornilov-type assault from within Russia.

It proved a critical decision. Realising that if the Bolsheviks could control the MRC they would control Petrograd, Trotsky used his influence to have himself accepted as one of the **troika** appointed to run the MRC. This meant he had at his disposal the only effective military force in Petrograd. Moreover, it was a legitimate force since theoretically it acted on the authority of the Soviet. Trotsky was now in a position to draft the plans for the overthrow of the Provisional Government. When Lenin gave the order for the uprising to begin, it was Trotsky who directed the **Red Guards** in their seizure of the key vantage points in Petrograd, such as the bridges and the telegraph offices.

Key terms

Troika
A three-man team.

Red Guards
Despite the Bolshevik legend that these were the crack military forces of the Revolution, the Red Guards, who numbered some 10,000, were largely made up of fairly elderly men recruited from the workers in the factories.

Cossacks
The remnants of the elite cavalry regiment of the tsars.

Collapse of the Provisional Government

In the three days (25–27 October) that it took for the city to fall under Bolshevik control there was remarkably little fighting. There were only six deaths during the whole episode and these were all Red Guards, most probably shot by mistake by their own side. The simple fact was that the Provisional Government had hardly any military forces on which to call. The Petrograd garrison that had turned out to defend the government on previous occasions did not come to its aid now. Desertions had reduced the garrison to a few loyal officer-cadets, a small group of **Cossacks** and a unit of female soldiers, known as the 'Amazons'.

When the Red Guards approached the Winter Palace, which housed the Provisional Government, they expected stiff resistance, but there was none. A black-and-white film of the dramatic, death-defying storming of the palace gates often appears in television documentaries about the October Revolution. Sometimes at the bottom of the screen will appear the word 'reconstruction'. This is very misleading since there was never such an event to reconstruct. The truth is there are no contemporary films of October 1917. What modern programme-makers invariably use are the powerful images from the feature film, *October*, made in 1927 on the tenth anniversary by the celebrated Bolshevik film-maker, Sergei Eisenstein.

The Bolshevik forces did not need to storm the gates; there was nobody defending them. The Winter Place was a vast building many times larger than London's Buckingham Palace. The Red Guards simply strolled in through the back doors. This was enough to make the defenders give up. The Cossacks walked off when confronted by the Red Guards. After that, it did not take much pressure to persuade the cadets and the Amazons that it was better for them to lay down their arms and go home rather than die in a futile struggle.

A contingent of Amazons under instruction in 1917. Kerensky had specially recruited these female soldiers, also known as 'the Women's Battalion of Death', as an example of the fighting spirit of the Russian people.

The sounding of its guns in a pre-arranged signal by the pro-Bolshevik crew of the cruiser *Aurora*, moored in the River Neva, convinced the remaining members of the government that their position was hopeless. As many as were able escaped unnoticed out of the building. Kerensky, having earlier left the city in a vain effort to raise loyal troops, fled to the American embassy. He later slipped out of Petrograd, disguised as a female nurse, and made his way to the United States where he eventually became a professor of history.

The Bolsheviks take power

The Bolsheviks did not seize power; it fell into their hands. The speed and ease with which it had happened surprised even Lenin. In the early hours of 26 October he said to Trotsky 'from being on the run to supreme power makes one dizzy'. He then rolled himself up in a large fur coat, lay on the floor and went to sleep.

On the following evening the All-Russian Congress of Soviets began their first session. They had barely completed the opening formalities when the chairman, who happened to be Lev Kamenev, the Bolshevik who had originally opposed the rising, informed the delegates that they were now the supreme authority in Russia; the Petrograd Soviet had seized power in their name and had formed a new government. Kamenev then read out to the bewildered delegates the list of 14 names of the new government they had supposedly just appointed. The 14 were all Bolsheviks or left SRs. At the head of the list of **Commissars** who made up the new ***Sovnarkom*** was the name of the Chief Minister – Vladimir Ilyich Lenin.

Key dates

Winter Palace seized by Bolsheviks and Kerensky flees from Petrograd: 24–5 October 1917

First session of the Congress of Soviets: 26 October 1917

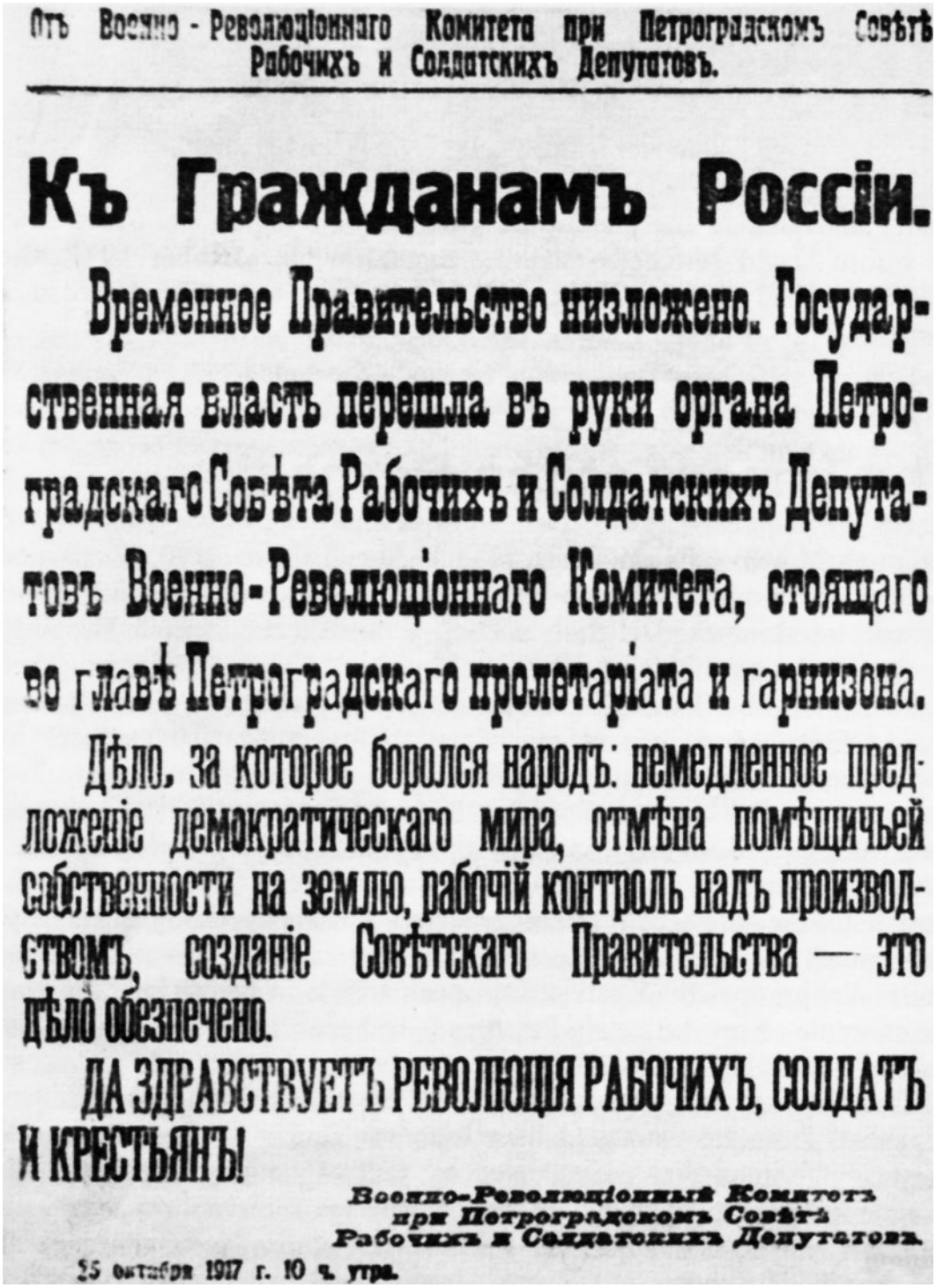
Bolsheviks established *Sovnarkom*: 26 October 1917

Lenin claimed power in the name of Congress of Soviets: 27 October 1917

Key terms

Commissars
Russian for ministers – Lenin chose the word because he said 'it reeks of blood'.

Sovnarkom
Russian for government or cabinet.



От Военно - Революціоннаго Комитета при Петроградскомъ Совѣтѣ Рабочихъ и Солдатскихъ Депутатовъ.

Къ Гражданамъ Россіи.

Временное Правительство низложено. Государственная власть перешла въ руки органа Петроградскаго Совѣта Рабочихъ и Солдатскихъ Депутатовъ Военно-Революціоннаго Комитета, стоящаго во главѣ Петроградскаго пролетаріата и гарнизона.

Дѣло, за которое боролся народъ: немедленное предложеніе демократическаго мира, отмѣна помѣщичьей собственности на землю, рабочій контроль надъ производствомъ, созданіе Совѣтскаго Правительства — это дѣло обезпечено.

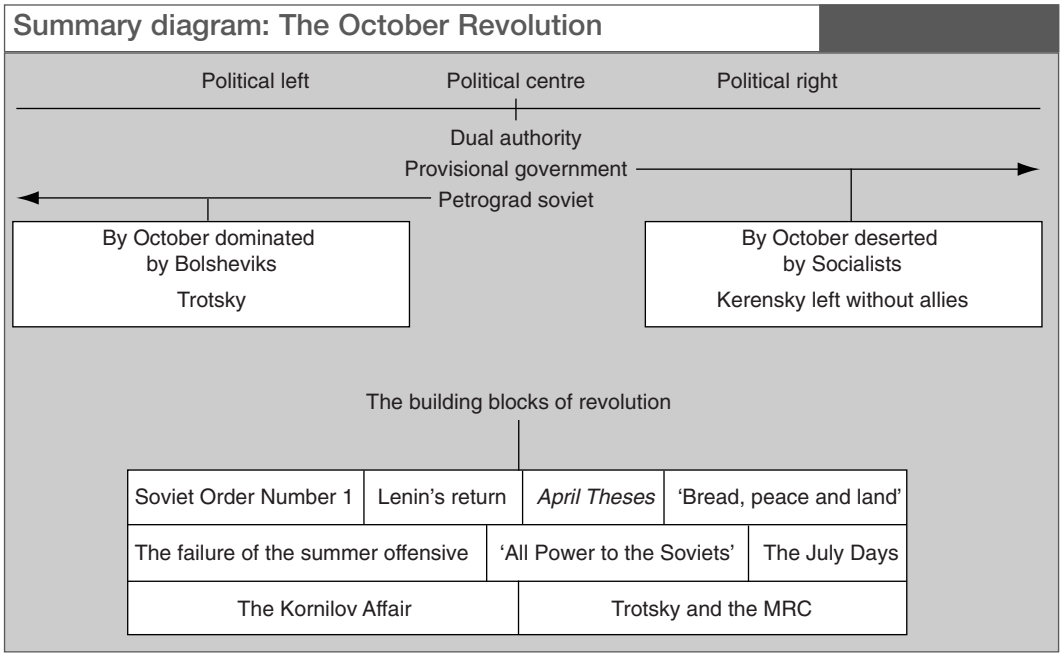
ДА ЗДРАВСТВУЕТЪ РЕВОЛЮЦІЯ РАБОЧИХЪ, СОЛДАТЪ И КРЕСТЬЯНЪ!

Военно-Революціонный Комитетъ при Петроградскомъ Совѣтѣ Рабочихъ и Солдатскихъ Депутатовъ.

25 октября 1917 г. 10 ч. утра.

To the People of Russia reads the headline of this poster, 25 October 1917, declaring that the Provisional Government has fallen. It goes on in the name of the Soviet to promise peace and land to the people.

The right-wing SRs and the Mensheviks walked out, protesting that it was not a taking of power by the Soviets but a Bolshevik *coup*. Trotsky jeered after them that they and their kind had 'consigned themselves to the garbage heap of history'. Lenin then announced to the Bolshevik and SR delegates who had remained that they would now proceed 'to construct the towering edifice of socialist society'.



5 | Reasons for Bolshevik Success

Key question
Why was there so little resistance to the Bolsheviks in October 1917?

Trotsky later said that the key factors in the Bolshevik success of October 1917 were:

- the failure of the Petrograd garrison to resist
- the existence of the MRC.

He claimed that Soviet decision to create the MRC had sounded the death-knell of the Provisional Government. The Bolsheviks' control of the MRC gave them 'three-quarters if not nine-tenths' of their victory in the October Revolution. Since Trotsky was a major player in the drama played out in October 1917, his views demand great respect. But his analysis was largely concerned with the immediate events of October. The success of the coup had as much to do with government weakness as Bolshevik strength, a weakness that was in-built into the Provisional Government from the start.

Provisional Government weakness

The failure of the Provisional Government to rally effective military support in its hour of need followed from its political failure over the previous eight months. It was not that the Provisional

Government was bitterly rejected by the Russian people, it was more a matter of its inability to arouse genuine enthusiasm. Kerensky's government had come nowhere near to solving Russia's problems. Its support had evaporated. Economically incompetent and militarily incapable, the Provisional Government was not considered worth struggling to save. In October 1917, the Bolsheviks were pushing against an already open door.

It should be emphasised that the Provisional Government had never been meant to last. As its very title suggested, it was intended to be an interim government. Along with its partner in the dual authority, the Petrograd Soviet, its role was to provide a caretaker administration until an all-Russian Constituent Assembly was formed after the autumn election. The Assembly was the ultimate dream of all liberals and democrats; it would be the first fully elected, nationwide parliament in Russia. All parties, including the Bolsheviks, were committed to it.

As a consequence, the Provisional Government was always open to the charge that as an unelected, self-appointed body it had no right to exercise the authority that properly belonged to the Constituent Assembly alone. Such limited strength as the Provisional Government had came from its claim to be the representative of the February Revolution. Lenin had made it his task to undermine that claim.

Key question
Why was it the Bolsheviks, and not any of the other parties, who took power in October 1917?

The weakness of the non-Bolshevik parties

An obvious question is why none of the other parties was able to mount a serious challenge to the Bolsheviks for the leadership of the Revolution between February and October. One answer is that they had all accepted February as a genuine revolution. Consequently, it made sense for them to co-operate with the Provisional Government, which claimed to represent the progressive forces in Russia. The result was that the supposedly revolutionary parties, such as the SRs, were prepared to enter into coalition with the Kadets, the dominant party in the government, and await the convening of the Constituent Assembly. This gave the Bolsheviks a powerful propaganda weapon, which Lenin exploited. He charged the socialists with having sold out to the bourgeoisie.

Another explanation is that the other parties were weakened by their support for the war. None of them opposed the continuation of the struggle against Germany with the consistency that Lenin's Bolsheviks did after April 1917. The non-Bolshevik parties regarded it as Russia's duty to defeat the enemy. The SRs, the Mensheviks and, indeed, some individual Bolsheviks believed wholeheartedly in a revolutionary war against bourgeois Germany. On the left of the Menshevik Party there was a vociferous wing of international revolutionaries who saw the war as the ideal opportunity for beginning the worldwide class struggle.

The Menshevik position

As committed Marxists, the Mensheviks had good reason for co-operating with the Provisional Government rather than opposing

it. They saw the February Revolution as marking a critical stage in the class war, when the bourgeoisie had overthrown the old feudal forces represented by the tsar. This stage, as Marx had argued, was the necessary prelude to the revolution of the proletariat.

However, the Mensheviks judged that since Russia did not yet possess a proletariat large enough to be a truly revolutionary force, it was their immediate task to align themselves with the other parties and work for the consolidation of the bourgeois revolution. When this had been achieved the Mensheviks could then turn to the ultimate objective of a proletarian rising. One of the interesting paradoxes of the Russian Revolution is that, in strictly theoretical terms, the Mensheviks were always more consistent in their Marxism than were Lenin and his Bolsheviks.

Russia's lack of a party-political tradition

It is important to remember the lack of a tradition of legitimate party politics in tsarist Russia. With the fall of tsardom, the various parties found themselves for a brief, heady period free to advance their views. But there were no accepted rules of political conduct that they could follow. The arts of negotiation and compromise, which had developed in more advanced political systems elsewhere, were unknown in Russia. In their absence, politics was reduced to a simple question of who could gain power and then assert it over others.

Lenin expressed it in the simple formulation: 'who, whom?'. What he was asking was who held power and over whom was it exercised? Democracy did not enter into it. Power would go to the most flexible and the most ruthless party. The Bolsheviks under Lenin perfectly fitted this requirement. They were prepared to adjust to circumstance if the occasion demanded. Their land policy was evidence of this (see page 96). But they never lost sight of their basic goal – the seizure of power.

Bolshevik ruthlessness

Down to October 1917 the Bolshevik position was far from unassailable; the near-fiasco of the July Days had shown how narrow the gap between success and failure could be. Nor can it be said that the Bolshevik takeover in October was inevitable – that depended as much on the weakness and mistakes of their opponents as upon their own resolution. Yet, what is clear is that none of the contending parties was as well equipped as the Bolsheviks to exploit the crises facing Russia in 1917.

Tseretelli, a Menshevik and a leading member of the Petrograd Soviet before its domination by the Bolsheviks, admitted: 'Everything we did at that time was a vain effort to hold back a destructive elemental flood with a handful of insignificant chips'. Struve, a liberal ***émigré***, observed: 'Only Bolshevism was logical about revolution and true to its essence, and therefore in the revolution it conquered'. Milyukov, the Kadet leader, shared Struve's view of the Bolsheviks: 'They knew where they were going, and they went in the direction which they had chosen once and for all toward a goal which came nearer with every new, unsuccessful, experiment or compromise'.

Key term

Émigré
The word refers to those who fled from Russia after the Revolution, either out of fear or a desire to plan a counter-strike against the Bolsheviks

Lenin's Bolsheviks were a new breed of politician: utterly self-confident, scornful of all other parties and ideas, and totally loyal to their leader. This drive and utter conviction came from the belief that they were an unstoppable force of history. As Trotsky put it: 'The party in the last analysis is always right, because the party is the only historical instrument given to the proletariat to resolve its fundamental tasks'. The ruthlessness of the Bolsheviks did not guarantee their success, but it did mean that no other party could hope to gain or hold power unless it was able to overcome the challenge of these dedicated revolutionaries. In the event, none of the other parties was ever in a position to do this.

Key question
In what ways did the Bolsheviks and the Provisional Government overestimate each other's strength?

The role of mutual misunderstanding

An irony of the pre-October situation was that both the Provisional Government and the Bolsheviks overestimated each other's power, each delaying their moves against the other for fear of overplaying their hand. Historians have often wondered why the Provisional Government did not make a more sustained effort to destroy the Bolsheviks politically. It is true that some arrests were made, but the government's efforts at suppression were half-hearted.

One reason, odd though it seems in retrospect, is that Kerensky's government was more frightened of an attack from the right than from the left. Fear of a tsarist reaction against the revolution pre-occupied the thoughts of many in the government. For much of 1917, Kornilov was regarded as a bigger threat than Lenin.

This was not entirely unrealistic. The Bolsheviks were not militarily strong. Sukhanov, a Menshevik eye-witness of the events of 1917, calculated that so limited was Bolshevik strength at the time of the October Rising that 'a good detachment of 500 men would have been enough to liquidate **Smolny** and everybody in it'. Trotsky agreed, but asked pointedly where the Provisional Government was to get 500 good men to fight for it.

Key term
Smolny
The Bolshevik headquarters in Petrograd, housed in what had been a young ladies' finishing school.

For their part, the Bolsheviks similarly miscalculated the strength and determination of the Provisional Government. Lenin expected to be summarily shot if ever the government's agents found him. This was why he was either incognito or absent altogether from Petrograd for long periods during the critical months between the two revolutions of 1917.

6 | The Key Debate

How far was the Bolshevik success due to Lenin?

It says much for Lenin's forcefulness as leader that despite his frequent absences from Petrograd between February and October he continued to dominate the actions of the Bolshevik Party. Trotsky later made an interesting assessment of the part played by Lenin in the October Revolution:

> 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.

However, most historians are now careful not to overstate Lenin's power to dictate events in 1917. In the standard Bolshevik version of what happened, Lenin was portrayed as having fulfilled his plans for revolution along the lines he had laid down in such writings as his 1902 pamphlet, *What Is To Be Done?* This had visualised the development of a tightly knit, disciplined Bolshevik Party that would seize power in the name of the masses at the opportune moment (see page 23). Yet, the structure and authority of his party in 1917 were markedly different from Lenin's 1902 model. The evidence of the many disputes within the Bolshevik ranks over policy between February and October 1917 and well into 1918 suggests that they were by no means as disciplined or centrally controlled as the party later claimed to have been.

