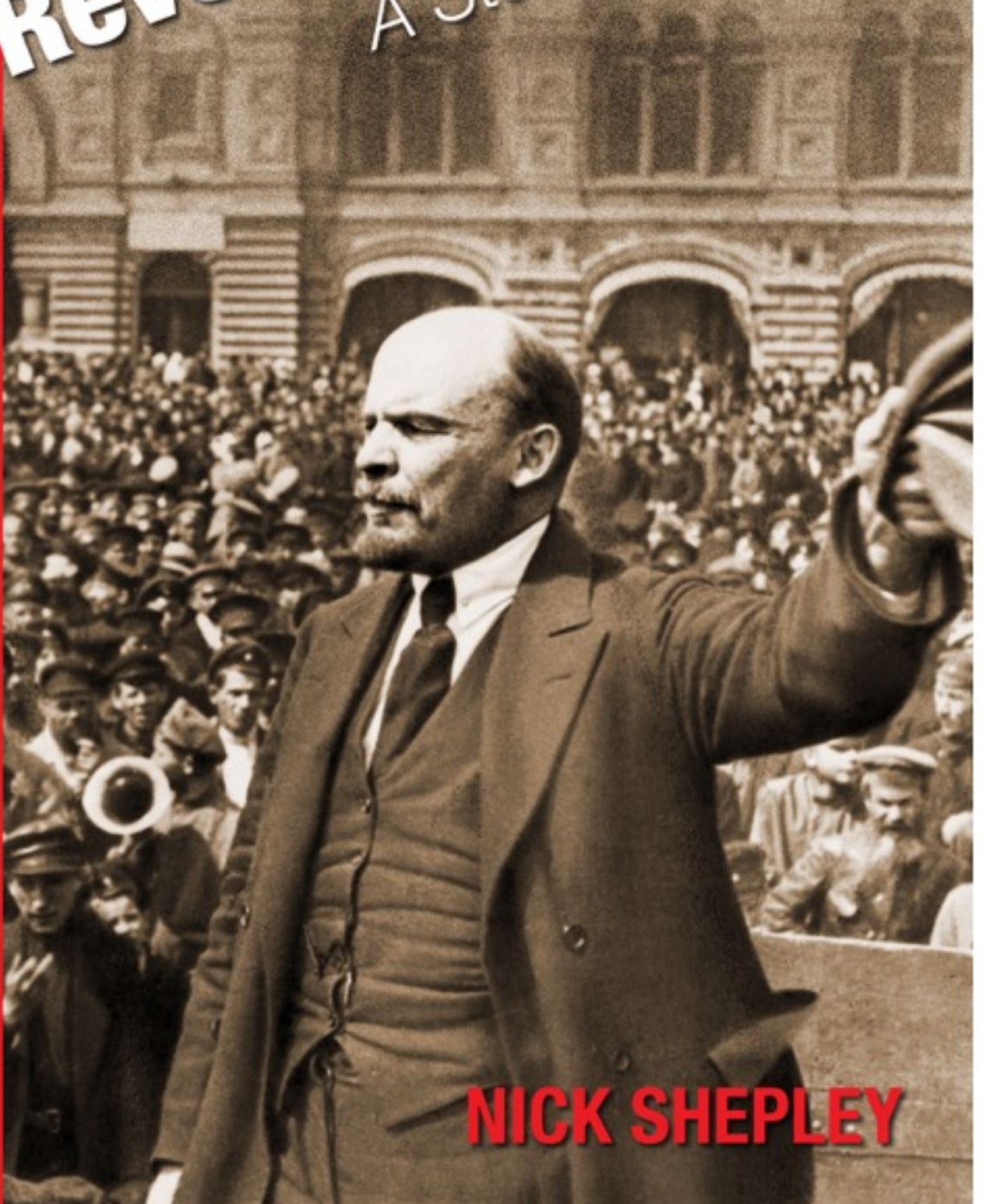


EXPLAINING
HISTORY
EBOOKS

The Russian Revolution 1917:

A Student's Guide

STUDY ESSENTIALS



NICK SHEPLEY

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Study Essentials:
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A Student's Guide.**

By Nick Shepley

Introduction

In the third year of the First World War, The Russian Empire experienced a year of revolutionary turmoil that saw the fall of the emperor, Tsar Nicholas II. This was followed by the creation of an interim government which in turn was overthrown by an extreme revolutionary socialist regime in October that year. By the end of 1917 a government that would rule Russia as a dictatorship for most of the rest of the 20th Century was firmly in power and its establishment would have profound implications for the rest of Russian and 20th Century history. However, the revolution was not simply the product of short term events, instead it developed from long term problems and challenges from within Russia, which the government of the tsars was incapable of controlling.

The purpose of this ebook is to focus closely on the revolutionary year of 1917 and explain why not just one but two governments fell in that year. It will also examine how and why the Bolsheviks, a revolutionary socialist party came to power. Firstly, however, we must explore the long term causes of the Russian Revolution, which stretch back deep into Russian history.

The Long Term Causes of the Revolution

Geography and People

By 1917 the Russian Empire covered one sixth of the landmass of the planet. It was the largest continuous land empire in history and stretched in the west from the Baltic Sea to the Pacific Ocean in the East. The far north of the country was in the Arctic Circle and the south and east bordered Asian countries like Persia and China. It incorporated many millions of non Russian people who had been conquered by Russia throughout the 18th and 19th Centuries, but who tended not to speak Russian or share Russian culture or traditions. These nationalities, Finns, Poles, Turcomen, Kazakhs, Siberians, Koreans and others were often treated like second class subjects of the Tsar within the Russian Empire and during the 1880s were subjected to a policy of **russification**, which meant that their customs and languages were banned and instead they were forced to adopt the Russian language and religion, Orthodox Christianity.

The enormous size of Russia and the fact that many of the subjects of the empire were not Russian and didn't identify with the empire (along with most Russian peasants), meant that Russia was a difficult and chaotic place to rule. In addition to this, much of the country was uncultivated wilderness. Forests, swamps, vast rivers, mountain ranges, tundra, steppe and deserts meant that out of an enormous landmass, only a small percentage of the land was suitable for cultivation. It also meant that navigating the empire was difficult and therefore it was hard to administer and govern. Travel across Russia began to be transformed by the 1890s by the development of railway, but by 1917 most travellers still used muddy potholed cart tracks that were often impassable.

