



## THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

### POSSIBLE ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- Who were the different factions involved in the Russian Revolution? What did they hope to achieve after Czar Nikolas II was deposed?
- What were the historical and current conditions that led to the communist takeover of the Russian State?
- How did the revolution change the lives of Russians and other people of the Soviet Republics?

### BACKGROUND

Political instability had been building in Russia since the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Land in Russia was owned by the monarchy and the aristocracy and peasants were alienated from the land and the products of their labor. The conditions facing urban workers were also wretched. Living conditions were crowded and unsanitary and workers faced grueling 60-70 hour work weeks in unsafe conditions. In 1905, a failed communist revolution had forced the Czar to nominally make changes, though little changed in fact. Strikes and peasant uprisings continued. Russian engagement in the First World War brought this instability to a head. In the early years of the war, Russia experienced major defeats and hundreds of thousands of Russian soldiers were killed and millions were injured. On

the home front, inflation was rampant and food was increasingly difficult to obtain. In March of 1917, another series of strikes and protests culminated in a coup, in which the Czar was forced to abdicate his throne.

The revolution was not singular, but in fact was composed of two revolutionary moments. In the first, Czar Nikolas II was forced to abdicate and the Duma, the Russian parliament, established a new Provisional Government. The Provisional Government, controlled by elite elements of Russian society, continued the work of the Russian State, including the Russian engagement in World War I. Alongside the Provisional Government, the Petrograd Soviet wielded considerable power and worked to prepare Russia for the transition to socialism. During the summer of 1917, Vladimir Lenin, leader of the Bolsheviks, returned to Russia from exile in Switzerland. The Bolsheviks organized soviets, elected councils of workers and peasants, around the country and amplified and channel the dissatisfaction of peasants, workers and soldiers. The second revolution, often called the October Revolution, saw the capture of the state by communist soviets. The Communists hoped to end the Russian engagement in World War I, and instigate a global class war. This effort failed and they were forced to make major concessions to end German aggression and make peace. Conservative elements of Russian society were deeply opposed to the communists and the conditions they had agreed upon to end Russia's involvement of World War I. The revolution gave way to the Russian civil war, a five-year conflict that saw 10M Russians killed, the anti-communist "Whites" destroyed, and the final consolidation of "Red" communist power over the Russian Empire.

The Russian revolution is not just important because of the political and economic transformations it brought about. The lives of millions of people were thrown into upheaval by the revolution and the following civil war. These consequences were born both by the Red and White factions, with the common people bearing the brunt. The new social order that emerged in the wake of the civil war presented a different vision of how society should be organized than that of the capitalist West. Communism, as a political philosophy, promised that workers would have control over their lives and their labor. "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs," was a common slogan used in communist organizing. The Soviet Union failed to live up the promise of communism and social life instead took shape of a drab uniformity for the masses and a life of luxury and opulence for the Party Elite.

## RESOURCES

### Personal Stories

- [How Russia's Shared Kitchens Helped Shape Soviet Politics \(NPR\)](#)
- [Communism: The Promise and the Reality - Red Flag \[pt 4/6\] \(Rasheedux\)](#)
- [Remembering Russia- Survivors of the 1917 Uprising Reflect On Their Journeys to America \(The Seattle Times\)](#)
- [21 October 1919: An Interview with Lenin \(The Guardian\)](#)
- [Interview with Tatiana Smilga-Poluyan, daughter of leading Soviet Left Oppositionist \(World Socialist Website\)](#)
- [CBS's "60 Minutes" interviews Nora Volkow, head of the National Institute of Drug Abuse and great-granddaughter of Leon Trotsky \(World Socialist Website\)](#)

### Art

- [Photos from the Bolshevik October Revolution \(TIME\)](#)
- [Did You Volunteer? \(British Library\)](#)
- [Be on Guard!](#)
- [Leon Trotsky](#)

### Articles

- [Lenin Works Archive Date Index \(Marxists.org\)](#)
- [Russian Provisional Government \(Britannica\)](#)
- [1918 Constitution of the Russian Soviet Federated](#)

[Socialist Republic \(Marxists.org\)](#)

- [Lenin on the Organisation of an Extraordinary Commission to Fight Counter-Revolution \(Euro Docs\)](#)
- [War and Revolution in Russia 1914 - 1921 \(BBC\)](#)
- [The October Revolution and the Tactics of the Russian Communists \(Marxists\)](#)
- [Timeline of the Russian Revolution \(Marxists.org\)](#)
- [The Abdication of Nicholas II \(BYU\)](#)
- [Petition Prepared for Presentation to Nicholas II \(Seton Hall\)](#)

### Data

- [Summary of Petrograd Election Returns, 1917 \(Grinnell\)](#)
- [Summary of Moscow Election Returns, 1917 \(Grinnell\)](#)
- [Europe 1914 - 1918 \(OmniAtlas\)](#)

### Videos

- [East-West Movie \(Amazon\)](#)
- [People's Century: Red Flag \(PBS\)](#)

### Poetry/Prose

- [Osip Mandelstam - Stalin Epigram](#)
- [Marina Tsvetaeva - The Seafarer](#)
- [Marina Tsvetaeva - I know the truth! Renounce all others!](#)
- [John Reed \(Poetry Foundation\)](#)
- [Preface to The Emancipation of Women \(Marxists.org\)](#)
- [On Communist Ethics \(Marxists.org\)](#)