Part of the explanation for this is that the composition of the party had changed in ways that Lenin and the Central Committee had not planned. After the February Revolution there had been a large increase in membership, which the Central Committee had not wanted but which, in the heady but politically confused situation following the fall of tsardom, they seemed unable to prevent. The following figures indicate the remarkable transformation that the Bolshevik Party underwent in 1917 (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Membership of the Bolshevik party in 1917

February	24,000
April	100,000
October	340,000 (60,000 in Petrograd)

Modern commentators view this influx of party members as an aspect of the general **radicalisation** of Russian politics that occurred as the Provisional Government got into increasing difficulties. What had helped to prepare the ground for the successful Bolshevik *coup* in October was the growth in the Petrograd factories of workers' committees that, while not necessarily pro-Bolshevik, were certainly not pro-government. One result of the anti-government agitation of these committees was that, when the open challenge to the Provisional Government came in October, Kerensky's desperate appeal for support from the people of Petrograd went unheeded.

Key term

Radicalisation A movement towards more sweeping or revolutionary ideas.

Summary diagram: Reasons for Bolshevik success

Little resistance to the Bolsheviks in October 1917

Why?

1. *Provisional Government weaknesses*

Never intended to be permanent

↓

Lack of popular support

↓

Internal divisions

↓

Failure to destroy Lenin when it had the chance

↓

Failure to solve land problem

↓

Strain of continuing war

↓

Low morale

↓

Deserted by Petrograd garrison

2. *Bolshevik strengths*

Driving sense of purpose

↓

Absence of challenge from the other parties

↓

Radicalisation of politics in Petrograd

↓

Lenin's leadership

↓

Trotsky's organisation

↓

Control of the MRC

Study Guide: AS Questions

In the style of AQA

(a) Explain why the Bolsheviks were determined to infiltrate the Petrograd Soviet after April 1917. (12 marks)

(b) How successful was the Provisional Government in overcoming the problems that it faced in 1917? (24 marks)

Exam tips

The cross-references are intended to take you straight to the material that will help you to answer the questions.

(a) You should be able to provide a variety of factors to explain the Bolsheviks' determination:

- The need of the Bolsheviks as a small party lacking popular support to find a covering body through which they could work (page 90).
- As elected representatives of the workers and soldiers, the Soviet had considerable prestige, which the Bolsheviks wanted to share and exploit (page 87).
- As part of the dual authority, the Soviet was a counterweight to the Provisional Government.
- Lenin believed that the structure of the Soviet made it easy to manipulate and ultimately dominate (page 99).
- The slogan 'All Power to the Soviets' provided a useful political weapon to use against the Provisional Government (page 91).

Try to prioritise between your ideas and show some inter-relationship between the factors you address. You will need to provide a short conclusion.

(b) To answer this question you will need to consider what problems the Provisional Government faced, the actions it took and the success of these. You might like to include the following in your answer:

- Its lack of political strength: it never won enough support during its eight months' existence (see page 104).
- Its failure to solve the land or food supply problem (page 96).
- The fact that it was continually under attack from both the right and left, e.g. the July Days (page 93) and the Kornilov Affair (page 97).
- Its failure to end the war against Germany coupled with its lack of military success.
- Its dependence financially on loans from the Western allies.
- It was only ever intended to be an interim government, filling in before a Constituent Assembly was elected.
- Its lack of unity – cabinet and ministerial change were frequent.
- It also lacked the resolve to crush its opponents even when it appeared to have defeated them, e.g. the survival of the Bolsheviks after the July Days.

To provide a balanced answer, you should find some points to suggest that the Provisional Government was not a total failure, although its record was not a strong one. It dealt with the immediate aftermath of the February Revolution and it survived the Kornilov *coup*. Furthermore, it had promised a Constituent Assembly that might have been able to take Russia forward into more democratic paths. Would it have collapsed in October/November without the actions of the Bolsheviks?

In the style of Edexcel

How far do you agree that the main reason for the fall of the Provisional Government was the skill and determination of Lenin in 1917? (30 marks)

Exam tips

The cross-references are intended to take you straight to the material that will help you to answer the question.

The key words to note in planning your answer to this question are 'skill and determination of Lenin' and 'fall of the Provisional Government'. You are being asked to explain why the Provisional Government fell. The question also asks you for a judgement. You need to weigh the given factor 'Lenin's leadership' against other factors which contributed to the weakness of the Provisional Government and to the strengths of the Bolsheviks. Your plan could be organised in four sections:

- The weakness of the Provisional Government: underlying weaknesses and the problem of dual authority (pages 86 and 105); weaknesses resulting from the strain of war (pages 91–2). In dealing with these you should remember that it is important not to give too much weight to these factors by themselves. In spite of the Provisional Government's underlying weaknesses it was able to resist the challenge of the July Days (pages 93–4). The failure of the rising revealed the disunity of the opposition and the weakness of the Bolsheviks (page 95).
- Misjudgements and mistakes: the June offensive (page 93); the land question (page 96); and the Kornilov Affair (page 57).
- Lenin's leadership: his call for a second revolution in the *April Theses* (page 90); his success in creating a party with drive and conviction (page 107); and his political skills (page 163). The force of his call for 'Peace, Bread and Land' (page 91); and his skill in attracting peasant support (page 96); his political judgement in pursuing urgent revolution in spite of the reservations of leading Bolsheviks (pages 99–100).
- Other factors: the radicalisation of Russian politics in 1917 (page 108); the role of Trotsky in organising the October Rising was a crucial factor in its success (page 101).

In coming to your overall conclusion, you could decide to give most weight to Lenin's leadership, or to argue that without the role of Trotsky, or without the mistakes of the Provisional Government, it is unlikely that Lenin's determined pursuit of revolution in 1917 would have succeeded. It will help you to organise your material if you make your decision first and then plan the order in which you deal with these factors.

In the style of OCR B

Answer **both** parts of your chosen question.

(a) Why did Provisional Government keep Russia in the war? [Explaining motives, intentions and actions.] (25 marks)

(b) How is Bolshevik success in 1917 best explained? [Explaining attitudes, events and circumstances.] (25 marks)

Exam tips

Read again the General Introduction at the start of the Study Guide to Chapter 2, page 54.

(a) Start in the intentional mode because this question is about explaining motives, and then shift to the empathetic mode to show the influence of ideas and attitudes. Were Lvov and then Kerensky committed to war against the Central Powers? Did the Provisional Government have a choice? These will be core issues for you to decide.

You could start with the burden of the dead for your first circle of explanation. The fighting had already cost millions of lives and much suffering. How could the nation dishonour their service to Mother Russia by abandoning the fight? The living were the prisoners of the dead. Your next circles could assess the influence of Russia's financial state. Russia was virtually bankrupt and survived only on loans, war credits and gifts of supplies from Britain, France and the USA. Where could the new government get the enormous sums of money it needed to stabilise and reform Russia? There was so much they wanted to do, but it would cost massive sums. They could not get nearly enough in Russia, so the only source was abroad, but foreign bankers needed to protect the large loans they had already made to the tsarist regime. If the Allies lost the war, they would lose their investments. The war had to be won and, to help ensure that, Russia must stay in the fight. Lots of money was offered, but only if Russia stayed in the war, so here too the new government had no free choice.

(b) Your answer can start with the weaknesses of the Provisional Government and then move on to the strengths of the Bolsheviks – or you can work the other way round. Either way, your circles must build up an explanation that is causal, intentional and empathetic – and links all three together to show how best we can understand this event.

The Provisional Government collapsed with virtually no fighting. The Petrograd garrison refused to defend Kerensky because of the Provisional Government's failure to solve any of Russia's many problems – or bring victory on the battlefield. One final element in your first circle is to explain why Kerensky didn't strike the Bolsheviks down – so make clear his overestimation of their strength and his belief that the greater threat came from the right, not the left. Your next circle of explanation could look at the weaknesses of all political parties other than the Bolsheviks.

Why was it left to Lenin to oppose Kerensky? The core answer here is that the other parties supported the February Revolution and, like Kerensky and the Kadets, looked to the Constituent Assembly that would be elected in November 1917 as the democratic parliament of the new Russia. This left the stage empty for Lenin and Trotsky and your final circles need to explain why they, unlike the Mensheviks, rejected co-operation with the bourgeois Provisional Government. Bolshevik ruthlessness and political flexibility have long been recognised as vital factors. So too has the organising talent of Trotsky. Without him, Lenin would have remained a small-bit opposition politician.

5 The Bolshevik Consolidation of Power 1917–24

POINTS TO CONSIDER

The successful Bolshevik rising of October 1917 marked the beginning rather than the end of the Russian Revolution. The big test was whether the Bolsheviks could retain their power and build upon it. Their efforts to do so are studied in this chapter under the following headings:

- The Bolsheviks in power
- The dissolution of the constituent assembly
- The treaty of Brest-Litovsk 1918
- The Russian Civil War 1918–20
- The foreign interventions 1918–20
- Lenin's methods 1917–21
- War communism 1918–21
- The Kronstadt rising 1921
- The New Economic Policy (NEP)

Key dates

1917	November	Bolsheviks issued the Decrees on Land and Workers' Control
		Elections for Constituent Assembly
	December	Armistice signed at Brest-Litovsk
		Cheka created
1918–20		Russian Civil War and foreign interventions
1918–21		War communism
1918	January	Bolsheviks forcibly dissolved the Constituent Assembly
		Red Army established
	March	Treaty of Brest-Litovsk
	June	Decree on Nationalisation
	July	Forced grain requisitions begun
		Murder of tsar and his family
	September	Red Terror officially introduced
1919	March	Comintern established
		Bolshevik Party renamed the Communist Party
1920	April	Invading Red Army driven from Poland
1921	March	The Kronstadt Rising
		The introduction of NEP

1 | The Bolsheviks in Power

Key question
How did the Bolsheviks tackle the problems confronting them after they had taken power in 1917?

In power, the Bolsheviks under Lenin faced huge difficulties in trying to consolidate their hold over what had been the tsarist empire. These can be identified as four basic questions:

- Could the Bolsheviks survive at all?
- If so, could they extend their control over the whole of Russia?
- Could they negotiate a swift end to the war?
- Could they bring economic stability to Russia?

The traditional Soviet view was that after the Bolsheviks had taken power under Lenin they transformed old Russia into a socialist society by following a set of measured, planned reforms that had been previously prepared. Few historians now accept that was what happened. Lenin's policy is now seen as having been a **pragmatic** adjustment to the harsh realities of the situation.

From the beginning, the Bolshevik regime was engaged in a desperate struggle for survival. In their government of Russia, the Bolsheviks were working from hand to mouth. They had few plans to help them. This was because before 1917 they had spent their time in preparing for revolution. They had given little thought to the details of how affairs would be organised once this had been achieved. It had always been a Marxist belief that after the triumph of the proletariat the state would 'wither away'. Trotsky had expressed this simple faith at the time of his appointment in October 1917 as **Commissar for Foreign Affairs** when he said 'all we need to do is issue a few decrees, then shut up shop and go home'. But circumstances were not to allow such a relaxed approach to government.

Key terms

Pragmatic
Describes an approach in which policies are changed and modified according to circumstance rather than in keeping with a fixed theory.

Commissar for Foreign Affairs
Equivalent to the Secretary of State in the USA or the Foreign Secretary in Britain.

The distribution of power

Lenin claimed that the October Revolution had been a taking of power by the Soviets. In fact, it had been a seizure of power by the Bolshevik Party. Nevertheless, Lenin persisted with the notion that *Sovnarkom* had been appointed to govern by the Congress of Soviets. According to this view, the distribution of power in revolutionary Russia took the form of a pyramid, with *Sovnarkom* at the top, drawing its authority from the Russian people who expressed their will through the Soviets at the base (see Figure 5.1).

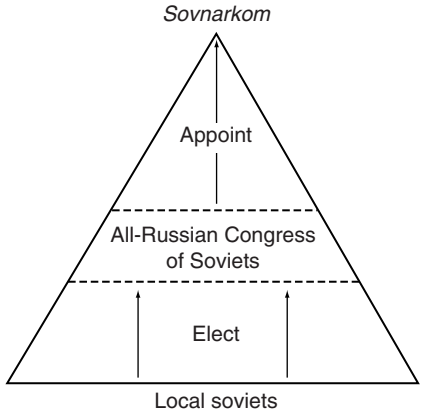


Figure 5.1: The distribution of power in revolutionary Russia

Key terms

De jure
By legitimate legal right.

'State capitalism'
Lenin's term for the system that operated during the first year of Bolshevik rule, 1917–18, whereby the Bolsheviks maintained the main pre-revolutionary economic structures.

The reality was altogether different. Traditional forms of government had broken down in 1917 with the fall of tsardom and the overthrow of the Provisional Government. This meant the Bolsheviks ruled *de facto* not ***de jure***. To put it another way, they were in a position to make up their own rules. And since not all the Soviets were dominated by the Bolsheviks, who in any case were a minority party, Lenin had no intention of letting true democracy get in the way. The notion that it was the Soviets who had taken power and now ruled was simply a convenient cover. From the beginning, whatever the claims may have been about Soviets' being in authority, it was in fact the Bolsheviks who held power. The key body here was the Central Committee of the Bolshevik party. It was this organisation under Lenin's direction that provided the members of the government. In a sense, *Sovnarkom* was a wing of the Bolshevik party.

In theory, the Central Committee derived its authority from the All-Russian Congress of the Bolshevik Party whose locally elected representatives voted on policy. In practice, the Congress and the local parties did as they were told. This was in keeping with Lenin's insistence that the Bolshevik Party operate according to the principle of democratic centralism (see page 24), a formula that guaranteed that power was exercised from the top down, rather than the bottom up.

The Bolsheviks' early measures

In Bolshevik theory, the October Revolution had marked the victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie, of socialism over capitalism. But theory was of little immediate assistance in the circumstances of late 1917. A hard slog lay ahead if the Bolsheviks were truly to transform the Russian economy.

Before the October Revolution, Lenin had written powerfully against landlords and grasping capitalists, but he had produced little by way of a coherent plan for their replacement. It is understandable, therefore, that his policy after taking power in 1917 was a pragmatic one. He argued that the change from a bourgeois to a proletarian economy could not be achieved overnight. The Bolshevik government would continue to use the existing structures until the transition had been completed and a fully fledged socialist system could be adopted. This transitional stage was referred to as **'state capitalism'**. Lenin explained it to his colleagues in the following terms:

> The majority of specialists are bourgeois. For the present we shall have to adopt the old bourgeois method and agree to pay higher salaries for the 'services' of the biggest bourgeois specialists. All who are familiar with the situation see the necessity of such a measure. Clearly it is a compromise measure.

Immediate problems

Lenin was aware that there were many Bolsheviks who wanted the immediate introduction of a sweeping revolutionary policy, but he pointed out that the new regime simply did not possess the power to impose this. Its authority did not run much beyond Petrograd and Moscow. Until the Bolsheviks could exercise a much wider

political and military control, their policies would have to fit the prevailing circumstances. The war against Germany and Austria had brought Russia to the point of economic collapse.

- The shortage of raw materials and investment capital had reduced industrial production to two-thirds of its 1914 level.
- Inflation had rocketed.
- The transport system had been crippled.
- Hunger gripped large areas of Russia – grain supplies were over 13 million tons short of the nation's needs.
- Within a few months of the October Revolution, the food crisis had been further deepened by the ceding to Germany of the Ukraine, Russia's richest grain-producing region (see page 123).

All Lenin's economic policies from 1917 on can be seen as attempts to deal with these problems, the most pressing being whether Russia could produce enough to feed itself. Lenin was a realist on the peasant question. Although he considered that the future lay with the industrial workers, he was very conscious that the peasantry, who made up the mass of the population, were the food producers. The primary consideration, therefore, was how best the peasants could be persuaded or forced to provide adequate food supplies for the nation.

Immediately after coming to power, the new government introduced two measures that are usually regarded as having initiated Bolshevik economic policy. These were the 'Decree on Land' and the 'Decree on Workers' Control', both issued in November 1917. However, these were not so much new departures as formal recognitions of what had already taken place.

Key date
Bolsheviks issued the Decrees on Land and Workers' Control: November 1917

The 'Decree on Land'

The key article of this measure stated:

> Private ownership of land shall be abolished forever; land shall not be sold, purchased, leased, mortgaged, or otherwise alienated. All land, whether state, crown, monastery, church, factory, private, public, peasant, etc., shall be confiscated without compensation and become the property of the whole people, and pass into the use of all those who cultivate it.

The decree gave Bolshevik approval to what had happened in the countryside since the February Revolution: in many areas the peasants had overthrown their landlords and occupied their property. Lenin had earlier accepted this when he had adopted the slogan 'Land to the Peasants' (see page 96).

The 'Decree on Workers' Control'

This measure was also largely concerned with authorising what had already occurred. During 1917 a large number of factories had been taken over by the workers. However, the workers' committees that were then formed seldom ran the factories efficiently. The result was a serious fall in industrial output. The decree accepted the workers' takeover, but at the same time it instructed the workers' committees to maintain 'the strictest order and discipline' in the workplace.

Passing decrees was one thing, enforcing them another. A particular problem for the government was that not all the workers' committees were dominated by Bolsheviks. Until the party gained

greater control at shop floor level it would be difficult for the central government to impose itself on the factories. Nevertheless, the government pressed on with its plans for establishing the framework of state direction of the economy, even if effective central control was some way off. In December, ***Vesenkha*** was set up 'to take charge of all existing institutions for the regulation of economic life'.

Initially, Vesenkha was unable to exercise the full authority granted to it. However, it did preside over a number of important developments.

- The banks and the railways were nationalised.
- Foreign debts were cancelled (see page 136).
- The transport system was made less chaotic.

These were important practical achievements, which suggested how effective centralised control might become should the Bolshevik regime be able to gain real power.

Key terms

Vesenkha
The Supreme Council of the National Economy.

Cheka
The letters of the word stood for 'the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Fighting Counter-Revolution, Sabotage and Speculation'.

Counter-revolution
A term used by the Bolsheviks to cover any action of which they disapproved by branding it as reactionary and opposed to progress.

Creation of the *Cheka*, 1917

While some Bolsheviks may have found the initial pace of revolutionary change too slow for their liking, there was no doubting that Lenin was determined to impose absolute Bolshevik rule by the suppressing of all political opposition. A development that gave the Bolsheviks muscle in dealing with their opponents was the creation in the weeks following the October *coup* of the ***Cheka***.

In essentials, the *Cheka* was a better organised and more efficient form of the *Okhrana*, the tsarist secret police, at whose hands nearly every Bolshevik activist had suffered. Its express purpose was to destroy '**counter-revolution** and sabotage', terms that were so elastic they could be stretched to cover anything of which the Bolsheviks disapproved (see page 140).

Summary diagram: The Bolsheviks in power

Problems confronting them

- Bolsheviks controlled only Petrograd and Moscow
- Low industrial production
- High inflation
- Acute food shortages
- Occupation by Germany

Measures to tackle problems

1. ***Economic***
   Adoption of state capitalism – a compromise measure to achieve the transition to a socialist economy
   Decree on Land – abolished private property – recognised peasant takeovers
   Decree on Workers' Control – an attempt to assert government authority over the factories which had been seized by workers
   Vesenkha – body to oversee economic development
2. ***Political***
   Cheka – special state police to crush counter-revolution and impose Bolshevik rule

2 | The Dissolution of the Constituent Assembly

Key question
What does this event reveal about Lenin's attitude towards the exercise of power?

As a revolutionary, Lenin had never worried much about how many people supported the Bolsheviks. Mere numbers did not concern him. He had no faith in democratic elections, which he dismissed as tricks by which the bourgeoisie kept itself in power. His primary objective was not to win mass support, but to create a party capable of seizing power when the opportune moment came. This was why he had refused to join a broad-front opposition movement before 1917 and why he had consistently opposed any form of co-operation with the Provisional Government.

After the successful October *coup* in 1917, Lenin was even more determined not to allow elections to undermine the Bolsheviks' newly won power. However, there was an immediate problem. The October Revolution had come too late to prevent the elections to the All-Russian Constituent Assembly from going ahead in November as planned. When the results came through by the end of the year they did not make pleasant reading for the Bolsheviks:

- They had been outvoted by nearly two to one by the Social Revolutionaries (SRs).
- They had won only 24 per cent of the total vote.
- They had gained barely a quarter of the seats in the Assembly.

Table 5.1: Results of the election for the Constituent Assembly, November 1917

	Votes	*Seats*
SRs	17,490,000	370
Bolsheviks	9,844,000	175
National minority groups	8,257,000	99
Left SRs (pro-Bolshevik)	2,861,000	40
Kadets	1,986,000	17
Mensheviks	1,248,000	16
Total	41,686,000	717

Lenin's motives for destroying the Assembly

Lenin had originally supported the idea of a Constituent Assembly, not out of idealism but for purely expedient reasons; it offered a way of further weakening the authority of the Provisional Government. Now, however, with his party in power, he had no need of an Assembly. Furthermore, since it was overwhelmingly non-Bolshevik it would almost certainly make life difficult for his government. One possibility was that he could have tried to work with the new Assembly. But that was not how Lenin operated. He was not a democrat; he did not deal in compromise. He was a revolutionary who believed that the only way to govern was not by compromise but by totally crushing all opposition.