These problems meant that any government would have problems administering the Russian empire, but by the eve of the First World War, both the Tsar of Russia, Nicholas II and his government, the Tsarist **autocracy** were hopelessly inadequate.

The Autocracy

The ruling dynasty of Russia was the Romanov family, who had controlled the empire since 1613. In the three centuries that the dynasty had controlled Russia, there had been several tsars who had attempted to modernise and change aspects of Russian government and society. However, nearly all tsars had maintained a commitment to the autocracy. This was a style of government that had been abandoned in much of Europe and it left the tsar holding supreme power in Russia. In 1832, the laws of the Russian Empire were written down formally for the first time by Mikhail Speransky, a reformist minister under Tsar Nicholas I. The laws set out what rights citizens of Russia's different social classes had, but they also gave the tsars the right to change, abolish or just ignore the law as they saw fit. This meant that the tsars of Russia had virtually limitless power and it also meant that they did not have to ask government ministers for their advice on what to do with it. Nicholas II (see below), believed that he had been placed on the throne by god, and that

as a result it was not the place of ministers, the Duma (parliament) and certainly not ordinary people to question his decisions. An autocratic system of government was an extremely unwieldy and inefficient way of administering a vast and complex empire that was undergoing immense change by 1914.

The Tsar

Tsar Nicholas II came to the throne suddenly in 1894 after the premature death of his father Alexander III, he had been given very little preparation for the role and was quite unsuited to ruling. Those close to the Tsar paint a picture of a shy and rather immature man who put most of his attention into small trivial matters instead of focusing on the most important issues of the day.

The tsars has traditionally been autocrats (see above on the autocracy). Previous tsars, such as Nicholas's grandfather Alexander II had been strong enough and politically shrewd enough to rule in this way. He knew when to ask for advice and when to listen to it.

Nicholas possessed none of these skills, he actually broke down and wept when he was told he was to be Tsar, asking how such a terrible fate had befallen him, he did not want the responsibility and quite preferred his life as an honorary cavalry officer.

Nicholas's rule got off to a bad start, following his coronation there was a catastrophe as hundreds of thousands of poor workers and peasants in Moscow thronged on the **Khodynka Field**, hearing rumours of gifts from the tsar of food and beer.

In the mass stampede that followed some 1,300 people were crushed, but Nicholas made matters worse by attending a ball that evening at the French Embassy, when the rest of the country was in mourning. He was not an uncaring man and did visit survivors in hospital, but he was weak and easily led and his uncles persuaded him to go to the ball and please the French ambassador. The result was widespread anger amongst the people. Nicholas combined this weakness with an infuriating stubbornness. He believed that he was appointed ultimately to rule by god, and that whilst he was a reluctant holder of the office of tsar, his duty to god meant that he would never relinquish it, or betray his duty by compromising with those who demanded a **constitutional monarchy**.

The Peasants

The peasants made up the vast majority of the population of Russia, approximately 80 percent, and they would play an important role in the revolutionary year of 1917. Before 1861, Russia's peasants had not been free, they had been **serfs** and had effectively been the property of the landowners, with many being treated little better than slaves. Tsar Alexander II realised that serfdom was a destabilising force within the empire and believed it had to be reformed by the government before the serfs revolted and did away with it themselves. Alexander II, however, freed the serfs with decades of debt to pay to the government who in turn had compensated the landowners for the loss of their free labour. The peasants were not guaranteed the land that they had originally worked on as serfs and many were cheated by the landowners who gave them infertile, barren land and kept the good soil for themselves. Alexander III, the son of Alexander II believed (correctly) that the countryside was anarchic and that emancipation had caused this because the peasants could not be controlled in the way they were when they were serfs. He introduced a new tier of policing called the **Land Captains**, who acted as enforcers of the law in the countryside and were often made up of the local nobility. The peasants had a deep and visceral

hatred of the nobility and a deep seated sense of anger about their own poverty and lack of land. They had a simple egalitarian viewpoint when it came to land; they believed that no one should own more land than they can actually work. In peasant villages the **Obschina**, or commune, would divide land between peasants based on need. Larger families would get larger plots, but land was farmed in narrow strips which were often distributed throughout the village commune. This meant that Russian peasant farming was among the least productive in Europe. Successive Tsars and their ministers had hoped that they might raise peasant productivity, as the rest of the economy balanced on the labour of the peasants and their ability to grow abundant food. The peasants themselves lived comparatively short lives with life expectancy by the early 20th Century in the mid 40s. Disease, high levels of child mortality, alcoholism and violence were daily features of peasant life, as was a complete lack of identification with the idea of being national citizens. The peasants tended to have a very **parochial** world view and had little understanding that they lived in a large imperial state called Russia. Their loyalties were defined by their local area and the topic that interested them the most was land and how to access more of it. They were loyal to the Tsar, who they often had icons of in their huts and referred to as the **Batyushka** (the little father), and believed that he had been sent to guide and watch over them by god. The peasants were predominantly **Orthodox Christian**, but often looked upon Orthodox priests as crooked exploiters looking to make a living from the Obschina. It was for these reasons that the countryside was a source of frequent unrest and when law and order finally broke down in the cities in 1917 the peasants saw an opportunity to seize the land they had wanted for so long and to chase away the landlords.