Hence, his response to the Constituent Assembly, when it gathered in January 1918, was simple and ruthless. After only one day's session, it was dissolved at gunpoint by the Red Guards. A few members tried to protest, but, with rifles trained on their heads, their resistance soon evaporated. It was a bitter end to the dreams

Key dates
Elections for Constituent Assembly: November 1917

Bolsheviks forcibly dissolved the Constituent Assembly: January 1918

of liberals and reformers. There would not be another democratic body in Russia until after the collapse of Soviet communism over 70 years later.

Lenin's act of violence in January 1918 has to be viewed in context. The Bolsheviks' hold on power was precarious. Indeed, the prospects of Bolshevik survival at all seemed slim. There was strong and widespread opposition to them inside the country. Moreover, Russia was still at war with Germany, with the Allies, France and Britain, all set to interfere should the new Russian government make a separate peace. In such an atmosphere, the Bolsheviks were not prepared to consider power-sharing.

Lenin justified the Bolshevik action by arguing that the original reason for electing an Assembly, the establishing of an all-Russian representative body, had already been achieved by the creation of a Soviet government in October 1917. The people's will had expressed itself in the October Revolution. The Constituent Assembly was, therefore, superfluous. More than that, it was corrupt. The elections, he asserted, had been rigged by the SRs and the Kadets; consequently, the results did not truly reflect the wishes of the Russian people. In such circumstances, Lenin declared:

> To hand over power to the Constituent Assembly would again be to compromise with the malignant bourgeoisie. Nothing in the world will induce us to surrender the Soviet power. The Soviet Revolutionary Republic will triumph no matter what the cost.

Commenting on Lenin's attitude at this stage, Trotsky revealingly noted that Lenin was always ready to back his theories with force by using 'sharpshooters'. He recorded a remark Lenin had made to him in private: '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'.

Reactions to the crushing of the Assembly

Lenin's ruthlessness caused unease among some of his own supporters. Maxim Gorky, one of the Bolshevik Party's leading intellectuals, wrote at the time:

> The best Russians have lived for almost 100 years with the idea of a Constituent Assembly as a political organ which could provide Russian democracy as a whole with the possibility of freely exercising its will. On the altar of this sacred idea rivers of blood have been spilled – and now the 'people's commissars' have ordered the shooting of this democracy.

Many foreign communists were appalled by Lenin's behaviour. Rosa Luxemburg, a German socialist, condemned 'the elimination of democracy' in Russia. She complained bitterly that the 'remedy' provided by Lenin and Trotsky was 'worse than the disease it is supposed to cure'.

Such criticisms did not move Lenin. As he saw it, the desperately vulnerable position the Bolsheviks were in – attempting to impose

themselves on Russia while surrounded by enemies on all sides – demanded the sternest of measures. Nor was he short of theory to justify his actions. The concept of democratic centralism, which required the absolute obedience of party members to the leaders, perfectly fitted the situation in which the Bolsheviks found themselves.

3 | The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk 1918

Key question
Why were the Bolsheviks willing to accept the humiliation of Russia in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk?

Lenin and Trotsky were united in their suppression of the Constituent Assembly. However, there was a marked difference of attitude between them over the issue of the war with Germany. Both wanted it ended but they disagreed on how this could best be achieved. Lenin wanted an immediate peace; Trotsky wanted a delay.

Lenin had shifted his position. At the time of his return to Russia in April 1917 he had been calling for an anti-imperialist revolutionary war (see page 89). But now his thinking ran along the following lines. Russia's military exhaustion made it impossible for it to fight on successfully. If Germany eventually won the war on both fronts it would retain the Russian territory it now possessed. But if Germany lost the war against the Western Allies, Russia would regain its occupied lands. In the first eventuality, Russia would not be worse off; in the second it would actually gain. It was, therefore, pointless for Bolshevik Russia to continue to fight.

An interesting aspect of Lenin's readiness to make peace with Germany was that it was not wholly ideological. Between 1914 and 1917 the German Foreign Office had given substantial amounts of money to Lenin and the Bolsheviks in the hope that if they succeeded in their revolution they would pull Russia out of the war (see page 90). Germany continued to finance Lenin even after the October Revolution and the armistice of December 1917. A settlement with Germany was therefore very much in Lenin's interests since it was the best guarantee against the drying up of this lucrative source of Bolshevik revenue.

Trotsky took a middle position between Lenin, who wanted a peace straightaway, and those Bolsheviks and Left Revolutionaries who pressed for the continuation of the war as a revolutionary crusade against imperialist Germany. Trotsky shared Lenin's view that Bolshevik Russia had no realistic chance of successfully continuing the military struggle against Germany. However, in the hope that within a short time the German armies would collapse on the Western Front and revolution would follow in Germany, Trotsky was determined to make the peace talks a protracted affair. He wanted to buy time for Bolshevik agitators to exploit the mutinies in the Austro-German armies.

Bolsheviks tactics at Brest-Litovsk

Key date
Armistice signed at Brest-Litovsk: December 1917

This approach, for which Trotsky coined the slogan 'neither peace, nor war', was intended to confuse and infuriate the German delegation at Brest-Litovsk – the Polish town where the Germans

and Russians gathered to discuss peace terms. Trotsky showed his contempt for what he called 'bourgeois propriety' by consistently flouting the traditional etiquette of European diplomacy. He would yawn loudly while German representatives were speaking and start private conversations with his Bolshevik colleagues rather than listen to what was being said. When he did join in the formal negotiations, he would ignore the point under discussion and launch into revolutionary speeches praising the October *coup* in Russia and calling on Germany to overthrow its corrupt bourgeois government.

Germany's chief negotiator, Field-Marshal Hindenburg, complained:

> Trotsky degraded the conference-table to the level of a tub-thumper's street corner. Lenin and Trotsky behaved more like victors than vanquished, while trying to sow the seeds of political dissolution in the ranks of our army.

Key terms

International revolutionaries Those Marxists who were willing to sacrifice mere national interests in the cause of the worldwide rising of the workers.

Diktat A settlement imposed on a weaker nation by a stronger.

Reparations Payment of war costs by the loser to the victor.

What Hindenburg had failed to grasp was that Trotsky and Lenin did indeed see themselves as victors – potential if not actual. They were not perturbed by the thought of national defeat. Their conviction was that time and history were on their side. They believed that a great international political victory was imminent. It is important to remember that Lenin and Trotsky were **international revolutionaries**. They had only a limited loyalty towards Russia as a nation. Their first concern was to spread the proletarian revolution.

This readiness to subordinate Russian national interests explains why, to the dismay of most Russians and many Bolsheviks, the Soviet delegation at Brest-Litovsk was eventually willing to sign a devastating peace treaty as soon as it became clear that the exasperated Germans were seriously considering marching to Petrograd to overthrow Lenin's government.

Trotsky's outlook as an international revolutionary did not prevent him from scoring a sharp nationalist propaganda point. Before signing the treaty on 3 March 1918, Sokolnikov, the Soviet representative, declared, under instructions from Trotsky, that it was not a freely negotiated settlement but a German ***Diktat*** imposed on a helpless Russia. Backing was given to this claim by the terms of the treaty, which could hardly have been more humiliating for Russia.

Key date

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk: March 1918

- A huge slice of territory, amounting to a third of European Russia, stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea and including the Ukraine, Russia's major grain-source, was ceded to Germany or her allies.
- The land lost by Russia – about a million square kilometres – contained a population of 45 million.
- Russia was required to pay three billion roubles in war **reparations**.

Lenin's reasons for signing the Treaty

Aware that the signing of the Treaty would be resented by many Bolsheviks, who were still pressing for a revolutionary struggle

against Germany, Lenin stressed that his policy was the only realistic one:

> Our impulse tells us to rebel, to refuse to sign this robber peace. Our reason will in our calmer moments tell us the plain naked truth – that Russia can offer no physical resistance because she is materially exhausted by three-years' war.

He acknowledged that there were Russians willing to fight on in a great cause. But they were 'romanticists' who did not understand the situation. Wars were not won by idealism alone; resources and technical skills were needed. The plain truth was that Bolshevik Russia did not yet have these in sufficient quantity to match Germany. Therefore, 'the Russian Revolution must sign the peace to obtain a breathing space to recuperate for the struggle'.

Lenin added that he expected that, before long, Russia would be in a position to reclaim its lost territories, since in the aftermath of the war a violent conflict would soon develop among the capitalist powers. The main struggle would be between 'English and German **finance-capital**'. His rallying cry was, therefore, 'Let the Revolution utilise this struggle for its own ends'.

Lenin's argument was a powerful one, yet he still experienced great difficulty in convincing his colleagues. The issue was debated bitterly in the Central Committee. In the end, Lenin gained his way by a majority of only one in a crucial Committee division.

A profound issue lay at the base of Bolshevik disagreements. To understand this, it has to be re-emphasised that Lenin and Trotsky were primarily international revolutionaries. They expected workers' risings, based on the Russian model, to sweep across Europe. Purely national conflicts would soon be superseded by the international class struggle of the workers. Lenin and Trotsky regarded the crippling terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk as of small account when set against the great sweep of world revolution.

The 'Left Communists'

Not all Bolsheviks shared this vision. A number, known as **'Left Communists'**, condemned the signing of the Treaty at Brest-Litovsk. In the end, after days of wrangling, it was only Lenin's insistence on the absolute need for party loyalty in a time of crisis that finally persuaded them reluctantly to accept the treaty. Even then, serious opposition to Lenin's leadership might well have persisted had not the turn of military events in western Europe saved the day.

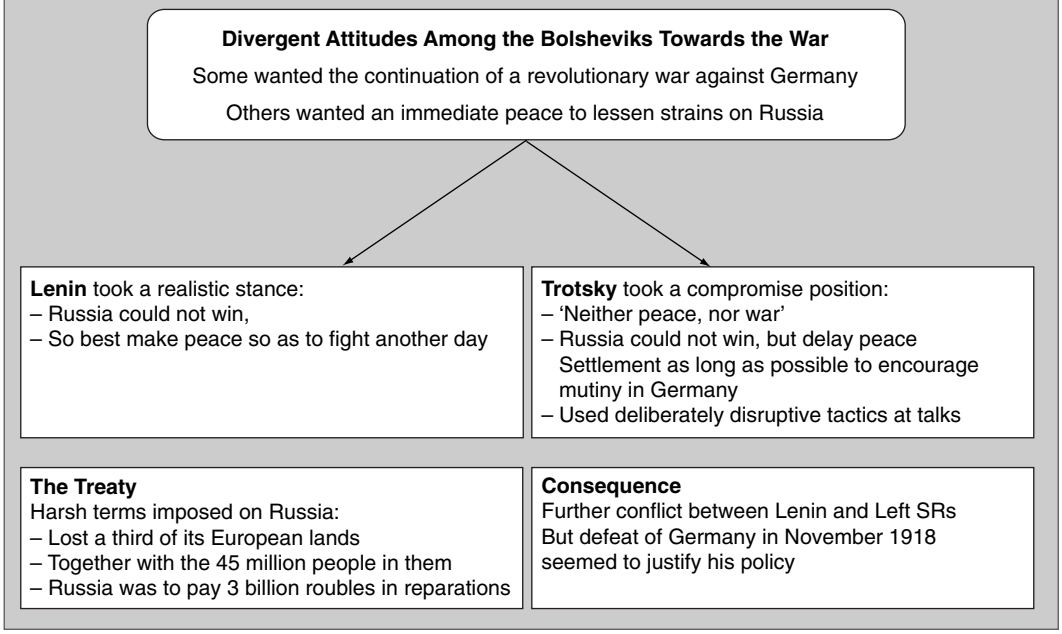
What eventually destroyed the argument of the Left Communists and the Left SRs was the collapse of Germany's Western Front in August 1918, followed by the almost total withdrawal of German forces from Russia. Lenin's gamble that circumstances would soon make the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk meaningless had paid off. It strengthened his hold over the party and provided the opportunity to expel the Left SRs from the government and to outlaw them politically.

Key terms

Finance-capital Lenin's term for the resource used by stronger countries to exploit weaker ones. By investing heavily in another country, a stronger power made that country dependent on it. It was a form of imperialism. In Lenin's view, the Great War had been caused by the competition between the imperialist powers, like France, Germany and Britain, for the dwindling markets in which to invest their surplus capital.

'Left Communists' Those Bolsheviks who were convinced that their first task was to consolidate the October Revolution by driving the German imperialist armies from Russia.

Summary diagram: The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk 1918



Key question
How far was Lenin personally responsible for the Civil War?

4 | The Russian Civil War 1918–20

The Bolsheviks' crushing of the Constituent Assembly in January 1918, followed by their outlawing of all other parties, showed that they were not prepared to share power. This bid for absolute authority made civil war highly likely, given that the Bolsheviks had only a limited grip on Russia in the early years after the October Revolution. They were bound to face military opposition from their wide range of opponents who were not prepared to accept being subjected to the absolute rule of a minority party.

Modern research strongly suggests that Lenin truly wanted a destructive civil war. Although it involved obvious dangers to the Bolsheviks, Lenin was convinced that his forces could win and that in winning that would wipe out all their opponents, military and political. Better to have a short, brutal struggle than face many years of being harassed and challenged by the anti-Bolsheviks who were a large majority in Russia, as the Constituent Assembly election results had shown all too clearly (see page 120).

Lenin knew that had the Bolsheviks chosen to co-operate in a coalition of all the revolutionary parties in 1918, it would have had two consequences:

- It would have made a successful counter-revolution easier to mount since the socialist parties would have had a popular **mandate** to govern.
- The Bolsheviks would have been unable to dominate government since they were very much a minority compared with the Social Revolutionaries.

Key term
Mandate
The authority to govern granted by a majority of the people through elections.

It was the second consequence that Lenin refused to contemplate. As Dominic Lieven, an outstanding modern scholar, observes: 'Some Bolsheviks would have accepted a socialist coalition but Lenin was not one of them. The Bolshevik leader rejected this course and pursued policies, which, as he well knew, made civil war inevitable'.

Reds, Whites and Greens

Key question
Who were the opposing sides in the war?

The conflict that began in the summer of 1918 was not just a matter of the Bolsheviks (**the Reds**) facing their political enemies (**the Whites**) in military struggle. From the start the Civil War was a more complex affair. It involved yet another colour – **the Greens**.

The Bolsheviks presented the struggle as a class war, but it was never simply this. The sheer size of Russia often meant that local or regional considerations predominated over larger issues. Significantly, a number of Russia's national minorities, such as the Ukrainians and the Georgians, fought in the war primarily to establish their independence from Russia. These national forces became known as the Greens. The best known of the Green leaders was Makhno, a one-time Bolshevik, who organised a guerrilla resistance to the Reds in the Ukraine.

It was ironic that, although most of the leading Bolsheviks were non-Russian, their rule was seen by many as yet another attempt to re-assert Russian authority over the rest of the country – the very situation that had prevailed under the tsars. As in all civil wars, the disruption provided a cover for settling old scores and pursuing personal vendettas, and it was not uncommon for villages or families to be divided against each other.

Key terms

The Reds
The Bolsheviks and their supporters.

The Whites
The Bolsheviks' opponents, including monarchists looking for a tsarist restoration, and those parties who had been outlawed or suppressed by the new regime.

The Greens
Largely made up of groups from the national minorities, they were nationalists, struggling for independence from central Russian control.

A war about food

On occasion, the fighting was simply a desperate struggle for food. Famine provided the backdrop to the Civil War. The breakdown in food supplies that had occurred during the war against Germany persisted. Until this was remedied whole areas of Russia remained hungry.

The failure of the new regime to end hunger was an important factor in creating the initial military opposition to the Bolsheviks in 1918. In addition to the problems of a fractured transport system, Lenin's government was faced with the loss to Germany of Russia's main wheat-supply area, the Ukraine. In March 1918, the month in which the Brest-Litovsk Treaty was signed, the bread ration in Petrograd reached its lowest ever allocation of 50 grams per day. Hunger forced many workers out of the major industrial cities. By June 1918 the workforce in Petrograd had shrunk by 60 per cent and the overall population had declined from three to two millions. A visitor to the city at this time spoke of 'entering a metropolis of cold, of hunger, of hatred, of endurance'. The Bolshevik boast that October 1917 had established worker-control of Russian industry meant little now that the workers were deserting the factories in droves.

Challenge from the SRs

These dire circumstances encouraged open challenges to the Bolsheviks from both left and right. The SRs, who had been driven from the government for their refusal to accept the Brest-Litovsk settlement, organised an anti-Bolshevik *coup* in **Moscow**. The Civil War could be said, therefore, to have begun not as a counter-revolution but as an effort by one set of revolutionaries to take power from another. In that sense it was an attempted revenge by a majority party, the SRs, against a minority party, the Bolsheviks, for having usurped the authority that they claimed was properly theirs.

Key term

Moscow
In 1918, for security reasons, Moscow replaced Petrograd as the capital of Soviet Russia.

The SRs' military rising in Moscow failed, but their terrorism came closer to success. Lenin narrowly survived two attempts on his life, in July and August. The second attempt, by Dora Kaplan an SR fanatic, left him with a bullet lodged in his neck, an injury that contributed to his death four years later. In their desperation at being denied any say in government, the SRs joined the Whites in their struggle against Lenin's Reds.

The Czech Legion

Armed resistance to the Bolsheviks had occurred sporadically in various parts of Russia since October 1917. What gave focus to this struggle was the behaviour in the summer of 1918 of one of the foreign armies still in Russia. 40,000 Czechoslovak troops who had volunteered to fight on the Russian side in the First World War as a means of gaining independence from Austria-Hungary, found themselves isolated after the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. They formed themselves into the Czech Legion and decided to make the long journey eastwards to Vladivostok.

Well armed and supplied, the troops of the Czech Legion aboard an armoured train in 1918. How does this picture help to explain why the presence of the Czech Legion in Russia was such a problem for the Bolsheviks?

Their aim was eventually to rejoin the allies on the Western Front in the hope of winning international support for the formation of an independent Czechoslovak state. The Bolsheviks resented the presence of this well-equipped foreign army making its way arrogantly across Russia. Local soviets began to challenge the Czech Legion and fierce fighting accompanied its progress along the trans-Siberian railway.

Armed resistance spreads

All this encouraged the Whites, and all the revolutionary and liberal groups who had been outlawed by the Bolsheviks, to come out openly against Lenin's regime.

- The SRs organised a number of uprisings in central Russia and established an anti-Bolshevik Volga 'Republic' at Samara.
- A White 'Volunteer Army', led by General Denikin, had already been formed in the Caucasus region of southern Russia from tsarist loyalists and outlawed Kadets.
- In Siberia, the presence of the Czech Legion encouraged the formation of a White army under Admiral Kolchak, the self-proclaimed 'Supreme Ruler of Russia'.
- In Estonia, another ex-tsarist general, Yudenich, began to form a White army of resistance.
- White units appeared in many regions elsewhere. The speed with which they arose indicated just how limited Bolshevik control was outside the cities of western Russia.

Bolshevik victory

Key question
Was the Bolshevik victory a result of Red strength or White weakness?

The patchwork of political, regional and national loyalties inside Russia made the Civil War a confused affair. It is best understood as a story of the Bolsheviks' resisting attacks on four main fronts, and then taking the initiative and driving back their attackers until they eventually withdrew or surrendered. Unlike the First World War, the Civil War was a war of movement, largely dictated by the layout of Russia's railway system. It was because the Bolsheviks were largely successful in their desperate fight to maintain control of the railways that they were able to keep themselves supplied, while denying the Whites the same benefit.

White weaknesses

The reasons for the final victory of the Reds in the Civil War are not difficult to determine:

- The various White armies fought as separate detachments.
- Apart from their obvious desire to overthrow the Bolsheviks, they were not bound together by a single aim.
- They were unwilling to sacrifice their individual interests in order to form a united anti-Bolshevik front. This allowed the Reds to pick off the White armies separately.
- In the rare cases in which the Whites did consider combining, they were too widely scattered geographically to be able to bring sufficient pressure to bear on the enemy.
- The Whites were too reliant on supplies from abroad, which seldom arrived in sufficient quantities, in the right places, at the right time.
- The Whites lacked leaders of the quality of Trotsky.

Red strengths

The Reds, in contrast, had a number of overwhelming advantages:

- They remained in control of a concentrated central area of western Russia which they were able to defend by maintaining their inner communication and supply lines.
- The two major cities, Petrograd and Moscow, the administrative centres of Russia, remained in their hands throughout the war, as did most of the railway network.
- The Reds also possessed a key advantage in that the areas where they had their strongest hold were the industrial centres of Russia. This gave them access to munitions and resources denied to the Whites.
- The dependence of the Whites on supplies from abroad appeared to prove the Red accusation that they were in league with the foreign interventionists (see page 134). The Civil War had produced a paradoxical situation in which the Reds were able to stand as champions of the Russian nation as well as proletarian revolutionaries.
- The Red Army was brilliantly organised and led by Trotsky.

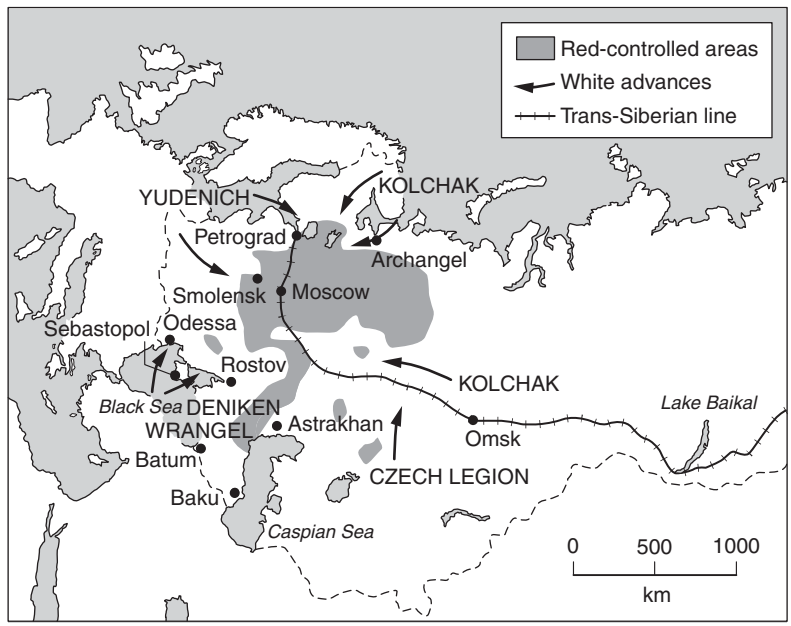


Figure 5.2: The Russian Civil War 1918–20

Key question
What strategy did Trotsky follow?

Trotsky's role

Trotsky's strategy was simple and direct:

- To defend the Red Army's internal lines of communication.
- To deny the Whites the opportunity to concentrate large forces in any one location.
- To prevent the Whites maintaining regular supplies.

The key to this strategy was control of Russia's railways. Trotsky viewed the role of the railways as equivalent to that of the cavalry

Profile: Leon Trotsky 1879–1940

1879	– Born into a Ukrainian Jewish family
1898	– Convicted of revolutionary activities and exiled to Siberia
1902	– Adopted the name Trotsky
	– Escaped from exile and joined Lenin in London
1903	– Sided with the Mensheviks in the SD split (see page 23)
1905	– Became Chairman of St Petersburg Soviet
1906	– Exiled again to Siberia
1907	– Escaped again and fled abroad
1907–17	– Lived in various European countries and in the USA
1917	– Returned to Petrograd after February Revolution
	– The principal organiser of the October *coup*
	– Appointed Foreign Affairs Commissar
1918	– Negotiated the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk
1918–20	– As War Commissar, created the Red Army
1921	– Crushed the Kronstadt Rising (see page 149)
	– Destroyed the trade unions in Russia
1924–27	– Outmanoeuvred in the power struggle with Stalin
1927	– Sentenced to internal exile at Alma Ata
1929	– Banished from USSR
1929–40	– Lived in various countries
	– Wrote prodigiously on revolutionary theory, in opposition to Stalin
1940	– Assassinated in Mexico on Stalin's orders

Trotsky's real name was Leon (Lev) Bronstein. He was born into a Jewish landowning family in the Ukraine in 1879. Rebellious from an early age, he sided with the peasants on his family's estate. Yet, like Lenin, he rejected 'economism', the attempt to raise the standards of peasants and workers by improving their conditions. He wanted to intensify class warfare by exploiting grievances, not to lessen it by introducing reforms.

As a revolutionary, Trotsky's sympathies lay with the Mensheviks and it was as a Menshevik that he became Chairman of the St Petersburg Soviet during the 1905 Revolution. His activities led to his arrest and exile. Between 1906 and 1917 he lived in a variety of foreign countries, developing his theory of 'permanent revolution', the notion that revolution was not a single event but a continuous process of international class warfare. Following the collapse of tsardom in the February Revolution, Trotsky returned to Petrograd and immediately joined the Bolshevik Party. He became chairman of the Petrograd Soviet, a position that he used to organise the Bolshevik rising, which overthrew the Provisional Government in October 1917.

In the Bolshevik government that then took over, Trotsky became Commissar for Foreign Affairs. He was the chief negotiator in the Russo-German talks that resulted in Russia's withdrawal from the war in 1918 under the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. He then became Commissar for War, and achieved what was arguably the greatest success of his career, the victory of the Red Army in the Civil War of 1918–20. As a hardliner, Trotsky fully supported Lenin's repressive policy of war communism (see page 143). He plotted the destruction of the Russian trade unions, and in 1921 ordered the suppression of the rebellious Kronstadt workers.

In terms of ability, Trotsky ought to have been the main contender in the power struggle that followed Lenin's death. But he was never fully accepted by his fellow Bolsheviks, which enabled Stalin to isolate him. Trotsky's concept of permanent revolution was condemned as anti-Soviet, since it appeared to put international revolution before the establishment of 'socialism in one country', Stalin's term for the consolidation of Communist rule in the USSR.

In 1929 Trotsky was exiled from the USSR. He spent his last 11 years in a variety of countries, attempting to develop an international following opposed to the Soviet regime. In 1939 he founded the Fourth International, a movement of anti-Stalin Marxists drawn from some 30 countries. Trotsky's end came in 1940 in Mexico City, when a Soviet agent acting on Stalin's direct orders, killed him by driving an ice-pick into his head.

in former times. They were the means of transporting troops swiftly and in large numbers to the critical areas of defence or attack. It was no accident that the decisive confrontations between Reds and Whites took place near rail junctions and depots. Trotsky's broad strategy was successful. Once the Reds had established an effective defence of their main region around Petrograd and Moscow they were able to exhaust the enemy as an attacking force and then drive them back on the major fronts until they scattered or surrendered.

Key question
Why did the peasantry support the Reds?

Red brutality

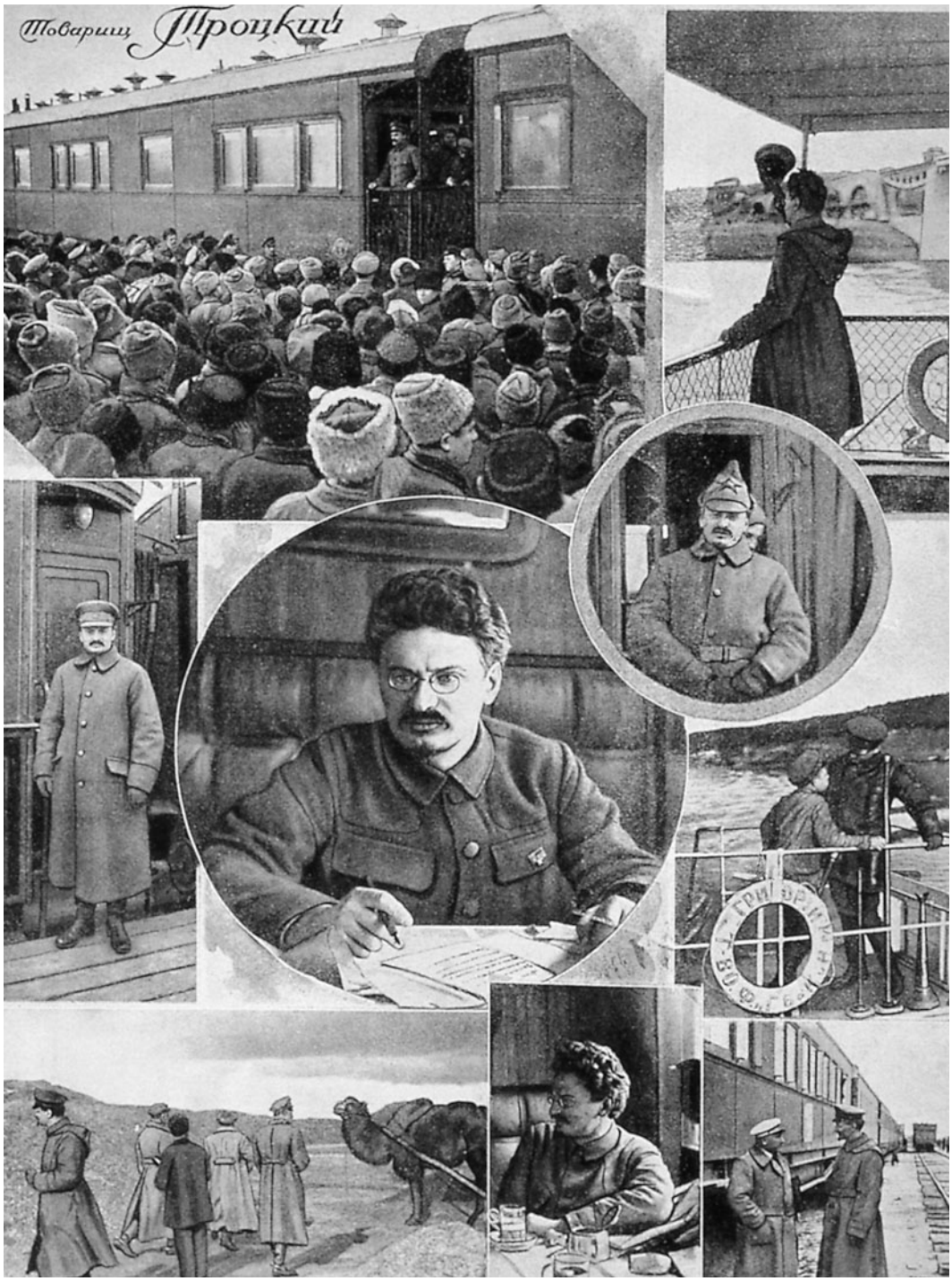
As in most civil wars, the Reds and Whites continually accused each other of committing atrocities. Both sides did undoubtedly use terror to crush opposition in the areas they seized. The actual fighting was not unduly bloody; it was in the aftermath, when the civilian population was cowed into submission, that the savagery usually occurred. The Reds gained recruits by offering defeated enemy troops and neutral civilians the stark choice of enlistment or execution.

Although the Reds imposed a reign of terror, the Whites' own record in ill-treating local populations was equally notorious. To the ordinary Russian there was little to choose between the warring sides in the matter of brutality. By the end of the Civil War, any initial sympathy gained by the Reds from the peasants, was lost by the severity of their grain-requisitioning methods. However, the Whites were unable to present themselves as a better alternative. All they could offer was a return to the pre-revolutionary past. This was particularly damaging to them in relation to the land question. The Reds continually pointed out that all the lands that the peasants had seized in the Revolutions of 1917 would be forfeit if ever the Whites were to win the war. It was this fear more than any other that stopped the peasants from giving their support to the Whites.

Key question
In what way was morale a factor in the Red's victory?

The importance of morale

Waging war is not just a matter of resources and firepower. Morale and dedication play a vital role. Throughout the struggle the Reds were sustained by a driving sense of purpose. Trotsky as the



A photo montage, showing the enormous efforts Trotsky put into his work as Commissar of War. One of the most remarkable features of Trotsky's activities was the use of his special train in which he travelled over 70,000 miles during the Civil War. It was not just a train. It was a town on wheels, serving as mobile command post, military headquarters, troop transporter, radio station, court martial, propaganda unit, publishing centre, arsenal and administrative office. In Trotsky's own words: 'The train linked the front with the base, solved urgent problems on the spot, educated, appealed, supplied, rewarded and punished'.

How much did the victory of the Reds in the Civil War owe to Trotsky?

Bolshevik War Commissar may have been extreme in his methods, but he created an army that proved capable of fighting with an unshakable belief in its own eventual victory (see page 141).

Set against this, the Whites were never more than an unco-ordinated group of forces, whose morale was seldom high. They were a collection of dispossessed socialists, liberals and moderates, whose political differences often led them into bitter disputes among themselves. Save for their hatred of Bolshevism, the Whites lacked a common purpose. Throughout the Civil War, the White cause was deeply divided by the conflicting interests of those who were fighting for national or regional independence and those who wanted a return to strong central government. Furthermore, no White leader emerged of the stature of Trotsky or Lenin around whom an effective anti-Bolshevik army could unite.

Key question
What effect did the Civil War have on the character of Bolshevism?

The effects of the Civil War on the Bolsheviks

Toughness

On the domestic front, the Civil War proved to be one of the great formative influences on the Bolshevik Party (renamed the Communist Party in 1919). Their attempts at government took place during a period of conflict in which their very survival was at stake. The development of the party and the government has to be set against this background. The Revolution had been born in war, and the government had been formed in war. Of all the members of the Communist Party in 1927, a third had joined in the years 1917–20 and had fought in the Red Army. This had created a tradition of military obedience and loyalty. The Bolsheviks of this generation were hard men, forged in the fires of war.

Key date
Bolshevik Party renamed the Communist Party: March 1919

Authoritarianism

A number of modern analysts have emphasised the central place that the Civil War had in shaping the character of Communist rule in Soviet Russia. Robert Tucker stresses that it was the military aspect of early Bolshevik government that left it with a 'readiness to resort to coercion, rule by administrative fiat [command], centralised administration [and] summary justice'. No regime placed in the Bolshevik predicament between 1917 and 1921 could have survived without resort to authoritarian measures.

Key terms
Politburo
Short for the Political Bureau, responsible for major policy decisions.

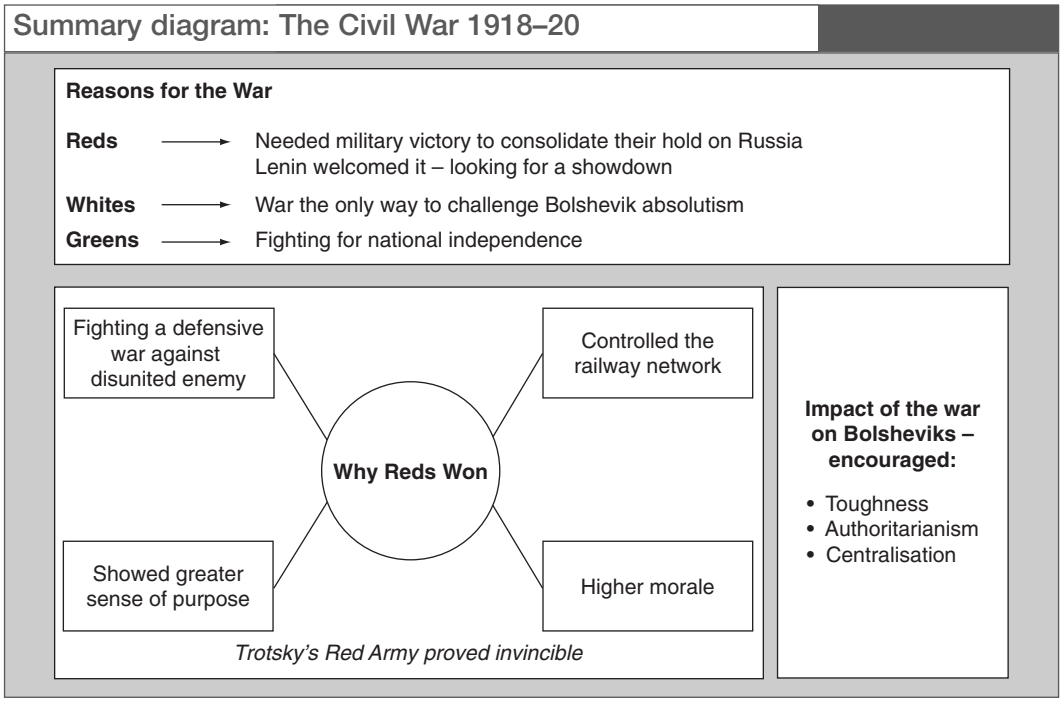
Orgburo
Short for Organisation Bureau, which turned the policies into practice.

Secretariat
A form of civil service that carried out the administration of policies.

Centralisation

The move towards centralism in government increased as the Civil War dragged on. The emergencies of war required immediate day-to-day decisions to be made. This led to effective power moving away from the Central Committee of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party, which was too cumbersome, into the hands of the two key sub-committees, the **Politburo** and the **Orgburo**, set up in 1919, that could act with the necessary speed. In practice, the authority of *Sovnarkom*, the official government of Soviet Russia, became indistinguishable from the rule of these party committees, which was served by the **Secretariat**.

Summary diagram: The Civil War 1918–20



5 | The Foreign Interventions 1918–20

Key question
What led foreign powers to intervene in Russia?

When tsardom collapsed in 1917 the immediate worry for the western Allies was whether the new regime would keep Russia in the war. If revolutionary Russia made a separate peace, Germany would be free to divert huge military resources from the Eastern to the Western Front. To prevent this, the Allies offered large amounts of capital and military supplies to Russia to keep her in the war. The new government eagerly accepted the offer; throughout its eight months in office from February to October 1917 the Provisional Government remained committed to the war against Germany in return for Allied war-credits and supplies.

This produced an extraordinary balance. On one side stood Lenin and his anti-war Bolsheviks financed by Germany; on the other the pro-war Provisional government funded by the Allies. However, the October Revolution destroyed the balance. The collapse of the Provisional Government and the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks had precisely the effect hoped for by Germany and feared by the Allies. Within weeks, an armistice had been agreed between Germany and the new government, and fighting on the Eastern Front stopped in December 1917.

The initial response of France and Britain was cautious. In the faint hope that the Bolsheviks might be persuaded to continue the fight against Germany, the same support was offered to them as to their predecessors. David Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister, declared that he was neither for nor against Bolshevism, but simply anti-German. He was willing to side with any group in Russia that would continue the war against Germany.

Allied attitudes harden

However, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918 ended all hope of Lenin's Russia renewing the war against Germany. From now on, any help given by Britain to anti-German Russians went necessarily to anti-Bolshevik forces. It appeared to the Bolsheviks that Britain and its allies were intent on destroying them. This was matched by the Allies' view that in making a separate peace with Germany the Bolsheviks had betrayed the Allied cause. The result was a fierce determination among the Allies to prevent their vital war supplies, previously loaned to Russia and still stock-piled there, from falling into German hands

Soon after the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, British, French, and American troops occupied the ports of Murmansk in the Arctic and Archangel in the White Sea (see the map on page 137). This was the beginning of a two-year period during which armed forces from a large number of countries occupied key areas of European, central and far-eastern Russia.

Once the First World War had ended in November 1918, the attention of the major powers turned to the possibility of a full offensive against the Bolsheviks. Among those most eager for an attack were Winston Churchill, the British cabinet minister, and

THE PERIL WITHOUT.

'The Peril Without'. A British cartoon of April 1919, showing the Bolsheviks as ravenous wolves preparing to attack a peaceful Europe. Britain and France were among the leading western countries who feared that revolutionary Bolshevism would spread across Europe. What influence might such images as these have in shaping British attitudes towards Bolshevik Russia?

Marshal Foch, the French military leader. They were alarmed by the creation of the **Comintern** and by the spread of revolution in Germany and central Europe:

- In January 1918, the 'Spartacists', a German Communist movement (named after Spartacus, the leader of the slave rebellion in ancient Rome), tried unsuccessfully to mount a *coup* in Berlin.
- In 1918–19 a short-lived Communist republic was established in Bavaria.
- In March 1919 in Hungary a Marxist government was set up under Bela Kun, only to fall five months later.

Key term
Comintern
Short for the Communist International, a body set up in Moscow in March 1919 to organise worldwide revolution.

Key date
Comintern established: March 1919

The interventions spread

There was also a key financial aspect to anti-Bolshevism in western Europe. One of the first acts of the Bolshevik regime was to declare that the new government had no intention of honouring the foreign debts of its predecessors. In addition, it nationalised a large number of foreign companies and froze all foreign assets in Russia. The bitter reaction to what was regarded as international theft was particularly strong in France where many small and middle-scale financiers had invested in tsarist Russia. It was the French who now took the lead in proposing an international campaign against the Reds.

- In 1918 British land forces entered Transcaucasia in southern Russia and also occupied part of central Asia.
- British warships entered Russian Baltic waters and the Black Sea, where French naval vessels joined them.
- The French also established a major land base around the Black Sea port of Odessa.
- In April 1918, Japanese troops occupied Russia's far-eastern port of Vladivostok.
- Four months later, units from France, Britain, the USA and Italy joined them.
- Czech, Finnish, Lithuanian, Polish and Romanian forces crossed into Russia.
- In 1919 Japanese and United States troops occupied parts of Siberia.

An important point to stress is that these were not co-ordinated attacks. There was little co-operation between the occupiers. The declared motive of Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the USA was the legitimate protection of their individual interests. The objective of Czechoslovakia, Finland, Lithuania, Poland and Romania, all of whom directly bordered western Russia, was to achieve their separatist aim, that went back to tsarist times, of gaining independence from Russia.

The failure of the interventions

Key question
Why did the interventions fail?

Despite the preaching of an anti-Bolshevik crusade by influential voices in western Europe, no concerted attempt was ever made to unseat the Bolshevik regime. This was shown by the relative ease with which the interventions were resisted. The truth was that after

Figure 5.3: The foreign interventions 1918–21

four long years of struggle against Germany the interventionists had no stomach for a prolonged campaign. There were serious threats of mutiny in some British and French regiments ordered to embark for Russia. Trade unionists who were sympathetic towards the new 'workers' state' refused to transport military supplies bound for Russia.