The Workers

From the 1880s onwards Russia began to experience an **industrial revolution**. The Russian industrial revolution began almost a century after the first industrial revolution in Britain, but the pace of change created an equivalent amount of squalor and hardship in Russia's growing cities. Russia's urban working class was drawn from the peasantry, they often migrated between the cities when there was work and moved back to the countryside when there were economic downturns, knowing that on the land there was always food to eat. Many who stayed in the towns and cities and found work in factories, docks or mines abandoned their peasant clothes and the men shaved off their peasant beards. They sought to reject the backwardness of the countryside and many workers embraced the modern world of the 19th Century that they encountered. Some found opportunities to become educated as private and **philanthropic** adult education was offered in a piecemeal fashion in cities like St Petersburg or Moscow. The period saw the development of a Russian trade union movement to protest against low wages, poor housing and unsafe workplaces. Many of the **feudal** attitudes that had shaped the countryside also emerged in the factories, who's owners often had aristocratic origins or connections and believed they had the right to treat the Russian workers as they saw fit. Factory owners often had very close relationships with the corrupt Russian police, who saw their role as one of enforcing the rights of the rich and powerful. The break-neck pace of industrialisation led to the rapid creation of slums in all the major cities in Russia. These slums were built to house workers but often without any oversight or planning from the government, meaning that they lacked sanitation, running water or other amenities. Infant mortality was higher in some instances than that in the peasant communes and by the late 1890s there was an observable attitude of anger, resentment and defiance among workers. In St Petersburg the well to do and the wealthy experienced verbal abuse, assault and robbery from young working class men, nicknamed '**hooligans**' by the newspapers. These attacks were not organised and

affected a relatively small number of people but they indicated that the old attitudes of deference were breaking down and working class people were no longer automatically guaranteed to be loyal and respectful to their 'betters'.

The Middle Class

The Russian middle class developed partly as a result of the industrial revolution, but there had always been a lower tier of minor nobility and those who carried out government administration in the provinces who could be thought of as middle class. They had been treated by the Romanov Tsars either with indifference or outright suspicion throughout the 19th Century. The final Tsar, Nicholas II had very little time for Russia's middle classes at all. The problem that the middle classes faced was that there were fewer and fewer opportunities for them. As more people from the middle class became educated and attended Russia's universities, they graduated with minds full of knowledge but very little that they could do with it. The failure of Russia to have a full scale industrial revolution until very late in the 19th Century meant that there were not enough 'white collar' jobs for them to do. In addition to this, the most attractive jobs in the Tsar's government were dominated by the aristocracy, who knew that working for the Tsarist administration often was more financially rewarding than being a landowner, especially after the emancipation of the serfs. This led to an increasingly angry and resentful younger generation of the middle classes who felt rejected by the regime and felt that there was no reason to be loyal to it. These young people formed the basis of Russia's revolutionary underground (see below). In 1864 the reforming Tsar Alexander II and his interior minister Milyutin created a new system of local government in Russia designed to improve living conditions in the countryside. They were called the zemstva (zemstva was the plural term, individual local governments were called **zemstvo**) were responsible for sanitation, health care, the maintenance of roads and the development of new farming techniques. The middle classes dominated the councils and came to see themselves as an important part of Russian **civil society**. The middle classes, through the zemstva were able to make contributions to the working of Russia and they increasingly saw the Tsar's government as the cause of many of Russia's problems. The middle class professionals who participated in the zemstva were intelligent, articulate, skilled, and believed that they were Russia's future. This belief was confirmed during the Volga famine of 1891-2. During the famine, the Tsarist government appeared to do very little to alleviate the suffering of starving Russian peasants, but it was the zemstva from across Russia that swung into action, feeding thousands of famine victims and treating the sick.

The Revolutionary Underground

Throughout the 19th Century a revolutionary movement in Russia had developed, often as a reaction to the oppressive autocratic regime of the Tsars. Revolutionary movements in the early 19th Century were first centred around the nobility who wanted a constitutional government to be established after the death of Tsar Alexander I in 1825. Later in the 19th Century these movements came predominantly from Russia's educated middle classes. In the decades before the revolution there were several phases of revolutionary activism.

The Narodniks

The **Narodniks** were a movement of well educated upper and middle class revolutionaries and idealists. The name was derived from the word narod meaning 'people'; the Narodniks

believed that the ordinary peasant people of Russia were cruelly oppressed by the Tsarist state and they wanted a revolution to liberate them. In 1874 thousands of Narodnik students and intellectuals migrated to the countryside to live with the peasantry and learn about the peasant way of life in a campaign called 'to the people'. At the same time they tried to explain revolutionary ideas to the peasants in the hope that they would revolt. The Narodniks thought that Russia did not need to industrialise instead, if the peasants could overthrow the Tsar they could simply divide the land between them and create a peasant socialist society. The campaign was a disaster, the majority of peasants were not interested in listening to the Narodniks ideas or simply too poorly educated to understand them. Even though the peasants despised the landowners, they were loyal to the Tsar and shocked by talk of overthrowing him. They frequently betrayed the revolutionaries to the secret police and many revolutionaries concluded that the Russian peasantry could not be relied on to bring about a revolution.

Narodnaya Volya

In 1879 a new revolutionary party, Narodnaya Volya or the 'People's Will' was established in large part due to the failure of the 'to the people' campaign. They believed that only violent terrorist action could challenge the regime and that the peasantry would be more likely to revolt if terrorism was used. They believed that the Tsarist regime had successfully convinced the peasants that the Tsar was a god and his control over Russia was permanent. If the Tsar could be assassinated, they believed, then the spell would be broken and the peasants would look upon their exploitation in a different light. In 1881 Narodnaya Volya succeeded in assassinating Tsar Alexander II in St Petersburg but instead of a peasant revolution, a majority of the peasantry were shocked and outraged by the killing. The leaders of Narodnaya Volya were quickly captured and executed after the assassination.

The Socialist Revolutionary Party

The largest revolutionary party in Russia by the eve of the First World War was the Socialist Revolutionary Party. The SR Party was founded in 1902 and much of their ideas were based on the Narodniks, but the party also embraced a new set of revolutionary ideas, those of the German philosopher Karl Marx (see Marxism below). The SR Party were popular with the peasants, who, in the two decades since the failure of the Narodnik movement, had become gradually more politically aware. The SRs promised that the peasants would be given land which in turn would be taken from the landowners. The party believed that the peasants would be the leaders of a future revolution but they tried to encourage revolution by assassinating government ministers. The SR party in the decade before the First World War carried out numerous assassinations of government officials across Russia, believing that this would 'embolden' the peasants to see that revolution was possible. Not all members of the party agreed with the policy of assassination and in 1906 major divisions opened up between the left and the right factions of the party with the left SRs advocating more assassinations and the right SRs repudiating them altogether.