After the separate national forces had arrived in Russia, there was seldom effective liaison between them. Furthermore, such

efforts as the foreign forces made to co-operate with the White armies were half-hearted and came to little. The one major exception to this was in the Baltic states where the national forces, backed by British warships and troops, crushed a Bolshevik invasion and obliged Lenin's government to recognise the independence of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, a freedom which they maintained until taken over by Stalin in 1940.

Such interventionist success was not repeated elsewhere. After a token display of aggression, the foreign troops began to withdraw. By the end of 1919, all French and American troops had been recalled, and by the end of 1920, all other western forces had left. It was only the Japanese who remained in Russia for the duration of the Civil War, not finally leaving until 1922.

Propaganda success for the Bolsheviks

In no real sense were these withdrawals a military victory for the Bolsheviks, but that was exactly how they were portrayed in Soviet propaganda. Lenin's government presented itself as the saviour of the nation from foreign conquest; all the interventions had been imperialist invasions of Russia intent on overthrowing the Revolution. This apparent success over Russia's enemies helped the Bolshevik regime recover the esteem it had lost over its 1918 capitulation to Germany. It helped to put resolve into the doubters in the party and it lent credibility to the Bolshevik depiction of the Whites as agents of foreign powers, intent on restoring reactionary tsardom.

War against Poland

Key date
Invading Red Army driven from Poland: April 1920

The failure of the foreign interventions encouraged the Bolsheviks to undertake what proved to be a disastrous attempt to expand their authority outside Russia. In 1920 the Red Army marched into neighbouring Poland expecting the Polish workers to rise in rebellion against their own government. However, the Poles saw the invasion as traditional Russian aggression and drove the Red Army back across the border. Soviet morale was seriously damaged, which forced Lenin and the Bolsheviks to rethink the whole question of international revolution.

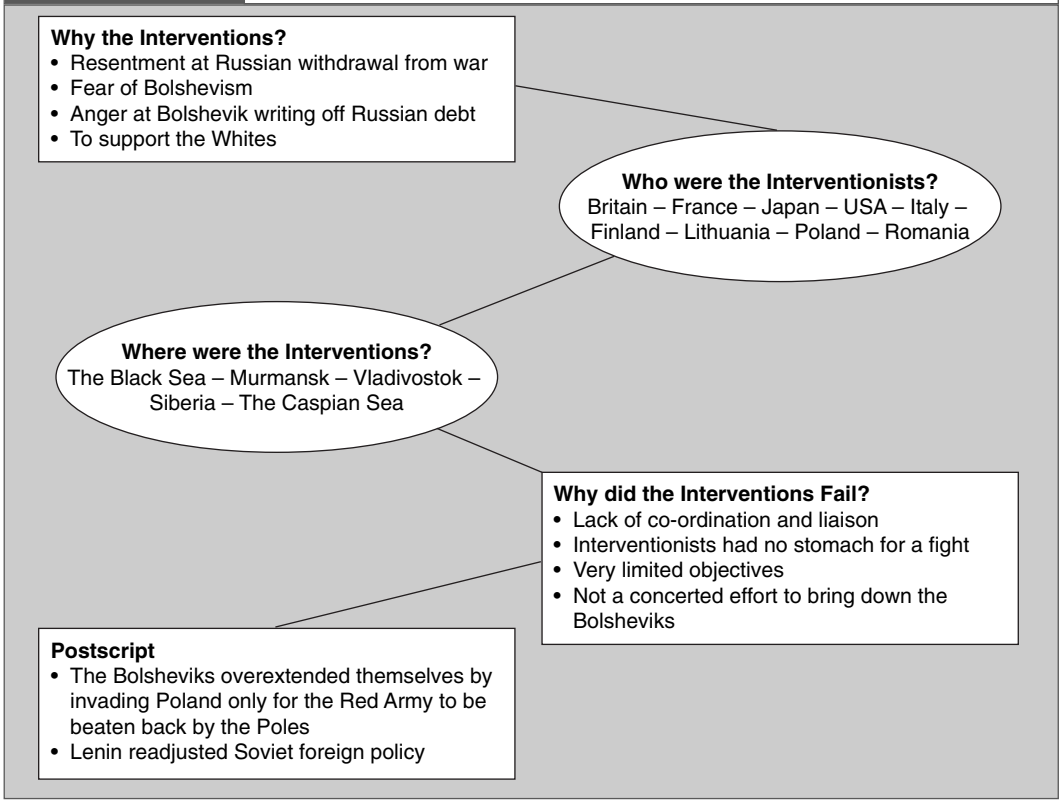
Lenin's approach to foreign affairs

Key question
What was Lenin's attitude towards foreign affairs?

Lenin adopted an essentially realistic approach. He judged that the Polish reverse, the foreign interventions in Russia, and the failure of the Communist revolutions in Germany and Hungary all showed that the time was not ripe for world revolution. The capitalist nations were still too strong. The Bolsheviks would, therefore, without abandoning their long-term revolutionary objectives, adjust their foreign policy to meet the new situation. The Comintern would continue to call for world revolution, but Soviet Russia would soften its international attitude.

Lenin's concerns were very much in the tradition of Russian foreign policy. Western encroachment into Russia had been a constant fear of the tsars. That long-standing Russian worry had been increased by the hostility of European governments to the October Revolution and by their support of the Whites during the Civil War. Lenin's reading of the international situation led him to conclude that discretion was the better part of valour. Under him Soviet foreign policy was activated not by thoughts of expansion but by the desire to avoid conflict.

Summary diagram: The foreign interventions, 1918–20



Key question
Were Lenin's terror tactics a temporary response to a desperate situation or an expression of Russian Communism's true character?

6 | Lenin's Methods 1917–21

The repression that accompanied the spread of Bolshevik control over Russia between 1918 and 1921 became known as the Terror. Whether the terror was justified remains a matter of debate.

One argument is that the extreme measures that Lenin's government adopted were the only response possible to the problems confronting the Bolsheviks after the October Revolution, in particular the need to win a desperate civil war.

Key date
Red Terror officially introduced: September 1918

An opposing view is that repression was not a reaction to circumstances but was a defining characteristic of **Marxism-Leninism**, a creed that regarded itself as uniquely superior to all other ideologies. An extension of this argument is that there was something essentially totalitarian about Lenin himself. He did not know how to act in any other way. He had always accepted the necessity of terror as an instrument of political control. Before 1917 he had often made it clear that a Marxist revolution could not survive if it were not prepared to smash its enemies: 'Coercion is necessary for the transition from capitalism to socialism. There is absolutely no contradiction between Soviet democracy and the exercise of dictatorial powers'.

Key term
Marxism-Leninism
The notion that Marx's theory of class war as interpreted by Lenin was a supremely accurate and unchallengeable piece of scientific analysis.

The chief instruments by which the Bolsheviks exercised their policy of terror were the *Cheka* and the Red Army, both of which played a critical role during the civil war.

The *Cheka*

This state police force, often likened historically to the Gestapo in Nazi Germany, had been created in December 1917 under the direction of Felix Dzerzhinsky, an intellectual of Polish aristocratic background, who sought to atone for his privileged origins by absolute dedication to the Bolshevik cause. Lenin found him the ideal choice to lead the fight against the enemies of the Revolution. Dzerzhinsky never allowed finer feelings or compassion to deter him from the task of destroying the enemies of Bolshevism. His remorseless attitude was shown in the various directives that issued from the *Cheka* headquarters in Moscow.

> Our Revolution is in danger. Do not concern yourselves with the forms of revolutionary justice. We have no need for justice now. Now we have need of a battle to the death! I propose, I demand the use of the revolutionary sword, which will put an end to all counter-revolutionaries.

The *Cheka*, which was to change its title several times over the years, but never its essential character, remains the outstanding expression of Bolshevik ruthlessness. Operating as a law unto itself, and answerable only to Lenin, it was granted unlimited powers of arrest, detention and torture, which it used in the most arbitrary and brutal way. It was the main instrument by which Lenin and his successors terrorised the Russian people into subservience and conformity.

The murder of the Romanovs, July 1918

Key date
Murder of tsar and his family: July 1918

In July 1918 a group of SRs assassinated the German ambassador as a protest against the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. A month later an attempt was made on Lenin's life (see page 127), followed by the murder of the Petrograd chairman of the *Cheka*. These incidents were made the pretext for a Bolshevik reign of terror across the greater part of Russia. It was in this atmosphere that a local *Cheka* detachment, on Lenin's personal order, executed the ex-tsar and his family in Ekaterinburg in July 1918.

The *Cheka* wages class war

The summary shooting of the Romanovs without benefit of trial was typical of the manner in which the *Cheka* went about its business throughout Russia. In accordance with Dzerzhinsky's instructions, all pretence of legality was abandoned; the basic rules relating to evidence and proof of guilt no longer applied. Persecution was directed not simply against individuals, but against whole classes. This was class war of the most direct kind.

> Do not demand incriminating evidence to prove that the prisoner has opposed the Soviet government by force or words. Your first duty is to ask him to which class he belongs, what are his origins, his education, his occupation. These questions should decide the fate of the prisoner.

Some Bolsheviks were uneasy about the relentless savagery of the *Cheka* but there were no attempts to restrict its powers. The majority of party members accepted that the hazardous situation they were in justified the severity of the repression. The foreign interventions and the Civil War, fought out against the background of famine and social disorder, threatened the existence of the Communist Party and the government. This had the effect of stifling criticism of the *Cheka*'s methods. Dzerzhinsky declared that the proletarian revolution could not be saved except by 'exterminating the enemies of the working class'.

Key question
What role did Trotsky play in the Red Terror?

The Red Army

Trotsky, who became Commissar for War after the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, complemented Dzerzhinsky's work. Trotsky used his powers to end the independence of the trade unions, which had first been legalised in 1905. Early in 1920, the workers were brought under military discipline on the same terms as soldiers. They were forbidden to question orders, could not negotiate their rates of pay or conditions, and could be severely punished for poor workmanship or not meeting production targets. Trotsky dismissed the unions as 'unnecessary chatterboxes' and told them: 'The working classes cannot be nomads. They must be commanded just like soldiers. Without this there can be no serious talk of industrialising on new foundations'.

Key date
Red Army established: January 1918

Trotsky's outstanding achievement as Commissar for War was his creation of the Red Army, which more than any other factor explains the survival of the Bolshevik government. This has

Lenin addressing a crowd in Moscow in May 1920. Trotsky and Kamenev are on the steps of the podium. This photo later became notorious when in Stalin's time it was air-brushed to remove Trotsky from it. Despite such later attempts to deny Trotsky's role in the Revolution he had undoubtedly been Lenin's right-hand man.

obvious reference to the Reds' triumph in the Civil War, but the Red Army also became the means by which the Bolsheviks imposed their authority on the population at large.

Lenin showed his complete trust in Trotsky by giving him a totally free hand in military matters. From his heavily armed special train, which served as his military headquarters and travelled vast distances, Trotsky supervised the development of a new fighting force in Russia. He had inherited 'The Workers' and Peasants' Red Army', formed early in 1918. Within two years he had turned an unpromising collection of tired Red Guard veterans and raw recruits into a formidable army of three million men. Ignoring the objections of many fellow Bolsheviks, he enlisted large numbers of ex-tsarist officers to train the rank and file into efficient soldiers. As a precaution, Trotsky attached **political commissars** to the army. These became an integral part of the Red Army structure.

Trotsky tolerated no opposition within the Red Army from officers or men. The death sentence was imposed for desertion or disloyalty. In the heady revolutionary days before Trotsky took over, the traditional forms of army discipline had been greatly relaxed. Graded ranks, special uniforms, saluting and deferential titles were dropped as belonging to the reactionary past. Trotsky, however, had no truck with such fanciful experiments. He insisted that the demands of war meant that discipline had to be tighter not looser.

Although 'commander' replaced the term 'officer', in all other key respects the Red Army returned to the customary forms of rank and address, with the word 'Comrade' usually prefixing the standard terms, as in 'Comrade Captain'. The practice of electing officers, which had come into favour in the democratic atmosphere of the February Revolution, was abandoned, as were soldiers' committees.

Key term

Political commissars Dedicated Party workers whose function was to accompany the officers permanently and report on their political correctness. No military order carried final authority unless a commissar countersigned it.

Conscription

Trotsky responded to the Civil War's increasing demand for manpower by enforcing conscription in those areas under Bolshevik control. (The Whites did the same in their areas.) Under the slogan 'Everything for the Front', Trotsky justified the severity of the Red Army's methods by referring to the dangers that Russia faced on all sides. Those individuals whose social or political background made them suspect as fighting-men were nevertheless conscripted, being formed into labour battalions for back-breaking service behind the lines, such as digging trenches, loading ammunition and pulling heavy guns.

Most of the peasants who were drafted into the Red Army proved reluctant warriors, and were not regarded as reliable in a crisis. Desertions were commonplace, in spite of the heavy penalties. The Bolsheviks judged that the only dependable units were those drawn predominantly from among the workers. Such units became in practice the elite corps of the Red Army. Heroic stories of the workers as defenders of the Revolution quickly became legends.

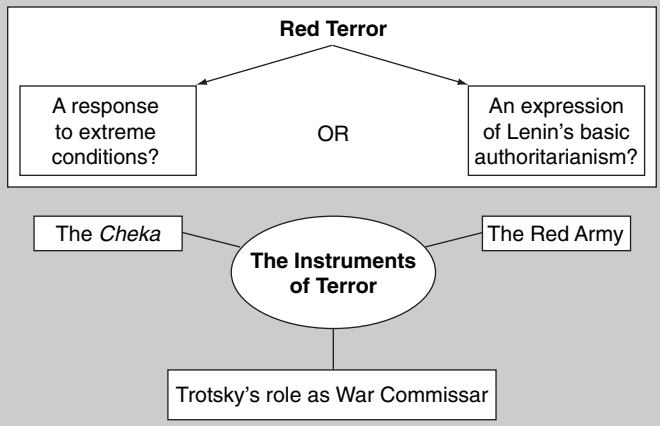
Red idealism

Not everything was achieved by coercion; there were idealists among the troops who believed sincerely in the Communist mission

to create a new proletarian world. Theirs was a vital contribution to the relatively high morale of the Reds. Although, by the standards of the European armies of the time, the Red Army was short of equipment and expertise, within Russia it soon came to outstrip its White opponents in its efficiency and sense of purpose.

Despite Trotsky's military triumphs, his authority did not go unchallenged. He met opposition from local Red commanders and commissars over tactics. His most notable dispute was with Joseph Stalin, who acted as political commissar in the Caucasus. Their legendary personal hostility dates from the Civil War days. Nonetheless, whatever the disputes, there was no doubting that Trotsky's organisation and leadership of the Red Army was the major factor in the survival of Bolshevik Russia.

Summary diagram: Lenin's methods 1917–21



Key question
What was the impact of war communism on industry?

7 | War Communism 1918–21

In the summer of 1918, Lenin began to introduce a series of harshly restrictive economic measures, which were collectively known as 'war communism'. The chief reason for the move away from the system of state capitalism, which had operated up to then, was the desperate situation created by the Civil War. Lenin judged that the White menace could be met only by an intensification of authority in those regions that the Reds controlled (approximately 30 of the 50 provinces of European Russia). The change in economic strategy has to be seen, therefore, as part of the terror that the Bolsheviks operated in these years. Every aspect of life, social, political and economic had to be subordinated to the task of winning the Civil War.

Effect on industry

The first step towards war communism as a formal policy was taken in June 1918. The existence of the *Cheka* and the Red Army enabled Lenin to embark on a policy of **centralisation** knowing that he had the means of enforcing it. By that time also, there had been a considerable increase in Bolshevik influence in the factories. This was a result of the infiltration of the workers' committees by political commissars. This development helped prepare the way for the issuing of the Decree on Nationalisation in

Key term
Centralisation
The concentration of political and economic power at the centre.

June 1918, which within two years brought practically all the major industrial enterprises in Russia under central government control.

Key date
Decree on Nationalisation: laid down a programme for the takeover by the state of the larger industrial concerns: 28 June 1918

However, nationalisation by itself did nothing to increase production. It was imposed at a time of severe industrial disruption, which had been caused initially by the strains of the war of 1914–17 but which worsened during the Civil War. Military needs were given priority, thus denying resources to those industries not considered essential.

The situation was made more serious by the factories being deprived of manpower. This was a result both of conscription into the Red Army and of the flight from the urban areas of large numbers of inhabitants, who left either in search of food or to escape the Civil War. The populations of Petrograd and Moscow dropped by a half between 1918 and 1921.

The problems for industry were deepened by hyper-inflation. The scarcity of goods and the government's policy of continuing to print currency notes effectively destroyed the value of money. By the end of 1920, the rouble had fallen to one per cent of its worth in 1917. All this meant that while war communism tightened the Bolshevik grip on industry it did not lead to economic growth. Table 5.2 below shows the failure of war communism in economic terms.

Table 5.2: A comparison of industrial output in 1913 and in 1921

	1913	*1921*
Index of gross industrial output	100	31
Index of large-scale industrial output	100	21
Electricity (million kilowatt hours)	2039	520
Coal (million tons)	29	8.9
Oil (million tons)	9.2	3.8
Steel (million tons)	4.3	0.18
Imports (at 1913 rouble value (millions))	1374	208
Exports (at 1913 rouble value (millions))	1520	20

Effects on agriculture

Key question
What was the impact of war communism on agriculture?

For Lenin, the major purpose of war communism was to tighten government control over agriculture and force the peasants to provide more food. But the peasants proved difficult to bring into line. As a naturally conservative class, they were resistant to central government, whether tsarist or Bolshevik. The government blamed the resistance on the ***kulaks*** who, it was claimed, were hoarding their grain stocks in order to keep prices artificially high. This was untrue. There was no hoarding. The plain truth was that the peasants saw no point in producing more food until the government, which had become the main grain purchaser, was willing to pay a fair price for it.

Key term
Kulaks
The Bolshevik term for the class of rich exploiting peasants. The notion was largely a myth. Rather than being a class of exploiters, the kulaks were simply the more efficient farmers who were marginally more prosperous.

Grain requisitioning

However, exasperated by the peasants' refusal to conform, the government condemned them as counter-revolutionaries and resorted to coercion. *Cheka* requisition units were sent into the countryside to take the grain by force. In August 1918, the people's commissar for food issued the following orders:

> The tasks of the requisition detachments are to: harvest winter grain in former landlord-owned estates; harvest grain on the land of

notorious *kulaks*; every food requisition detachment is to consist of not less than 75 men and two or three machine guns. The political commissar's duties are to ensure that the detachment carries out its duties and is full of revolutionary enthusiasm and discipline.

Key date
Forced grain requisitions begun: July 1918

Between 1918 and 1921, the requisition squads systematically terrorised the countryside. The *kulaks* were targeted for particularly brutal treatment. Lenin ordered that they were to be 'mercilessly suppressed'. In a letter of 1920, he gave instructions that 100 *kulaks* were to be hanged in public in order to terrify the population 'for hundreds of miles around'.

Yet, the result was largely the reverse of the one intended. Even less food became available. Knowing that any surplus would simply be confiscated, the peasant produced only the barest minimum to feed himself and his family. Nevertheless, throughout the period of war communism, the Bolsheviks persisted in their belief that grain hoarding was the basic problem. Official reports continued to speak of 'concealment everywhere, in the hopes of selling grain to town speculators at fabulous prices'.

Famine

Key term
ARA
The American Relief Association, formed by Herbert Hoover (a future President of the USA, 1929–33) to provide food and medical supplies for post-war Europe.

By 1921, the combination of requisitioning, drought and the general disruption of war had created a national famine. The grain harvests in 1920 and 1921 produced less than half that gathered in 1913. Even *Pravda*, the government's propaganda news-sheet, admitted in 1921 that one in five of the population was starving. Matters became so desperate that the Bolsheviks, while careful to blame the *kulaks* and the Whites, were prepared to admit there was a famine and to accept foreign assistance. A number of countries supplied Russia with aid. The outstanding contribution came from the USA, which through the **ARA**, provided food for some ten million Russians.

A pile of unburied bodies in a cemetery in Buzuluk, grim testimony to the famine that struck the region in 1921. Similar tragedies were common across Russia, reducing some areas to cannibalism. How does this picture help to explain why Lenin abandoned war communism in 1921 and introduced NEP?

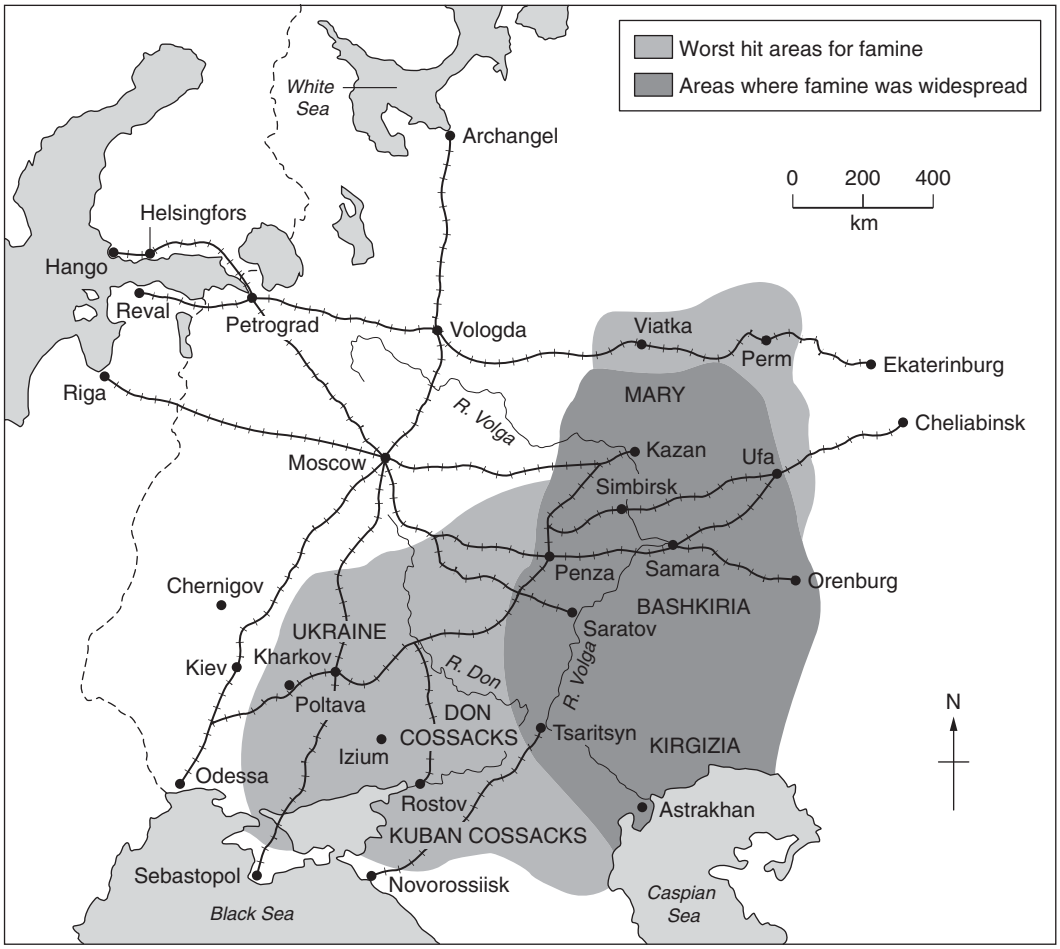


Figure 5.4: Areas of Russia worst hit by famine. Based on a map © Martin Gilbert

Despite such efforts, foreign help came too late to prevent mass starvation. Of the ten million fatalities of the Civil War period, over half starved to death. Lenin resented having to accept aid from the ARA and ordered it to withdraw from Russia in 1923 after two years, during which time it had spent over 60 million dollars in relief work.

The end of war communism

Key question
In what ways was war communism an extension of the Red Terror?

What is now known is that Lenin positively welcomed the famine as providing an opportunity to pursue his destruction of the Orthodox Church. In a letter of 1922, he ordered the Politburo to exploit the famine by shooting priests, 'the more, the better'. He went on:

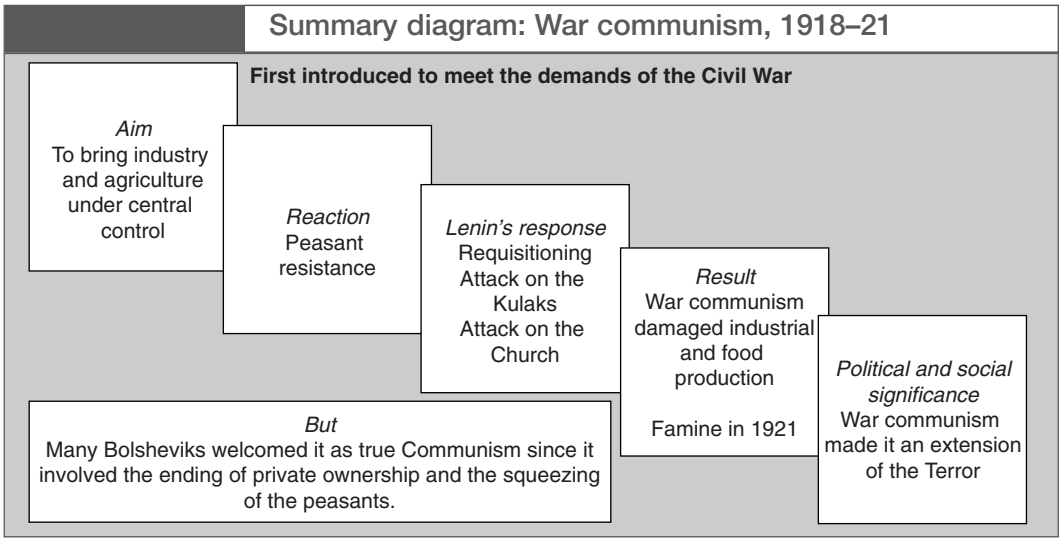
> It is precisely now and only now when in the starving regions people are eating human flesh and thousands of corpses are littering the roads that we can (and therefore must) carry out the confiscation of the church valuables with the most savage and merciless energy.

By 1921, the grim economic situation had undermined the original justification for war communism. During its operation, industrial and agricultural production had fallen alarmingly.

Yet, this did not mean the policy necessarily became unpopular among the Bolsheviks themselves. Indeed, there were many in the party who, far from regarding it as a temporary measure to meet an extreme situation, believed that it represented true revolutionary Communism. The party's leading economists, Nikolai Bukharin and Yevgeny Preobrazhensky, urged that war communism should be retained as the permanent economic strategy of the Bolshevik government. They saw it as true socialism in action since it involved:

- the centralising of industry
- the ending of private ownership
- the squeezing of the peasants.

The policy of war communism was maintained even after the victory of the Red Army in the Civil War. The systematic use of terror by the *Cheka*, the spying on factory workers by political commissars, and the enforced requisitioning of peasant grain stocks all continued. As a short-term measure the policy had produced the results Lenin wanted, but its severity had increased Bolshevik unpopularity. Throughout 1920 there were outbreaks of resistance, the most serious occurring in the central Russian province of Tambov.



Key question
What led to the Rising?

8 | The Kronstadt Rising 1921

Key date
The Kronstadt Rising: March 1921

Lenin himself clung to war communism as long as he could. However, the failure of the economy to recover and the scale of the famine led him to consider possible alternative policies. He was finally convinced of the need for change by widespread anti-Bolshevik risings in 1920–1. These were a direct reaction against the brutality of requisitioning. One in particular was so disturbing that Lenin described it as a lightning flash that illuminated the true reality of things. He was referring to The Kronstadt Rising of 1921, the most serious challenge to Bolshevik control since the October Revolution.

The 'Workers' Opposition'

As long as unrest was confined to the peasants and to the Bolsheviks' political enemies it was a containable problem. What

became deeply worrying to Lenin in 1921 was the development of opposition to war communism within the party itself. Two prominent Bolsheviks, Alexander Shlyapnikov, the **Labour Commissar**, and Alexandra Kollontai, the outstanding woman in the party, led a 'Workers' Opposition' movement against the excesses of war communism. Kollontai produced a pamphlet in which she accused the party leaders of losing touch with the proletariat:

> The workers ask – who are we? Are we really the prop of the class dictatorship, or just an obedient flock that serves as a support for those, who, having severed all ties with the masses, carry out their own policy and build up industry without any regard to our opinions.

Key terms

Labour Commissar Equivalent to a Minister of Labour, responsible for industry and its workers.

Non-partisan Politically neutral, belonging to no party.

Picking up the cue given by the 'Workers' Opposition', groups of workers in Petrograd went on strike early in 1921, justifying their actions in an angrily worded proclamation:

> A complete change is necessary in the policies of the government. First of all, the workers and peasants need freedom. They don't want to live by the decrees of the Bolsheviks; they want to control their own destinies. Comrades, preserve revolutionary order! Determinedly and in an organised manner demand: liberation of all the arrested Socialists and **non-partisan** working-men; abolition of martial law; freedom of speech, press and assembly for all who labour.

By February 1921, thousands of Petrograd workers had crossed to the naval base on Kronstadt. There they linked up with the sailors and dockyard workers to demonstrate for greater freedom. They demanded that in a workers' state, which the Bolshevik government claimed Soviet Russia to be, the workers should be better, not worse, off than in tsarist times. In an attempt to pacify the strikers, Lenin sent a team of political commissars to Kronstadt. They were greeted with derision. Petrechenko, a spokesman for the demonstrators, rounded bitterly on the commissars at a public meeting:

> You are comfortable; you are warm; you commissars live in the palaces … Comrades, look around you and you will see that we have fallen into a terrible mire. We were pulled into this mire by a group of Communist bureaucrats, who, under the mask of Communism, have feathered their nests in our republic. I myself was a Communist, and I call on you, Comrades, drive out these false Communists who set worker against peasant and peasant against worker. Enough shooting of our brothers!

The Kronstadt manifesto

Key question
Why was the rising so disturbing for Lenin and the Bolsheviks?

Early in March, the sailors and workers of Kronstadt elected Petrechenko as Chairman of a 15-man Revolutionary Committee, responsible for representing their grievances to the government. This committee produced a manifesto that included the following demands:

1. New elections to the soviets, to be held by secret ballot.
2. Freedom of speech and of the press.
3. Freedom of assembly.
4. Rights for trade unions and release of imprisoned trade unionists.
5. Ending of the right of Communists to be the only permitted socialist political party.
6. The release of left-wing political prisoners.
7. Ending of special food rations for Communist Party members.
8. Freedom for individuals to bring food from the country into the towns without confiscation.
9. Withdrawal of political commissars from the factories.
10. Ending of the Communist Party's monopoly of the press.

It was not the demands themselves that frightened the Bolsheviks; it was the people who had drafted them – the workers and sailors of Kronstadt. They had been the great supporters of the Bolsheviks in 1917. Trotsky had referred to them as 'the heroes of the Revolution'. It was these same heroes who were now insisting that the Bolshevik government return to the promises that had inspired the Revolution. For all the efforts of the Bolshevik press to brand the Kronstadt protesters as White agents, the truth was that they were genuine socialists who had previously been wholly loyal to Lenin's government, but who had become appalled by the regime's betrayal of the workers' cause.

Key question
Why did Lenin and Trotsky consider it necessary to crush the Kronstadt protest by force?

The rising crushed

Angered by the growing number of strikers and their increasing demands, Trotsky ordered the Red Army under General Tukhachevsky to cross the late-winter ice linking Kronstadt to Petrograd and crush 'the tools of former tsarist generals and agents of the interventionists'. An ultimatum was issued to the demonstrators. When this was rejected, Tukhachevsky gave the signal for his force, made up of Red Army units and *Cheka* detachments, to attack. After an artillery bombardment, 60,000 Red troops stormed the Kronstadt base. The sailors and workers resisted fiercely. Savage fighting occurred before they were finally overcome. Tukhachevsky reported back to Trotsky:

> The sailors fought like wild beasts. I cannot understand where they found the might for such rage. Each house where they were located had to be taken by storm. An entire company fought for an hour to capture one house and when the house was captured it was found to contain two or three soldiers at a machine-gun. They seemed half-dead, but they snatched their revolvers and gasped, 'We didn't shoot enough at you bastards'.

Aftermath of the rising

Immediately after the rising had been suppressed, the ringleaders who had survived were condemned as White reactionaries and shot. In the succeeding months the *Cheka* hunted down and

Alexandra Kollontai – the leading female in the ranks of the Bolsheviks and a consistent supporter of Lenin from the time of his return to Petrograd in April 1917 until the Kronstadt rising. Why did Alexandra Kollontai oppose Lenin over the Kronstadt affair?

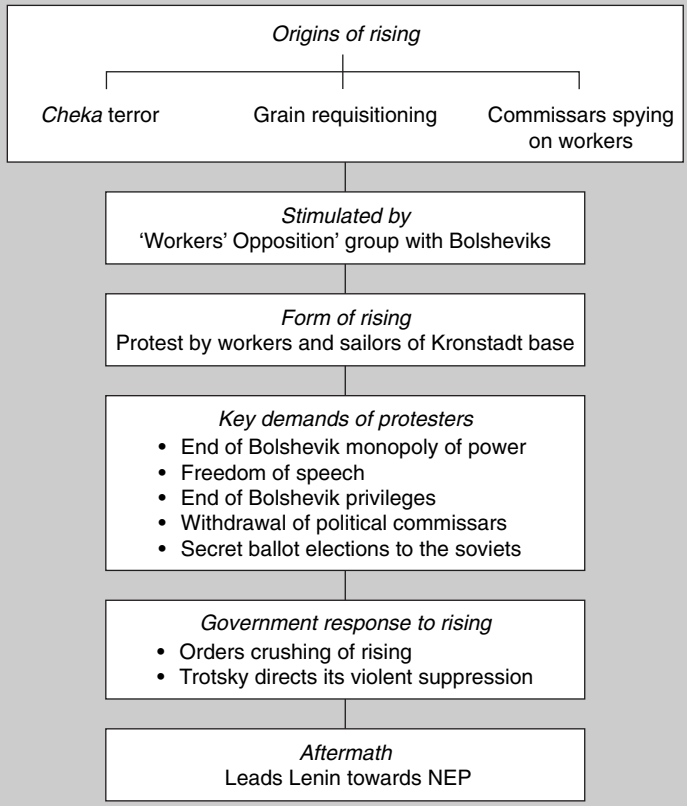
executed those rebels who had escaped from Kronstadt. Lenin justified the severity on the grounds that the rising had been the work of the bourgeois enemies of the October Revolution: 'Both the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries declared the Kronstadt movement to be their own.'

However, as well as being a propagandist, Lenin was also a realist. He took the lesson of Kronstadt to heart. To avoid the scandal and embarrassment of another open challenge to his party and government, he decided it was time to soften the severity of war communism.

At the Tenth Conference of the Communist Party, which opened in March 1921, Lenin declared that the Kronstadt rising had 'lit

up reality like a lightning flash'. This was the prelude to his introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP), a move intended to tackle the famine and in doing so to lessen the opposition to Bolshevism. However, this was to be a purely economic adjustment. Lenin was not prepared to make political concessions: Communist control was to be made even tighter.

Summary diagram: The Kronstadt rising



Key question
What were Lenin's motives in introducing the NEP?

Key date
The introduction of the NEP: March 1921

9 | The New Economic Policy (NEP)

As with the policy it replaced, NEP was intended by Lenin primarily to meet Russia's urgent need for food. Whatever the purity of the revolutionary theory behind war communism, it had clearly failed to deliver the goods. State terror had not forced the peasants into producing larger grain stocks. Pragmatic as ever, Lenin judged, that, if the peasants could not be forced, they must be persuaded. The stick had not worked so now was the time to offer the carrot. He told the delegates at the 1921 Party Congress:

> We must try to satisfy the demands of the peasants who are dissatisfied, discontented, and cannot be otherwise. In essence the small farmer can be satisfied with two things. First of all, there must be a certain amount of freedom for the small private proprietor; and, secondly, commodities and products must be provided.

Despite the deep disagreements that were soon to emerge within the Bolshevik Party over NEP, the famine and the grim economic situation in Russia led the delegates to give unanimous support to Lenin's proposals when they were first introduced. The decree making NEP official government policy was published in the spring of 1921. Its essential features were:

- central economic control to be relaxed
- the requisitioning of grain to be abandoned and replaced by a **tax in kind**
- the peasants to be allowed to keep their food surpluses and sell them for a profit
- public markets to be restored
- money to be reintroduced as a means of trading.

Lenin was aware that the new policy marked a retreat from the principle of state control of the economy. It restored a mixed economy in which certain features of capitalism existed alongside socialism. Knowing how uneasy this made many Bolsheviks, Lenin stressed that the NEP was only a temporary concession to capitalism. He emphasised that the party still retained control of 'the commanding heights of the economy', by which he meant large-scale industry, banking and foreign trade. He added: 'we are prepared to let the peasants have their little bit of capitalism as long as we keep the power'.

The adoption of NEP showed that the Bolshevik government since 1917 had been unable to create a successful economy along purely ideological lines. Lenin admitted as much. He told party members that it made no sense for Bolsheviks to pretend that they could pursue an economic policy that took no account of the circumstances.

Key terms

Tax in kind
The peasant surrendering a certain amount of his produce, equivalent to a fixed sum of money. This contrasted with requisitioning, which had invariably meant the seizure of all the peasant's stocks.

'Nepmen'
Those who stood to gain from the free trading permitted under NEP: the rich peasants, the retailers, the traders and the small-scale manufacturers.

Key question
How did Lenin preserve party unity over NEP?

Bolshevik objections to NEP

Lenin's realism demanded that political theory take second place to economic necessity. It was this that troubled the members of the party, such as Trotsky and Preobrazhensky, who had regarded the repressive measures of war communism as the proper revolutionary strategy for the Bolsheviks to follow. To their mind, bashing the peasants was exactly what the Bolsheviks should be doing since it advanced the revolution. It disturbed them, therefore, that the peasants were being given in to and that capitalist ways were being tolerated. Trotsky described NEP as 'the first sign of the degeneration of Bolshevism'.

A main complaint of the objectors was that the reintroduction of money and private trading was creating a new class of profiteers whom they derisively dubbed **'Nepmen'**. It was the profiteering that Victor Serge, a representative of the Left Bolsheviks, had in mind when he described the immediate social effects of NEP: 'the cities we ruled over assumed a foreign aspect; we felt ourselves sinking into the mire. Money lubricated and befouled the entire machine just as under capitalism'.

NEP became such a contentious issue among the Bolsheviks that Lenin took firm steps to prevent the party being torn apart over it. At the Tenth Party Congress in 1921, at which the NEP had been formally announced, he introduced a resolution 'On Party Unity'. The key passage read:

> The Congress orders the immediate dissolution, without exception, of all groups that have been formed on the basis of some platform or other, and instructs all organisations to be very strict in ensuring that no manifestations of **factionalism** of any sort be tolerated. Failure to comply with this resolution of the Congress is to entail unconditional and immediate expulsion from the party.

Key term

Factionalism
The forming within the party of groups with a particular complaint or grievance. Lenin used the term to brand as disloyal those Bolsheviks who opposed central party policy.

The object of this proposal was to prevent 'factions' within the party from criticising government or Central Committee decisions. An accompanying resolution condemned the 'Workers' Opposition', the group that had opposed the brutalities of war communism and that had been involved in the Kronstadt Rising. The two resolutions on party loyalty provided a highly effective means of stifling criticism of the NEP.

At the same time as Lenin condemned factionalism, he also declared that all political parties other than the Bolsheviks were now outlawed in Soviet Russia. 'Marxism teaches that only the Communist Party is capable of training and organising a vanguard of the proletariat and the whole mass of the working people'. This was the logical climax of the policy, begun in 1918, of suppressing all opposition to Bolshevik rule. Lenin's announcements at this critical juncture made it extremely difficult for doubting members to come out and openly challenge NEP, since this would appear tantamount to challenging the party itself.

Bukharin's role

What also helped preserve Bolshevik unity was the decision by Bukharin, the outstanding Bolshevik economist, to abandon his opposition to NEP and become its most enthusiastic supporter. His new approach was expressed in his appeal to the peasants: 'Enrich yourselves under the NEP'. Bukharin believed that the greater amount of money the peasants would have, as a result of selling their surplus grain, would stimulate industry since their extra income would be spent on buying manufactured goods. It is significant that during the final two years of Lenin's life, when he became increasingly exhausted by a series of crippling strokes, it was Bukharin who was his closest colleague. The last two articles published under Lenin's name, *On Co-operation* and *Better Fewer, But Better*, were justifications of the NEP. Both were the work of Bukharin.

Economic results of NEP

Key question
How far did NEP meet Russia's needs?

In the end, the most powerful reason for the party to accept the NEP proved to be a statistical one. The production figures suggested that the policy worked. By the time of Lenin's death in 1924, the Soviet economy had begun to make a marked recovery. Table 5.3 indicates the scale of this.

Table 5.3: Growth under the NEP

	1921	*1922*	*1923*	*1924*
Grain harvest (million tons)	37.6	50.3	56.6	51.4
Value of factory output (in millions of roubles)	2004	2619	4005	4660
Electricity (million kilowatt hours)	520	775	1146	1562
Average monthly wage of urban worker (in roubles)	10.2	12.2	15.9	20.8

Lenin's claim that under the NEP the Bolsheviks would still control 'the commanding heights of the economy' was shown to be substantially correct by the census of 1923. Figure 5.5 and Table 5.4 indicate that, in broad terms, the NEP had produced an economic balance: while agriculture and trade were largely in private hands, the state dominated Russian industry.