Marxism

Karl Marx was probably the most influential philosophical thinker of the 19th Century. He was born in Trier in Prussia in 1818 and for much of his life was a stateless exile, living in France, Belgium and Britain. In 1848 he wrote the Communist Manifesto in which he explained his theory of history. He argued that:

- * **All history was the history of class struggle** - This meant that in any historical period there was a struggle going on between the ruling classes and those they oppressed.
- * **Society was divided into a class system** - The ruling class in the 19th and 20th Centuries was the middle class (bourgeoisie) and the oppressed class was the workers (the proletariat).
- * **Capitalism led to crisis and revolution** - The economic system that dominated throughout the world was called capitalism. It was an economic system where the private ownership of wealth and the means of becoming wealthy was concentrated in a small number of hands (factories were owned privately by factory owners). This economic system would lead to huge inequality with many poor workers being exploited by a small number of capitalists.
- * **The workers must unite and overthrow capitalism** - Marx finished his book with a call to the proletariat across the world to revolt: "Workers of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but your chains". He believed that unless the working classes of different countries cooperated and helped each other, capitalism would prevail.

Bolsheviks and Mensheviks

In 1898 the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party was founded. It was meant to be a union of all the socialist parties in Russia and had followed on from an earlier party, the Emancipation of Labour Group. The RSDLP disagreed with the Narodnik parties and the Social Revolutionaries about how to bring the revolution about. They believed that the peasants were the wrong class to focus the attentions of the revolutionary movement on. Instead, the RSDLP believed that the industrial working class would bring about the revolution. The RSDLP was far more orthodox Marxist in its beliefs and followed the writings of Marx closely. In 1902 a member of the radical faction within the party, Vladimir Lenin published a book entitled 'What is to be done?' In it he identified several key problems that the revolutionary movement faced:

- * The working class in Russia was extremely small and made up just three percent of the population. It might be a century before the working class was big enough to challenge the state.
- * By this time the Tsarist government would have worked out the dangers that revolutionary politics posed to it. A more competent Tsar might take steps to pacify the workers with better living conditions and the radical middle class intelligentsia who made up the ranks of professional revolutionaries with a role in government.
- * This would mean the capitalist system would simply adapt to the challenges it faced and not be overthrown.
- * Waiting for a revolution to happen naturally and for the workers to grow large enough as a class would mean waiting forever in Lenin's view. He argued that the party must become a secret revolutionary force that would seize power when the time was right and then impose socialism on Russia.
- * This meant operating outside Russia as it was too easy to be infiltrated by the Tsarist secret police inside the empire. Lenin wanted a small number of party members who were ruthlessly dedicated to the cause of revolution and were prepared to suffer the hardships of Tsarist prisons and be killed for the cause.

The majority faction in the party that supported Lenin was called the Bolsheviks, and the minority faction, who feared Lenin's ideas were too extreme and could only be achieved using immense violence were called the Mensheviks. They were led by the socialist Julius Martov, who had argued that the party should have a large membership and exist in the

open. The party split into the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks and was dissolved in 1912. When the February revolution happened in 1917, most Bolsheviks and many leading Mensheviks were in exile in Europe and America.

The Aristocracy

The aristocracy were Russia's wealthy landowning classes who had inherited their estates and noble titles. They owned most of Russia's agricultural land and were traditionally loyal to the Tsars of Russia. Whilst some landowners treated the peasants badly, it cannot be said that all were cruel and dismissive of the peasantry's needs. Some aristocrats, like Leo Tolstoy, the famous Russian novelist, believed that they had a sacred duty to help the poor and improve their living conditions. Others believed that land reform was a necessity and without some transfer of land to the peasants, they would be swept away by revolution. Nicholas II did not inspire confidence in lots of the aristocracy and many wondered whether he would be their downfall. During the 1905 Revolution (see below) Count Sergei Sheremetev wrote a diary entry that articulated the fears that many aristocrats had. He said: *"Dear God, how far we have departed since 1894, and in what direction! But then I never did have any hopes for the successor [Nicholas II]. Russia in 1894 and Russia today! I don't know if anyone will ever read this diary, but what we are now experiencing with him, I had premonitions of long ago."*

Sheremetev, one of Russia's biggest landowners had witnessed Nicholas II fail to contain or to appease the protest movement of 1902-1905, and instead watched it evolve into a full blown revolution following Bloody Sunday in January 1905. He had also watched horrific bloodshed take place on his own lands, with land seizures and **anti Semitic pogroms** happen with regularity. Sheremetev began to take a dim view of the peasants as he did of Russia's Czar, shifting away from the previously naive and generous position he had held, that the peasants represented something honest and egalitarian that much of Russia had lost. Most peasants passionately hated the landowners and hoped that they would be able to seize their land and exact violent retribution against them for the years of serfdom and the disappointment of emancipation. In the countryside by the turn of the century a new and anarchic attitude was creeping into peasant thinking which upset and frightened the aristocracy. It was called '**voila**' and the rough translation meant having the right to do whatever one wanted. It coincided with a more tense and violent atmosphere in the countryside, one that would explode into violence in 1905.

Repression

In the last two decades of the 19th Century state repression dramatically increased in Russia. The assassination of Tsar Alexander II gave his son, Alexander III the excuse he needed to introduce a series of authoritarian policies and transform Russia into a **police state**. As previously mentioned, the countryside fell under the jurisdiction of the land captains and the Tsarist secret police, the **Okhrana** developed a sophisticated network of informants and agents. They infiltrated the revolutionary underground and spied on students and intellectuals. Alexander III had a very different personality to his father, both men believed in the autocracy but Alexander II thought that only reform could save it. Alexander III believed that a relentless war against the subversive elements in Russian society was the only way to preserve Russia. He was advised by Konstantin Pobedonostsev, an arch conservative statesman who had a powerful influence over the Russian Orthodox Church. Pobedonostsev was determined to prevent liberal modern thoughts from influencing Russian politics and society and two months after Alexander III came to the throne Pobedonostsev helped write a new set of policies that pledged to overturn most of the previous Tsar's liberal reforms. It was called the Manifesto of Unshakeable Autocracy and its creation forced liberal Tsarist ministers to resign. Russification was forced on German, Polish and other non Russian speaking subjects and Alexander III also used anti semitic policies from 1882 onwards to repress Russia's Jews and direct hatred towards them. He weakened the zemstva and gave land captains power over peasant Obschina. Alexander III died in 1894 and was succeeded by his son Nicholas II.