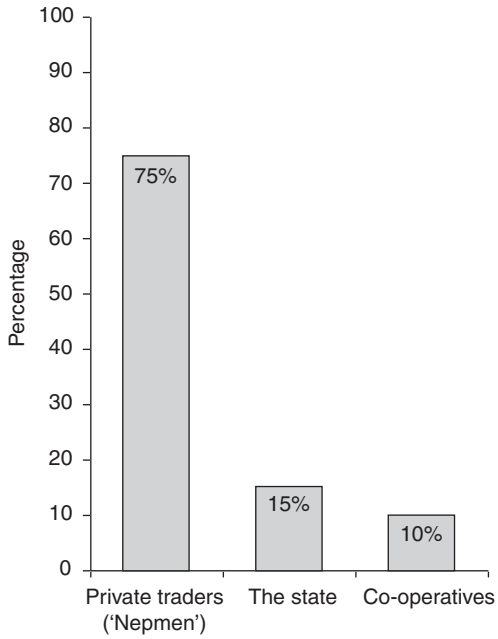


Figure 5.5: Share of trade

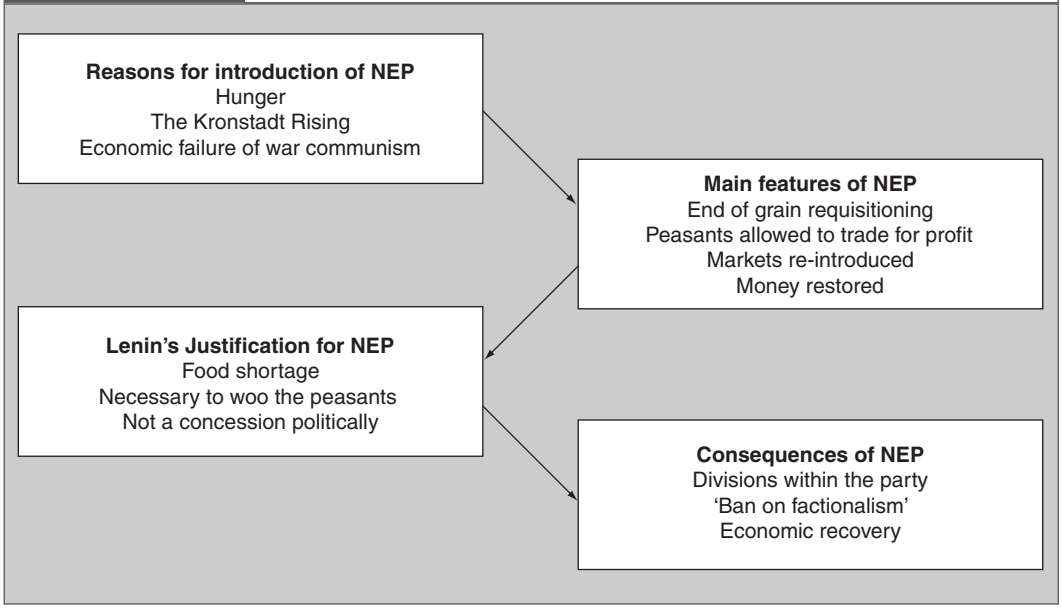
Table 5.4: Balance between main types of enterprise

	Proportion of industrial workforce	*Average number of workers in each factory*
Private enterprises	12%	2
State enterprises	85%	155
Co-operatives	3%	15

Key term
Co-operatives
Groups of workers or farmers working together on their own enterprise.

The NEP was not a total success. Its opponents criticised it on the grounds that the balance it appeared to have achieved was notional rather than real. The fact was that industry failed to expand as fast as agriculture. The 'Nepmen' may have done well, but there was high unemployment in the urban areas. NEP would continue to be a matter of dispute and division among the Bolsheviks long after Lenin's death.

Summary diagram: The New Economic Policy (NEP)



Study Guide: AS Questions

In the style of Edexcel

How successfully did the New Economic Policy deal with the problems it was designed to solve in the period 1921–4?

(30 marks)

Exam tips

The cross-references are intended to take you straight to the material that will help you to answer the question.

This question is asking you for a judgement on the effects of the New Economic Policy (NEP), but it has a very precise focus. The key words for you to address in your planning are 'deal with problems' and 'designed to solve'. This means that you will first need to identify what those problems were. Essentially you will be showing that the NEP modified the economic policies of war communism in order to reduce the problems that had developed because of it (page 152). Your plan could usefully be divided into three sections:

- The economic problems in 1921: the problems associated with the period of war communism by 1921 can be grouped into: low industrial production (pages 143–4); low agricultural production leading to severe famine (pages 144–5).
- The aims and approaches of the NEP: the NEP involved a restoration of a mixed economy and some retreat from the principle of state control (page 152). Its central aims were to promote economic recovery and reduce famine (page 152). How did it inject wealth into the economy, stimulate industry and agricultural production (page 153)?
- The extent to which the NEP improved Russia's economy by 1924: in assessing the success of the NEP be careful not to be drawn into criticisms of it that are not related directly to the economic problems of 1921. How far did it promote economic recovery? There was a notable increase in production (page 154). In dealing with the statistics you have on page 154, it would be helpful to comment on them rather than simply reproduce them. For example, if grain output went up from 37.6 to 51.4 million tons, by what proportion or percentage did it increase?

Finally, you will need to come to an overall conclusion. In order to reach a judgement about the extent of success you will also need to acknowledge the limitations of the NEP (page 155). What is your decision? In terms of the economic aims Lenin had in 1921 was the NEP a success?

In the style of OCR B

Answer **both** parts of your chosen question.

(a) Why did the Bolsheviks win the Civil War?
[Explaining actions, events and circumstances.] (25 marks)

(b) How is the introduction of the New Economic Policy best explained?
[Explaining ideas, intentions and circumstances.] (25 marks)

Exam tips

Read again the General Introduction at the start of the Study Guide to Chapter 2, page 54.

(a) The initial focus needs to be causal or intentional, and then switch. Remember to look at both sides: factors that worked against the Whites and the Greens as well as those that worked for the Reds. Also, do not forget to decide which was the most important reason (or the key two or even three reasons) – and then explain why. You might start your first circle by considering briefly how the situation the Reds found themselves in in 1921 compared to that of November 1917. The contrast was enormous: when the Provisional Government fell, the Bolsheviks controlled only Petrograd. Your essay is going to look at how and why that situation changed so dramatically.

Try to take a thematic approach looking at both sides simultaneously on each issue/factor. Your first group of circles could focus on the organisation and morale of both sides, contrasting Red unity with White disunity, the better morale of the Reds compared to that of the Whites, and the far better organisation and discipline of the Red Army compared to the various White forces. Point to the shortage of White supplies and the scattered nature of their forces, and their lack of railways (unlike the Bolsheviks). In that contrast, the central importance of Trotsky will be a big factor in the Bolshevik's favour. From that point, your next circles could move into the war itself – the quality of Trotsky's Red Army compared to the (usually) poorer 'generalship' of the Whites and the general lack of commitment of the scattered interventionist forces from abroad. Finally, you could focus your last circle on how close the Reds came to defeat: Lenin was almost assassinated twice; the Czech Legion was formidable. Lenin did win, but not completely. With British help, the Baltic republics defeated the Red Army and established their independence. They were driven out of Poland too. So when they faced opponents as determined as they were, the Red Army could be defeated. What does that tell us? It suggests that White weaknesses were more important than Bolshevik strengths in explaining the outcome.

(b) Begin with an empathetic, an intentional or a causal explanation, and then switch to the others because all three have to be used. Given the wording of the question, you need to build into your circles of explanation an evaluation of the relative importance of

the various reasons you consider so you answer directly 'best explained'.

You might decide to start your circles with the human problems facing Russia in 1921: economic failure and starvation. They provide the broad context within which the decision was taken. These circles will overlap with another explaining why the decision was taken when it was: the immediate circumstance of anti-Bolshevik risings (notably Kronstadt). Another set of circles should focus on Lenin's stated reasons and justifications: the people needed to be fed and the party needed active support from the peasants. You must decide whether, as he claimed, the New Economic Policy (NEP) was true to Marxist theory, was not a U-turn and was not an admission that war communism had been a terrible mistake. Lenin's assertion to the 10th Party Conference that Kronstadt 'lit up reality like a lightning flash' makes a good launch-pad for that final circle. Most have seen the NEP as showing that Lenin was pragmatic, a realist, but make the key point that he only modified economic systems. Political control remained even more tightly in Bolshevik hands. Does that suggest short-term rather than fundamental change?

6 Interpreting the Russian Revolution

POINTS TO CONSIDER
Three main arguments can be identified relating to late Imperial Russia and the Revolution that destroyed it:

- The Revolution dramatically and decisively changed the course of Russian history, ending any hope that Russia might become a modern democratic state.
- The Bolshevik *coup* in October 1917 did not mark a real break with the past, since, although the form of government changed, its essentially authoritarian and non-representative character remained.
- The October Revolution was not a victory for Marxism, since Lenin in his leadership and consolidation of the Revolution did not follow or fulfil strict Marxist theory.

By examining these propositions, you will be in an informed position to understand the varying interpretations of the Russian Revolution. However, there will never be entire agreement about the significance of the Bolshevik *coup*. Over a decade after the collapse of Communism in 1991, the debate still goes on about the event that brought the 70-year experiment into being. This chapter examines:

- Whether the October Revolution was inevitable
- The role of Lenin – central to any analysis of the Revolution
- The range of interpretations of 1917

1 | The Key Debate

A fascinating question to ponder is:

> Was late imperialist Russia already doomed when Nicholas II came to the throne in 1894?

It is possible to argue that by that time Russia was so backward that whatever she did she would be unable to catch up with the advanced nations. Her institutions – political, social and economic – were incapable of being reformed. This is what is meant by saying that Russia was in institutional crisis. She simply was not capable of making the adjustments necessary for her to become a modern state. Her underlying weaknesses were:

- a rapidly growing population
- land hunger
- food shortage
- an uneducated peasantry who made up four-fifths of the nation
- an economic system that stifled initiative
- a repressive political system that regarded all reform with suspicion and rewarded incompetence
- a government run by inept courtiers from a corrupt court headed by a tsar who lacked the realism to understand his nation's needs
- a social system, which, with its tiny middle class, its unenterprising aristocracy, and undermanned workforce, was ill equipped to embrace progress.

A counter view

Yet, other nations in other periods of history had surmounted what seemed like crippling disadvantages. An outstanding contemporary example was Japan, which, as Russia learned to her cost in 1904–5 (see pages 30–2), turned itself from a feudal to a modern society in scarcely more than a generation. It is equally possible, therefore, to argue from an optimistic angle that Russia had the potential to overcome her problems and become a modern state. A list of Russia's strengths might include:

- a growing population, which all societies need if they are to modernise successfully
- rich natural resources, e.g. oil, which, if fully exploited, could have earned her huge foreign revenues
- the largest army in Europe, which other nations feared
- the great industrial spurt of the 1890s, which suggested that she might be capable of sustained economic growth
- the beginnings of a parliamentary democracy in the form of the duma.

These, of course, were no guarantee of modernisation but they did hint that Russia had the means to overcome her backwardness. This line of reasoning may be pushed further by suggesting that Russia was indeed on the path to progress only for the war to intervene in 1914 and destroy the gains that she was making.

Doubters and believers

The argument can be said to be between the doubters and the believers. The doubters argue that the Bolshevik Revolution was simply the concluding part of the sequence of events that led to the collapse of old Imperial Russia. The Bolsheviks did not cause the Revolution; they were the beneficiaries of it.

The believers counter this by claiming that pre-1914 Russia was on an upward path; it was the strain of the war that began in that year that destroyed the progress Russia had been making, and created the disturbed and confused situation which the Bolsheviks exploited to their advantage in the October *coup*.

One of the particularly strong points in the doubters' case is the crippling lack of leadership from which Russia suffered. Nicholas II

and his ministers led the nation so poorly that Russia was unable to use the strengths it possessed. Russia, therefore, could not modernise. The tsarist system itself was basically opposed to progress.

It is true that on occasion, as under Witte and Stolypin, tsardom dallied with reform. But too often reaction prevailed. In the end, the tsarist system showed itself unwilling to make the political adjustments needed to accommodate the social and economic changes that were occurring. It seemed to have overcome the challenge of 1905, but later events suggested this had been no more than a reprieve.

Whether tsardom would have survived but for the onset of war in 1914 must remain an open question. What is clear is that the war revealed both the fragility of the economic advance made since the 1890s and the weakness of the tsarist state as an organisation.

The war also finally destroyed the myth of the tsar as the protector of the Russian people. The lack of character that Nicholas II revealed when faced by the military and political crises that confronted Russia after 1914 eroded the loyalty of the people. By February 1917, not even the tsar's traditional supporters were prepared to save him. It was not the demonstrators in Petrograd, but the army high command and the aristocratic members of the duma who advised him to abdicate.

The Provisional Government

Nicholas II's government did not show leadership; nor did the government that succeeded it. The collapse of tsardom left a power vacuum. Although the Provisional Government held office between February and October 1917, it never held power. It lacked the ruthlessness that the desperate situation demanded. Furthermore, from the first, its authority was weakened by the existence of the Petrograd Soviet. Unable to fight the war successfully and unwilling to introduce the reforms that might have given it popular support, the Provisional Government tottered towards collapse. When it was challenged in October 1917 by the Bolsheviks, who themselves had been on the point of political extinction in July, it was friendless. It gave in with scarcely a show of resistance.

Key question
What principles guided Lenin as a revolutionary?

2 | Lenin's Role as a Revolutionary

The debate above can never be finally settled, since, in the end, historians can never know what might have happened; they can comment only on what did happen. However, the importance of the argument is the bearing it has on the question of what actually took place in 1917.

In name, it was the Soviets that took power in October 1917, but in reality it was the Bolsheviks. It was also the Bolsheviks who proceeded to turn Russia into a one-party state. It took them two years of bitter civil war to do it, but they alone of all the political parties in post-tsarist Russia had the necessary willingness to destroy whatever stood in their way.

Lenin as heir to Russian tradition

Although Lenin rejected the Russian past, he remained very much its inheritor. He had as little time for democracy as the tsars had. The rule of the Bolsheviks was a continuation of the absolutist tradition in Russia. The Civil War and the foreign interventions, by intensifying the threat to the Bolshevik government, provided it with the pretext for demanding total conformity from the masses and the party members as the price of the Revolution's survival.

Yet, it is doubtful whether, even without that threat, Bolshevism could have developed other than as an oppressive system. Its dogmatic Marxist creed made it as intolerant of other political ideas as tsardom had been. The forcible dissolution of the Constituent Assembly in 1918, the Terror and the crushing of the Kronstadt revolt in 1921 were clear proof of the absolutism of Bolshevik control. 1917 did not mark a complete break with the past. Rather it was the replacement of one form of state authoritarianism with another.

Lenin's Marxism

Lenin's greatest single achievement as a revolutionary was to reshape Marxist theory to make it fit Russian conditions. The instrument that he chose for this was the Bolshevik Party. Although Lenin was careful always to describe his policies as democratic, for him the term had a particular meaning. Democracy was not to be reckoned as a matter of numbers but as a method of Party rule. Because the party was the vehicle of historical change, its role was not to win large-scale backing, but to direct the Revolution from above, regardless of the scale of popular support. 'No revolution', Lenin wrote, 'ever waits for formal majorities'.

Lenin's view of the Russian proletariat

Lenin's political certainties followed logically from his view of the contemporary Russian working class. Its small size and limited political awareness meant that it could not achieve revolution unaided. It was, therefore, the historical mission of the enlightened Bolshevik Party to use its unique understanding of how human society worked to guide the proletariat towards its revolutionary destiny. Since authority flowed from the centre outwards, it was the role of the leaders to lead, the role of the party members to follow. The special term describing this was 'democratic centralism'. Lenin defined it in these terms:

> Classes are led by parties, and parties are led by individuals who are called leaders. This is the ABC. The will of a class is sometimes fulfilled by a dictator. Soviet socialist democracy is not in the least incompatible with individual rule and dictatorship. What is necessary is individual rule, the recognition of the dictatorial powers of one man. All phrases about equal rights are nonsense.

With a small change in the political terminology this could serve equally well as a justification for tsarist absolutism.

Lenin's adaptability

A marked feature of Lenin as a revolutionary was his ability to adjust theory to fit circumstances. This pragmatic approach often led him to diverge from the strict pattern of the Marxist dialectic with its clear-cut stages of class revolution (see page 21), but it made him and his followers infinitely adaptable. In his writings and speeches he always insisted that his ideas were wholly in accordance with those of Marx. However, in practical terms, Lenin's role in Russia after April 1917 was that of a skilled opportunist who outmanoeuvred a collection of opponents who never matched him in sense of purpose and sheer determination.

'The telescoped revolution'

Key term

'Telescoped revolution'
The notion that the final two stages of revolution, bourgeois and proletarian, could be compressed into one.

Lenin used his concept of the **'telescoped revolution'** as a very useful instrument that allowed the Bolsheviks to organise revolution against the Provisional Government without having to wait for the Russian proletariat to grow substantially in size. It was not necessary for the Russian workers to initiate the Revolution; it was enough that it was carried out in their name by the Bolsheviks, the special agents of historical change and the true voice of the proletariat.

This readiness to make Marxist theory conform to practical necessity was very evident in Lenin's economic policies. A basic premise of Marxism was that political systems were determined by the economic structure on which they rested. Lenin turned this idea upside down. His government after 1917 used its political power to determine the character of the economy. His flexible approach was then shown in 1921 when he introduced NEP, a policy that entailed the abandonment of war communism and a reversion to capitalism.

Lenin was perfectly clear about what his ultimate objectives were but he was wholly unprincipled in the methods he used to achieve them. The end justified the means. This approach was wholly consistent with his interpretation of the scientific nature of Marxism. Once the concept of the historical inevitability of the proletarian revolution had been accepted, it followed that the binding duty of revolutionaries was to work for that end by whatever means necessary.

The Bolsheviks' belief that they were the special agents of historical change led logically to their destruction of all other political parties. Since history was on their side, the Bolsheviks had the right to absolute control.

Lenin the international revolutionary

A vital factor to stress when assessing Lenin's role is that he regarded himself primarily as an international revolutionary. Originally he expected that the successful Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917 would be the first stage in a worldwide proletarian uprising. When this proved mistaken, he had to adapt to a situation in which Bolshevik Russia became an isolated revolutionary state, beset by internal and external enemies.

Lenin responded by making another major adjustment of Marxist theory. Marx had taught that proletarian revolution would be an international class movement. Yet, the 1917 Revolution had been the work not of a class but of a party and had been restricted to one nation. Lenin explained this in terms of a delayed revolution; the international rising would occur at some point in the future; in the interim Soviet Russia must consolidate its own individual revolution.

This placed the Bolshevik government and its international agency, the Comintern, in an ambiguous position. What was their essential role to be? At Lenin's death in 1924, this question – whether Soviet Russia's primary aim was world revolution or national survival – was still unresolved.

3 | Interpretations of the Russian Revolution

The Russian Revolution was an extraordinary experiment that changed the political, social, cultural and economic life of the nation. The collapse of Communism in the USSR in the early 1990s seemed to indicate the experiment had failed. But that served only to increase interest in the subject. The following paragraphs list the major interpretations between 1917 and the present. There have been so many important studies that the listing has to a very selective one. Nevertheless, although it does not include all the theories that have been put forward, it does indicate some of the principal approaches.

A central question with which all the interpretations deal is:

What was the real character of the Russian Revolution of 1917?

The traditional Soviet view

This was the official version put out and maintained by the **Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU)**. It claimed that in 1917 Lenin and his Bolshevik Party had seized power in the name of the people and had then gone on to create a workers' state. In doing this they were fulfilling the scientific principles first defined by Karl Marx who had spoken of the inevitable triumph of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie. This view of what had happened was the only one permitted in the USSR until the 1990s.

Key term

Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU)
The new name the Bolshevik Party adopted in 1919.

It is worth pointing out that Soviet historians were not neutral scholars; they were state employees who were required to be active promoters of the Revolution. A typical expression of their official approach was given in 1960 by the Academy of Sciences, the Soviet body which controlled historical publications: 'The study of history has never been a mere curiosity, a withdrawal into the past for the sake of the past. Historical science has been and remains an arena of sharp ideological struggle and remains a class, party history'.

The theory of 'the unfinished revolution'

This view is associated particularly with Trotsky and his followers. It argues that a genuine workers' revolution had indeed occurred in 1917, but it had then been betrayed by Lenin's successors. According

to this school of thought, which was powerfully represented in the West by such writers as Isaac Deutscher and Adam Ulam, the initial revolutionary achievement of the workers was perverted by the deadening rule of the bureaucratic and repressive CPSU under Stalin. That was why Lenin's revolution was unfinished.

The 'optimistic' view

This interpretation was advanced by Russian *émigrés* (those who fled abroad to escape the Revolution) and held by such historians as George Katkov. The 'optimism' lay in their claim that Imperial Russia had been successfully transforming itself into a modern, democratic, industrial society until weakened by the 1914–17 war. However, at that point, the Bolsheviks, who were in the pay of the German government, had unscrupulously exploited the nation's difficulties to seize power in an illegal *coup* and then create a Communist tyranny, which diverted Russia from the path of progress.