1904-5

Nicholas II's obstinacy and poor judgement took his dynasty to the brink of destruction in 1905, Russia's faltering economy, the repression of students at her universities, near famine conditions in the Volga basin and a growing lack of deference and respect from the urban working classes and the peasants from 1902 onwards led the Tsar to contemplate a very foolhardy policy. Russia's territorial expansion into Korea and Manchuria in China had led to growing tensions with the Japanese for a decade, but by 1904 unrest at home gave the Tsar an added incentive to wage war against Japan. He personally despised the Japanese and viewed them as inferior, a view that was abruptly challenged when the Japanese attacked the Russian **treaty port** in China, Port Arthur, and destroyed the entire Russian fleet at Tsushima in May 1905. The country was already in open revolt at this point, following another disaster on the Tsar's part in January 1905. On Sunday January 22nd, a march of over 100,000 St Petersburg workers marched through the city and 3,000 gathered outside the Tsar's residence, the **Winter Palace** to present him with a petition pleading for better living conditions. Nicholas was not even in residence at the palace at the time, but armed troops were dispatched to keep the peaceful protest at bay, one panicked soldier accidentally fired into the crowd, suddenly triggering a volley from the rest of the troops, causing the deaths of over 1,000 people.

The explosion of revolutionary violence that rocked the country was only amplified after the humiliating defeat at the hands of the Japanese and a wave of workers strikes, bombings, assassinations of government ministers brought the Tsar's regime to the very brink. In the

Black Sea, the crew of the battleship Potemkin mutinied and sailed for Romania and freedom, the Tsar was stranded on his Peterhof estate due to strikes by railway workers. Throughout these crises, Nicholas II steadfastly refused to compromise or introduce reforms.

Saving the Tsar

Only when the Tsar's own uncle threatened to shoot himself, did Nicholas relent and listen to his most able minister Sergei Witte. After negotiating a peace with Japan, Witte told the Tsar that the only way to save his throne was through limited **constitutional reform**, which would allow the Tsar to buy off the bulk of his middle class opponents and prevent them from providing the workers with leadership. Through gritted teeth the Tsar signed the **October Manifesto**, an act which he believed was a betrayal of god's will for him. It gave the country a **Duma**, or parliament, removed restrictions on the press and political and civil freedoms, and cancelled the crippling debts of the peasants. The Tsar cursed Witte however, blind to the fact that Witte's advice had stopped the unrest and almost certainly saved his rule. He was simply angry that he was the first Romanov Tsar that had been forced to relinquish some power and was determined to claw it back.

Broken Promises

Over the next decade the Tsar gradually undermined the Duma after having dismissed Witte and appointed Peter Stolypin as Prime Minister in 1906. Stolypin was an arch reactionary and he made sure that as many of the revolutionaries of 1905 were punished as possible, with Russia seeing so many hangings over the next five years that the noose was nicknamed Stolypin's necktie. The Tsar might well have seen a return to some kind of normalcy in the long run as after 1905 the economy began to improve once again, but by 1914 Nicholas was dragged into his last catastrophe. The first Duma in 1906 had a majority of left wing deputies, and the second Duma in 1907 featured Social Revolutionaries, Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. By 1914, after eight years of manipulation, the Tsar had a Duma he was more comfortable with. It was full of reactionaries and nationalists, but this did not mean they would necessarily do what the Tsar wanted, they knew, as well as the socialist parties did that he was weak and indecisive. When war loomed with Austria and then Germany it was the fear of revolt on the right that pushed Nicholas to declare war on Austria, even though his generals and senior ministers, with fresh memories of 1905, advised that it would be a disaster.

The Dumas	Date	Parties	Objectives	Fate
First Duma	April to June 1906	Predominantly liberal and left parties	* Constitutional Reform * Land Reform	* Tsar dissolved Duma in July 1906.
Second Duma	February to June 1906	More radical left parties (including Bolsheviks and Mensheviks) and Liberals	* Land confiscation from the nobility.	* . * Dissolved in June 1907
Third Duma	July 1907 to June 1912	Aristocratic parties (Octobrists)	* Military spending * Stolypin's reforms	* Serves full term

The Dumas	Date	Parties	Objectives	Fate
Fourth Duma	1912-1917	Aristocratic parties	* Nationalism/War	* Revolution

Part One: The First World War

Overview:

Before 1914 it had been possible for the Tsars to contain the long term problems of the Russian Empire, even though Russia underwent dramatic economic and social change in the decade after 1905. It was a period of rapid economic growth in Russia and some on-lookers, particularly Germany, believed that Russia might develop into an unstoppable economic and military power. During the July Crisis of 1914 (see below) Tsar Nicholas II was warned by his generals that a war would unleash powerful revolutionary tensions in Russia and would result in catastrophe for his regime. In this section we will examine Nicholas's reasons for going to war and the events of the July Crisis. We will also explore in the following two chapters the effect of the war on the troops who fought it and the impact on Russians at home.

Chapter One:

Russian Diplomacy 1894-1908

In the two decades before the coronation of Nicholas II, Russia's relations with her neighbours Germany and Austria-Hungary underwent a dramatic change. Russia had been allied to both empires, a diplomatic system engineered by the German Chancellor Bismarck called the Dreikaiserbund (League of three emperors). He wanted to prevent either of the two major powers to Germany's east allying with her old enemy in the West, France. The alliance contained a fundamental weakness, both Austria and Russia had conflicting interests in the South East of Europe in the Balkans. As the Muslim Ottoman Empire declined in power throughout the 19th Century the European part of the empire in the Balkans experienced nationalist revolutions and uprisings. In 1877 the Orthodox Christian people of Bulgaria rebelled against the Ottomans and the Sultan's government responded with brutal violence and repression sparking outrage across Europe. The Russian autocracy took the opportunity to extend Russia's power into the Balkans, having an excuse to make war against the Ottomans on the behalf of Bulgaria. The Russians defeated the Turks and forced them from Bulgaria, imposing a punitive peace settlement on the ailing empire. The Treaty of San Stefano in 1878 created a large Bulgarian state that would fall under effective Russian control, but this caused outrage from Austria and Britain. The Austrians did not want a major Russian satellite state in the Balkans, a region they wished to control and the British did not want Russia to have access to the Mediterranean Sea. Russian ships that could possibly block the Suez Canal and the route to India were a threat to Britain and the two powers threatened war. When Bismarck called an international conference in Berlin that year to defuse the tensions, he decided to back Austria, knowing he could not please both the Austrians *and* the Russians. Russia's plans for a big Bulgarian state were scaled back and a small Bulgaria emerged, which proved to be a major diplomatic humiliation for Russia. After this snub she drifted away from the alliance system, her diplomats vowing never to trust Germany again.

By 1892 Germany's worst fears were realised as Russia concluded an alliance with France. Tsar Nicholas II, not understanding the rules of the alliance with France his father he had committed Russia to, attempted some independent diplomacy in 1905. He signed a pact with Germany, in breach of Russia's alliance with France at Bjorko in Finland after a secret meeting between himself and his cousin, the Kaiser of Germany. The Tsar's government told him it was an invalid treaty as soon as they heard of it, as it broke the existing alliance with France. The failure of this initiative left the Tsar looking foolish, and it meant that the only other power Russia was able to ally with was Britain. Russia signed an entente (an agreement but not a full alliance) in 1908. This final agreement left Europe divided into two military camps, greatly heightening the tensions across the continent.

The July Crisis

The Russian people were ethnically slavic and the Tsar had to appear to his people to be protecting the interests of other slavic peoples in Europe and other followers of the Orthodox faith. Most fellow **slavs** could be located in the Balkans, a region of South East Europe that had been part of the Ottoman Empire throughout the 19th Century. Nations like Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania had thrown off the yoke of Ottoman rule by the start of the 20th Century and in the case of Serbia, wanted to expand their territory at the expense of their neighbours. The Austrian Empire ruled Bosnia Herzegovina, part of the Balkans that the Serbs demanded. They had been granted this region in 1878 after the Congress of Berlin and Serbian Nationalists were prepared to risk war with the Austrians in order to gain control over it. The Serbs were given encouragement by Russia that they would be supported and defended in the event of an Austrian attack. On June 28th 1914 the heir to the throne of the Austro Hungarian Empire was assassinated along with his wife on a state visit to the Bosnian capital Sarajevo. The killers were a terrorist group called the Black Hand Gang, closely related to the Serbian military. Austria accused Serbia of causing the murder and threatened war, demanding such extreme concessions (in effect a full take over of the Serbian government and police by Austria) that the Serbs could only refuse. With Germany's backing, Austria attacked Serbia on July 29th 1914 and Russia mobilised against Austria the following day. Nicholas II wrote to Kaiser Wilhelm II to ask him not to support Austria, he wanted only to use Russia's army to make war against Austria and not Germany. The Kaiser refused, stating that a war with Austria was a war with Germany. The Tsar's generals had advised him not to become involved in war, that the consequences for the regime would be catastrophic but by the end of July it was too late, the Russian Army had begun to march.

Rasputin

Throughout the July Crisis, the Tsar took advice from a Siberian peasant mystic called Grigori Rasputin. He had become close to the Tsar's family from 1905 in the aftermath of the revolution that year. Rasputin was highly intelligent but illiterate so the accounts of Rasputin's life that historians have to work with mostly come from second hand sources; the people who came to know him and were deeply influenced by him. His story is one of immense hardship growing up in Siberia. He believed god spoke directly to him and he was known as a Starets (Holy Man), who wandered from village to village. He was part of an underground religious cult called the Khylist, who believed in 'redemption through sin', which meant that engaging in debauched 'sins of the flesh' and other hedonistic activities would bring them closer to a disapproving god (who would punish and then redeem the sinner). As such, he was an unlikely choice of company for the Tsar, but he was famed as a healer; it was believed that he possessed mystical powers that could cure illnesses and

the Tsar's son Alexei suffered from the hereditary illness of haemophilia (he was unable to form blood clots if he was injured). When Rasputin appeared to alleviate the illness he was trusted implicitly firstly by the Tsarina and then by the Tsar. Advisors in the Tsar's inner circle attempted to warn him away from Rasputin, aware that the mystic was very damaging to the reputation of the royal family but they were unsuccessful, the Tsar was as determined and stubborn in his defence of the new family friend as he was in other matters.

Chapter Two:

The Early Battles

In 1914 the Tsarist army was one of the best equipped fighting forces in the world. Contrary to popular belief, the Tsar's soldiers marched to war with more cannons, machine guns and aircraft than any other fighting force. In the decade after the humiliation of the Russo-Japanese War, Nicholas II had spent large sums on the military. The equipment was not matched, however, with an understanding of military tactics by the Tsar's top generals. Basic practices such as digging trenches or encrypting messages were ignored and the Russian Army did not understand how to keep a large army on the move supplied and fed. Russia was allied with France and the Tsar promised an overly optimistic timetable of mobilisation against Austria and Germany, poor railways meant that Russia took longer than anticipated to have the large numbers of men ready to attack (though this was still quicker than the Germans had anticipated). When the Russian Army advanced into East Prussia, it dwarfed the German forces presented to stop it 3/1. However, because of poor communication between generals and an inability to coordinate forces, German generals encircled their enemies and inflicted a devastating defeat upon them. At the Battle of Tannenberg and the Battle of the Masurian Lakes the Russians lost 170,000 men killed, wounded or captured and 125,000 respectively. These disasters were not enough to defeat Russia or end the war, but they ended the belief that the war could be won quickly or without enormous costs. It also further shook the confidence in the Tsar's ability to lead Russia, particularly among his generals. This made his next decision all the more damaging to the regime.

The Tsar takes command

The year 1915 brought further bad news for the Tsar, Russian dominated Poland was conquered by the German Army and the Polish capital Warsaw fell. Angry demonstrators took to the streets of Russia's cities demanding the Tsar abdicate, that Rasputin be executed and the Tsarina (widely, though mistakenly believed to be a Russian spy) be imprisoned. The Tsar formed a new defence council to run the war which drew its members from the Duma and from his own ministers, but in September he decided to replace his cousin Grand Duke Nikolay as head of the Russian Army with himself. He believed that this would rally the Russian people behind him as a divine figurehead, providing them with the inspiration they needed to win the war. It was a short sighted error because whilst it meant that the Tsar could take the credit for any successes Russia might have, it also meant that he would take the blame for Russia's failures. The war that Russia was fighting would not be decided by having a Tsar in charge, but by how well the troops were equipped and led and in both cases, by 1915 these were major weaknesses for Russia.