The 'pessimistic' view

In the 1960s, Leopold Haimson, an American scholar, had a major impact on studies of the Revolution. He suggested that, far from moving towards modernisation, Imperial Russia by 1914 was heading towards revolutionary turmoil. Hence, the term 'pessimist'. He argued that the First World War made little difference. Russia was suffering an 'institutional crisis'. Haimson meant by this that an unbridgeable gap had developed between the reactionary tsarist establishment and the progressive professional classes and urban workers. So great was the divide that violent revolution was the unavoidable outcome.

Key term

Glasnost
The Russian word for 'openness', adopted as a description of the reforming policies introduced by the Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, in the late 1980s and 1990s.

The post-*glasnost* Soviet view

During the years of the Gorbachev reforms of the late 1980s in the USSR, a more open-minded approach became noticeable among Soviet historians. Many of them were now prepared to admit that mistakes had been made by the Bolsheviks. The leading exponent of this new honesty was Dmitri Volkogonov, who concluded that Stalin's tyranny was a logical continuation of the authoritarianism of Lenin and the Bolsheviks after 1917. Volkogonov paid tribute to the work of Leonard Schapiro and Robert Conquest, Western historians who had been initially sympathetic to Soviet Communism but whose subsequent researches led them to depict it as essentially oppressive.

Post-Soviet revisionism

The collapse of the Communist Party and the disintegration of the USSR in the 1990s had a profound impact on historical thinking. Interpretation is rarely neutral. The way historians view the past is always influenced by their experiences of the present. The survival of Soviet Russia for nearly 75 years had helped to give strength to the Marxist analysis of history. The very existence of this Communist state was taken by its supporters to be proof that it had come into being in accordance with the scientific laws of the dialectic – the clash of class against class until the final victory of the workers.

However, once the Communist Party and the USSR had collapsed this rigid view of history lost its appeal. After 1991, those writers on Russia who had never accepted the view that history was pre-shaped by unchangeable social laws regained their confidence. They reasserted the importance of what individuals and groups had actually done. The Russian Revolution had unfolded the way it had, not in accordance with the dialectic, but because individuals and groups had chosen to behave in a particular way rather than in another.

Such views were given added credibility by the opening of the Russian archives after the fall of Communism in 1991. The new non-Communist government allowed access to the hundreds of thousands of documents that had lain unexamined in the Soviet state archives during the previous 75 years. Before he died in 1995, Volkogonov used these to write a revisionist trilogy of biographies on Lenin, Stalin and Trotsky in which he detailed their mistakes and failings. A number of Western scholars were also permitted to study the Russian documentary treasure trove. Robert Service's celebrated biography of Lenin drew on the previously unseen Lenin manuscripts.

No single identifiable viewpoint has yet emerged. Indeed, outstanding modern historians, such as Orlando Figes, Richard Pipes and Robert Service, differ on a whole range of issues. But what they share is a **non-determinist approach**. In Russia nothing was pre-ordained, nothing absolutely had to happen the way it did. Politics was crucial. Things occurred the way they did because of the decisions made by the participants.

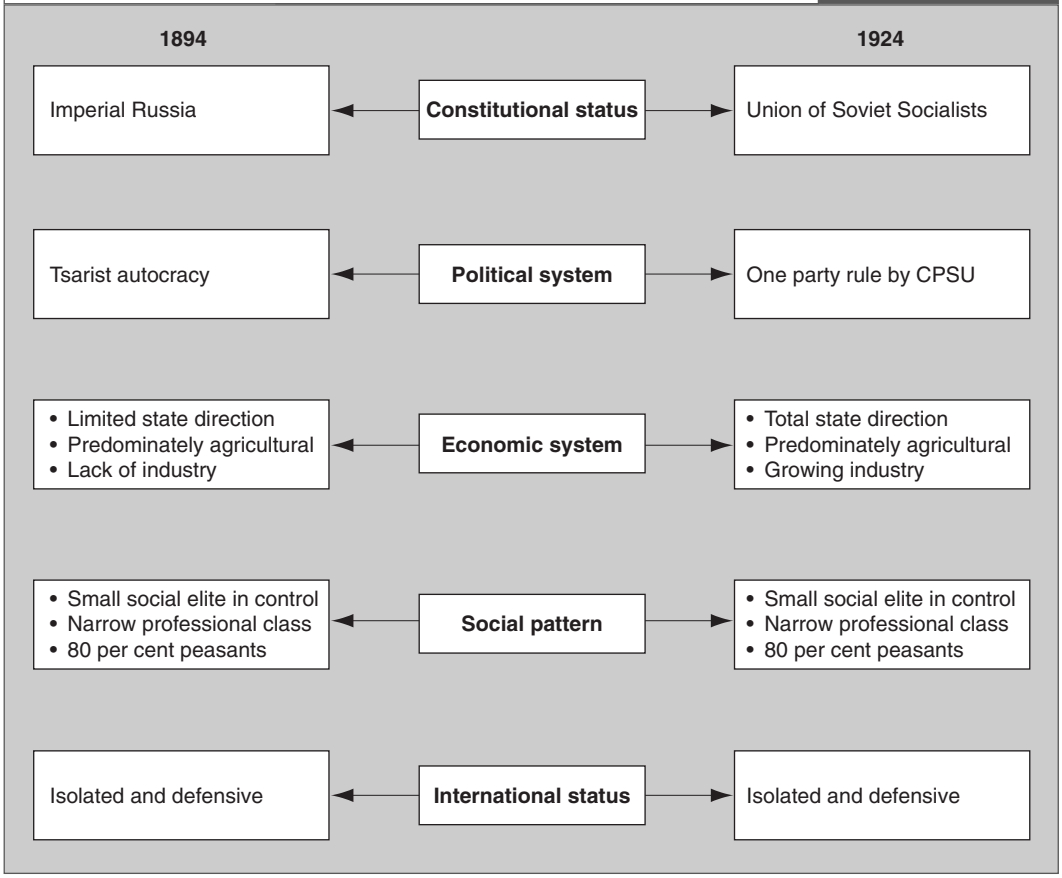
Key term

Non-determinist approach
Rejects the idea that history follows a fixed, inevitable course.

Some key books in the debate

Isaac Deutscher, *Trotsky* (OUP, 1954–70)
Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891–1924* (Jonathan Cape, 1996)
George Katkov and Harold Shukman, *Lenin's Path to Power* (Macdonald, 1971)
Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution 1899–1919* (Collins Harvill, 1990)
Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime* (Collins Harvill, 1994)
Richard Pipes (ed), *The Unknown Lenin: From the Soviet Archives* (Yale, 1996)
Richard Pipes, *Three Whys of the Russian Revolution* (Pimlico, 1998)
Robert Service, *Lenin: A Biography* (Macmillan, 2000)
Dmitri Volkogonov, *Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy* (Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1991)
Dmitri Volkogonov, *Lenin: Life and Legacy* (HarperCollins, 1994)
Dmitri Volkogonov, *Trotsky: The Eternal Revolutionary* (Free Press, 1996)
Dmitri Volkogonov, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire: Political Leaders Lenin to Gorbachev* (HarperCollins, 1997)

Summary diagram: Russia in 1894 and 1924



Glossary

Accommodationism The idea that the Bolsheviks should accept the situation that followed the February Revolution, co-operating with the Provisional Government, and being prepared to work with the other revolutionary and reforming parties.

Agents provocateurs Government agents who infiltrate opposition movements with the deliberate aim of stirring up trouble so that the ringleaders can be exposed and dealt with.

Agrarian economy The system in which food and goods are produced on the land by arable and dairy farming, and then traded.

Anarchy An absence of government or authority, leading to disorder.

Annexation Seizure of territory.

ARA The American Relief Association, formed by Herbert Hoover (a future President of the USA, 1929–33) to provide food and medical supplies for post-war Europe.

Autocracy The absolute rule of one person – in Russia this meant the tsar.

Autonomy National self-government.

Balkans The area of south-eastern Europe (fringed by Austria-Hungary to the north, the Black Sea to the east, Turkey to the south and the Aegean Sea to the west) which had largely been under Turkish control. As Turkey weakened as a power the peoples of the region, who came from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, struggled for independence, often competing fiercely against one another for territory.

Bi-cameral A parliament made up of two chambers or houses, an upper and a lower.

Bolsheviks From *bolshinstvo*, Russian for majority.

Bosphorus The narrow waterway linking the Black Sea with the Dardanelles.

Bourgeoisie The owners of capital, the boss class, who exploited the workers but who would be overthrown by them in the revolution to come.

Buffer state An area that lies between two states and so providing protection for each against the other.

Capital The essential money resource that provides the means for investment and expansion. No economy can grow without it.

Central Committee The decision-making body of the Bolshevik Party. It later became known as the Politburo.

Central Powers Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey.

Centralisation The concentration of political and economic power at the centre.

Cheka The letters of the word stood for 'the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Fighting Counter-Revolution, Sabotage and Speculation'.

Class struggle A continuing conflict at every stage of history between those who possessed economic and political power and those who did not, in simple terms 'the haves' and 'the have-nots'.

Comintern Short for the Communist International, a body set up in Moscow in March 1919 to organise worldwide revolution.

Commissar for Foreign Affairs Equivalent to the Secretary of State in the USA or the Foreign Secretary in Britain.

Commissars Russian for ministers – Lenin chose the word because he said 'it reeks of blood'.

Commissions Official appointments of individuals to the various officer ranks.

Committee system A process in which the duma deputies formed various committees to discuss and advise on particular issues.

Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) The new name the Bolshevik Party adopted in 1919.

Confidant A person in whom another places a special trust and to whom one confides intimate secrets.

Conscription The forcing of large numbers of peasants to join the armed services.

Conservatism Suspicion of change and, therefore, resistance to it.

Constitutional monarchy A system of government in which the king or emperor rules but governs through elected representatives who have authority to countermand his decisions.

Co-operatives Groups of workers or farmers working together on their own enterprise.

Cossacks The remnants of the elite cavalry regiment of the tsars.

Counter-revolution A term used by the Bolsheviks to cover any action of which they disapproved by branding it as reactionary and opposed to progress.

Dark masses The dismissive term used in court and government circles to describe the peasants.

De jure By legitimate legal right.

Democratic centralism The notion developed by Lenin that true democracy in the Bolshevik party lay in the obedience of the members to the authority and instructions of the leaders. The justification for this was that while, as representatives of the workers, all Bolsheviks were genuine revolutionaries, only the leaders were sufficiently educated in the science of revolution to understand what needed to be done. In practice, democratic centralism meant the Bolsheviks doing what Lenin told them to do.

Dialectic The violent struggle which takes place in every historical period between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots', the exploiting and the exploited classes of the day.

Diktat A settlement imposed on a weaker nation by a stronger.

Double-agent A government agent who pretends to be spying for the opposition against the authorities but who reports plans and secrets back to the authorities.

Dual authority Lenin first coined this term to describe the balance of power between the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet.

Duma The Russian parliament that existed from 1906 to 1917.

Economism Putting the improvement of the workers' conditions before the need for revolution.

Emigrant internationalists Russian revolutionaries living in exile.

Entrepreneurialism The dynamic attitude associated with western commercial and industrial activity in this period.

Factionalism The forming within the party of groups with a particular complaint or grievance. Lenin used the term to brand as disloyal those Bolsheviks who opposed central party policy.

Finance-capital Lenin's term for the resource used by stronger countries to exploit weaker ones. By investing heavily in another country, a stronger power made that country, dependent on it. It was a form of imperialism. In Lenin's view, the Great War had been caused by the competition between the imperialist powers, like France, Germany and Britain, for the dwindling markets in which to invest their surplus capital.

Fundamental Laws of the Empire Article 1 of this document declared: 'The Emperor of all the Russias is an autocratic and unlimited monarch. God himself ordains that all must bow to his supreme power, not only out of fear but also out of conscience'.

'German woman' The disparaging term used by anti-tsarists to describe Alexandra.

Ghettos Particular areas where Jews were concentrated and to which they were restricted.

Glasnost The Russian word for 'openness', adopted as a description of the reforming policies introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev in late 1980s and 1990s.

God's anointed The ceremony of anointing the tsar with holy oil at his coronation symbolised that he governed by divine right.

Gold standard The system in which the rouble, Russia's basic unit of currency, had a fixed gold content, thus giving it strength when exchanged with other currencies.

'Great spurt' The spread of industry and the increase in production that occurred in Russia in the 1890s.

Greens Largely made up of groups from the national minorities, they were nationalists, struggling for independence from central Russian control.

Haemophilia A condition in which the blood does not clot leaving the sufferer with heavy, painful bruising and internal bleeding, which can be life-threatening.

Indemnities Payment of war costs demanded by the victors of the losers.

Institutions The formal structures on which a society depends, e.g. government, the administrative system, the law, education, the economy.

Intelligentsia This was not so much a single class as a cross-section of the educated and more enlightened members of Russian society who had been influenced by western ideas and wanted to see their nation adopt progressive changes.

International revolutionaries Those Marxists who were willing to sacrifice mere national interests in the cause of the worldwide rising of the workers.

Kulaks The Bolshevik term for the class of rich exploiting peasants. The notion was largely a myth. Rather than being a class of exploiters, the kulaks were simply the more efficient farmers who were marginally more prosperous.

Labour Commissar Equivalent to a Minister of Labour, responsible for industry and its workers.

Labourists What the SRs stood as in the election to the first duma.

Left Communists Those Bolsheviks who were convinced that their first task was to consolidate the October Revolution by driving out the German imperialist armies from Russia.

Left Social Revolutionaries Wanted to continue the policy of terrorism inherited from 'The People's Will'.

Legislative duma A parliament with law-making powers.

Liberals The term described those who wanted political or social change in Russia, but who believed that it could be achieved by reforming rather than destroying the tsarist system.

Liberal ideas Notions that called for limitations on the powers of rulers and governments and greater freedom for the people.

Mandate The authority to govern granted by a majority of the people through elections.

Martial law The whole of the population being placed under military discipline.

Marxism-Leninism The notion that Marx's theory of class war as interpreted by Lenin was a supremely accurate and unchallengeable piece of scientific analysis.

Mensheviks From *menshinstvo*, Russian for minority.

Militia A group of local citizens called together and given arms when a crisis requires the use of organised force to control the situation.

Mir The traditional village commune.

Modern industrial state The term describes a nation whose economic development enables it to compete on equal terms with other advanced countries. This invariably means having a strong industrial base and sufficient capital to undertake progressive social reforms.

Monarchists Reactionaries who wanted a restoration of tsardom.

Moscow In 1918, for security reasons, Moscow replaced Petrograd as the capital of Soviet Russia.

National insurance A system providing workers with state benefits, such as unemployment pay and medical treatment, in return for the workers' contributing regularly to a central fund.

National minority governments A number of Russia's ethnic peoples exploited the government's difficulties by setting up their own governments which they claimed were independent of central control.

Nepmen Those who stood to gain from the free trading permitted under NEP: the rich peasants, the retailers, the traders and the small-scale manufacturers.

Nepotism A corrupt practice in which those distributing positions and offices give them to their family or friends rather than to people of merit.

Non-determinist approach Rejects the idea that history follows a fixed, inevitable course.

Non-partisan Politically neutral, belonging to no party.

Okhrana The tsarist secret police whose special role was hunting down subversives who challenged the tsarist regime. It stood outside the law, had unlimited powers of arrest and was answerable only to the tsar.

Orgburo Short for Organisation Bureau, which turned Soviet policies into practice.

Parliamentary-bourgeois republic Lenin's contemptuous term for the Provisional Government, which he dismissed as an unrepresentative mockery that had simply replaced the feudal control of the tsar with the bourgeois control of the old duma.

Participatory government A form of rule in which ordinary people choose their government through voting for individual representatives and have the power to vote them out if they do not serve their interests.

Passive disobedience A tactic in which opponents of a government show their disfavour not by violent challenge but by refusing to obey particular laws.

People's militia Volunteer law-enforcement officers drawn from among the ordinary people.

Per capita production Literally the amount 'per head' – this is calculated by dividing the amount produced by the number of people in the population.

Petrograd Was the Russian name for the city of St Petersburg, adopted for patriotic reasons soon after the First World War began in 1914.

'People' That part of the population that the SRs believed truly represented the character and will of the Russian nation.

Pogroms Fierce persecutions which often involved the wounding or killing of Jews and the destruction of their property.

Politburo Short for the Political Bureau, responsible for major policy decisions.

Political activists Those who believe that it is not enough simply to talk and write about altering the system; change can be achieved only by direct action.

Political commissars Dedicated Party workers whose function was to accompany the officers permanently and report on their political correctness. No military order carried final authority unless a commissar countersigned it.

Political subversives Kornilov's term for the Social Democrats and the Social Revolutionaries in Russia.

Populists *Narodniks* (from the Russian word for 'the people').

Private enterprise Economic activity organised by individuals or companies, not the government.

Progressists A party of businessmen who favoured moderate reform.

Progressives Those who believed in parliamentary government for Russia.

Proletariat The exploited industrial workers who would triumph in the last great class struggle.

Radicalisation A movement towards more sweeping or revolutionary ideas.

Reactionary Resistant to any form of progressive change.

Red Guards Despite the Bolshevik legend that these were the crack military forces of the Revolution, the Red Guards, who numbered some 10,000 in 1917, were largely made up of fairly elderly men recruited from the workers in the factories.

Reds The Bolsheviks and their supporters.

Reformers Usually referred to as liberals, were strong critics of the tsarist system who believed it could be changed for the better by pressure from without and reform from within.

Reparations Payment of war costs by the loser to the victor.

Requisitioning State authorised takeover of property or resources.

Revolutionary socialism The belief that change could be achieved only through the violent overthrow of the tsarist system.

Right Social Revolutionaries The more moderate members. Believed in revolution as the ultimate goal, but were prepared to work with other parties for an immediate improvement in the conditions of the workers and peasants.

Rightists Not a single party; they represented a range of conservative views from right of centre to extreme reaction.

Romanov dynasty The Russian monarchy was hereditary. Between 1613 and 1917, Russia was ruled by members of the House of Romanov.

Rural crisis Refers to the problem of land shortage and over-population in the countryside produced by the huge increase in the number of people living in Russia by the late nineteenth century.

Russian The predominant ethnic group in Russia were the Slavs.

Russification Russian was declared to be the official first language; this meant that all legal proceedings, such as trials, and all administration had to be conducted in Russian. Public office was closed to those not fluent in the language.

Secretariat A form of civil service that carried out the administration of policies.

Serbian nationalists Activists struggling for Serbia's independence from Austria-Hungary.

Slav The predominant ethnic group to be found in Russia and eastern Europe.

Slavophiles Regarded Western values as corrupting. Urged the nation to preserve itself as 'holy Russia', by glorying in its Slav culture and its separate historical tradition.

Smolny The Bolshevik headquarters in Petrograd, housed in what had been a young ladies' finishing school.

Soviet Russian word for a council made up of elected representatives.

Sovnarkom Russian for government or cabinet.

Starets Russian for holy man, the nick-name Rasputin was given by the impressionable peasants who believed he had special powers.

State capitalism The direction and control of the economy by the government, using its central power and authority.

Stavka The high command of the Russian army.

Sultanate The government of Turkey under the nominal authority of the sultan.

System of dating Until February 1918, Russia used the Julian calendar which was 13 days behind the Gregorian calendar in general use in most Western countries. That is why different books quote different dates for the same event. This book uses the older dating for the events of 1917.

Tariffs Duties imposed on foreign goods to keep their prices high and, therefore, discourage importers from bringing them into the country.

Tax in kind The peasant surrendering a certain amount of his produce, equivalent to a fixed sum of money.

'Telescoped revolution' The notion that the final two stages of revolution, bourgeois and proletarian, could be compressed into one.

Trade recession A serious fall in the demand for goods, which leads to production being cut back and workers being laid off.

Triple Entente Not a formal alliance, but a declared willingness by three powers to co-operate with each other.

Troika A three-man team.

Ukraine The area in southern Russia containing the largest non-Russian collection of people (23 million). It was also the largest food-producing region in the empire, hence its great importance.

Union of Municipal Councils A set of patriotic urban local councils.

Union of *Zemstvos* A set of patriotic rural local councils.

Universal suffrage An electoral system in which all adults have the right to vote.

Verst Approximately one-third of a mile.

Vesenkha The Supreme Council of the National Economy.

War-credits Money loaned on easy repayment terms to a country to help it finance its war effort.

Westerners Believed that if Russia wished to remain a great nation it would have to adopt the best features of the political and economic systems of the advanced countries of Western Europe.

White Russia The area, also known as Belorussia, which had been annexed by Russia in the eighteenth century. It was situated on Russia's Western borders between Lithuania and Poland.

Whites The Bolsheviks' opponents, including monarchists, looking for a tsarist restoration, and those parties who had been outlawed or suppressed by the new regime.

Zemgor The organisation which devoted itself to providing help for Russia's war wounded.

Zemstvos These local councils were elected bodies, but since the right to vote was based on land ownership the peasants were largely excluded.

Index