The war industry

Even though the Russian Army had been large and well equipped by the outbreak of war in 1914, the effectiveness of the army soon broke down due to supply problems. Russia lacked:

- * An arms and munitions industry large and advanced enough to supply all of the army's needs.
- * A railway system that could get troops and supplies to the front line quickly and efficiently.

The Tsarist government, like many governments in 1914 expected the war to last for a maximum of six months. Even for this short period of time there was insufficient artillery shells for the army, fodder for horses and replacement boots for the men. In addition to this the decision by the Tsar to prioritise the army when it came to dividing up Russia's food reserves caused significant food shortages in the countryside and in the towns and cities. Ironically, the railway system was so badly organised that often food taken from the peasants sat and rotted in warehouses, never reaching the soldiers who needed it. Despite good harvests, Russia experienced serious food problems in 1916 due to:

- * the collapse of the transport network
- * the fact that the government fixed grain prices artificially low
- * rising inflation ate into any profits the peasantry might make

Not only did the peasants lose their grain, which was sold at artificially low prices, but they often lost their horses which were taken by the army to pull gun carriages. The youngest men in peasant villages were conscripted to fight, meaning that it became very difficult without young men and horses to bring in harvests, resulting in bumper harvests rotting in the fields.

Conditions at the front

The cruelties of Russia's class system were not contained just to the civilian sphere, on the front line Russian officers, normally of aristocratic bearing often treated their peasant soldiers with brutality or casual indifference. Many aristocratic generals knew nothing about how to fight a modern war and instead vied with one another for the Tsar's favour at the **Stavka** (forward command) at Mogilev. They rarely visited the front line and instead enjoyed, along with the Tsar, a leisurely lifestyle of entertainments and long walks. Junior officers in the field often sacrificed men in suicidal attempts to attack Austrian and German positions, only to see the captured territory abandoned shortly afterwards. Ordinary soldiers were treated as little better than serfs, being forced to carry out menial tasks such as cleaning officers boots when they returned from battle. Unlike nearly every other combatant power in the war, the Russian Army initially did not dig trenches for its men to shelter in from artillery fire, instead it was thought by out of touch generals that soldiers would simply throw themselves to the ground when an enemy shell was fired. The poorly led Russian soldiers often showed remarkable bravery and were respected by their enemies, but often they had little or no idea why they were fighting. Most were illiterate and only had a very loose sense of being Russian, as their sense of identity and loyalty was normally based around a village they had never travelled beyond. They had some idea about who the Tsar was but were often unsure about why Russia was fighting Germany and what the Germans wanted. Unsurprisingly, it was difficult to motivate men who had no understanding of the conflict and who simply wanted to be able to go home. It came down to the Zemstva of Russia to provide trenches, field hospitals, canteens and other essential services for the soldiers. The local government organisations stepped in to provide all the facilities that the

Tsar's government seemed incapable of offering. In doing so, many members of the Zemstva and their supporters began to believe that the local government organisations and the middle class that dominated them might actually do a better job of running Russia than the Tsar. They would be able to put this to the test in February 1917.

Changing fortunes 1916

By 1916 it seemed as if Russia has overcome many of her supply and strategy problems. A talented general, Aleksei Brusilov was given command of the South West front against Austria in March that year. Unlike his contemporaries he believed in coordinating infantry, artillery and air power in an organised attack. The major attack against Austria's forces that he planned (known across the world as 'The Brusilov Offensive'), was immensely successful and advanced 30 kilometres (a considerable distance by 1916 standards) across the Carpathian region, taking 400,000 Austrian prisoners.

Brusilov's successes, however, did not necessarily make him popular at the Stavka in Mogilev. Rival generals, jealous of his breakthrough undermined him in the eyes of the Tsar. Worse still, his offensive was not supported by rival general Evert who delayed in moving against the Austrians, which gave Germany's quick thinking generals time to move troops to the front line to support Austria and bring the offensive to a stand still. Brusilov's troops had high morale at the start of the battle and most of them respected their commander, who visited their trenches in person and was able to relate to them. The end of the offensive, which, whilst a Russian victory was a short lived one, led to a further slump in army morale. It proved to be the final great offensive before the February Revolution of 1917 (see the next section). The failure of the offensive, despite Brusilov's skill and planning showed that the Russian Empire wasn't capable of sustaining a successful campaign against the enemy, even if it had got off to a promising start.

Rasputin's murder

In Petrograd, with the Tsar away at the Stavka, the Tsarina Alexandra was left in charge of the government. The Duma and the Tsar's ministers had even less power with the Tsar away than before. The Tsarina was advised by the mystic Grigori Rasputin, but as a consequence the monarchy fell into ever greater disrepute. Rumours, all of which were false, circulated around the city that the Tsarina was a German spy, that she and Rasputin were lovers, and that Rasputin had supernatural powers. The monk was unwittingly a valuable source of information for the Germans, who sent spies to follow him around the city's drinking dens, where he would freely discuss military strategy while drunk. His influence over the deeply religious Tsarina grew and he was able to undermine any ministers who threatened his position by appealing to her to have them dismissed. He took an active role in devising military strategy, passing messages to the Tsar through Alexandra. Nicholas II, also a deeply religious man who believed in the inherent good of the peoples of peasant Russia, had absolute faith in Rasputin, whom he called 'Our Friend'. The first major challenge to the Tsar's authority came with the murder of Rasputin in December 1916, but it was not carried out by revolutionaries. Instead, the wealthiest aristocrat in Russia, Felix Yusupov and one of the Tsar's own nephews Dmitri Romanov led a group of conspirators who murdered Rasputin with cyanide then shot him, dumping his body in the frozen River Neva. Historians have presented several theories as to why he was killed but the most

compelling argument seems to be that patriotic nobles believed that he was causing Russia to lose the war and the damage he was doing to the royal family was dragging the country close to a revolution in which they would all be in great danger.

The winter of 1916

The Russian winter of 1916/17 was an exceptionally long and cold one, even by Russian standards. Food shortages caused by the war and inflation left shops empty and market stalls bare. Fuel was also in short supply and there was insufficient man power in the cities to shovel the snow. Many diarists wrote of a sense of impending dread, that something terrible was about to happen, but few of them actually foresaw the collapse of the regime. Revolutionaries in exile across Europe had little idea that within months the Tsar would be swept away, but ordinary Russians could see that the government was not functioning. The autocratic head of state was away at the front, his government was full of incompetent ministers, hand picked by the Tsarina and Rasputin. The food and transport systems had broken down and only state repression appeared to be keeping dissent in check. The bitterly cold weather kept many Russians off the streets but a thaw in the spring would change this.

Part Two: The February Revolution

Overview:

The February Revolution that swept the Tsar from power was not so much a revolt from below or by an organised party as it was simply the collapse of the Tsarist state. The revolution was initially contained to Petrograd where it began, but quickly royal authority across Russia dissolved. Emerging from the chaos were two separate organisations, both attempting to rule an almost ungovernable country that was still at war with Germany; the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet.

Chapter Three: The Revolution in Petrograd

On February 22nd the wives of steel workers at Petrograd's Putilov Steel Works reacted in anger and dismay after they queued for hours for bread, only to find that there was none in the shops to buy. Bread and other staples were already heavily rationed. Their husbands worked at a steel plant that had a long history of radicalism, as its philanthropic founder, Nikolai Putilov had encouraged literacy and political education amongst the workers. It was the largest employer in the city due to the massive increase in demand for steel that the war had created. This gave the steel workers considerable power. The workers went out on strike in protest against the shortages, but at this stage it was a display of dissatisfaction with the shortages, not a demand that the Tsar step down. The following day was international women's day (March 8th in the Gregorian (new style) calendar, February 23rd in the Julian (old style) calendar. Warmer weather led to a thaw in the bitterly cold snow and thousands of women joined the striking men on the city's streets to demand better food rations.

The Tsar's fatal error

What followed next was an example of the government's poor judgement and bad luck. It was announced that the flour ration per person would be reduced and the rumour that the food had completely run out spread through the crowd. Rioters crossed into the city's wealthier districts and smashed shop windows to grab loaves and pastries. On the 23rd some 50,000 protesters took to the streets but the following day the number had reached 200,000. The crowds grew as Petrograd's citizens joined in an almost carnival like atmosphere, but as they did the political mood was beginning to change. Banners demanding the removal of the Tsar were widespread throughout the crowds and by the 25th the protests had become an unofficial general strike with nearly every business across the city closing its doors. Protesters were emboldened by the fact that there had been no military crack down on the crowds, but the lack of repression had been a deliberate policy. The Tsar's Council of Ministers was well aware that the situation could be contained if the troops did not react. The Tsar, at the front in Mogilev only had information from his wife and Rasputin to guide his decisions. Disastrously, he ordered a military crack down on the protests on February 26th. The centre of Petrograd filled with soldiers, barricades and machine gun posts and two regiments, the Pavlovsky and Volynsky fired on protesters killing dozens. This brought the crisis to a head and the protesters realised that they were now fighting against the regime for their very lives. Most of the troops who fired on the crowds

were young and inexperienced and horrified by what had happened. They faced a dilemma, would they carry out their oath to the Tsar or be loyal to the people?

Mutiny

Troops across the city debated what to do and by the morning of the 27th the vast majority had decided to join the crowds. Commanding officers ordered them to carry out their duties but they were either ignored, chased away or in several cases murdered. When the Pavlovsky, Volynsky, Preobaszhensky and Lithuanian regiments joined the crowds, they brought with them thousands of rifles from the city's arsenals and millions of rounds of ammunition. This mutiny robbed the Tsar of any military power in Petrograd and turned the protests into a revolution and more importantly, into one with every chance of success. By the evening of the 27th it was clear that the Tsar's general in Petrograd, Khabalov, had completely lost control of the city. The Tsar's prime minister, Mikhail Rodzianko repeatedly sent telegrams to him over the five days of protests urging him to return to the city to take command. Rodzianko told him that it was fatal to delay returning and that each day the Tsar came closer to being deposed. Nicholas did not know what to do, but in part his decision not to return was a show of stubbornness. He did not believe he was answerable to the people. The Tsarina Alexandra continued to tell her husband that there was nothing to panic about, and that the trouble makers would soon disperse.

Abdication

Partly on the advice of the Tsarina, he had prorogued the Duma, indefinitely suspending the very ministers who might have saved his regime. Crowds threatened to storm the Peter and Paul Fortress in Petrograd on the 28th. It was a symbol of Tsarist oppression and had imprisoned generations of opponents of the regime.

By March 1st the Tsar's generals had concluded that they stood little chance of winning back the city through force of arms. They realised that the troops they would use to take back the city could not be trusted not to mutiny and join the revolution. When they realised that the Duma leaders had not dispersed as ordered but had organised a committee to maintain public order they knew there was a potential government in the capital they could work with. The generals were worried that socialist revolutionaries would try to take power, but with that worry seemingly gone, they cancelled the planned mission to save the Tsar's regime. The following day the Tsar's generals collectively advised him to abdicate. He preferred to give up the throne than compromise with a new government and become a constitutional monarch. When he signed his abdication, he stipulated that his ill son the Tsarevich Alexei would not take the throne. The only other option was the Tsar's brother, who had no desire to take on Nicholas's problems. With his refusal to consider becoming Tsar, the Romanov dynasty came to an end.

Chapter Four: The Revolution in the countryside

The revolution was not contained to Petrograd, it spread into the countryside but it manifested itself in a distinctly different way. Anger and resentment towards the landowners had been building for decades since the perceived failures of emancipation (see chapter one). In the two decades before the revolution many nobles in the countryside perceived a change in attitudes by the peasants. They appeared far less deferential and were sometimes insolent, rude and even threatening. The peasants adopted an ethos of 'voila', which roughly translated as a desire to be free from any kind of control. Younger peasants did not see the landowners, the government or any authority, including the village *obshchina* as having any right to control them. Some landowners looked on this development with fear, worrying what might happen if the Tsar's ability to police the countryside broke down.

In 1917 they found out what would happen, as the peasants, hearing that the Tsar's government had fallen seized the opportunity this presented. They were anxious for revenge against the landowners, but more importantly, they were hungry for land.

Anarchy

During and immediately after the February Revolution the Russian countryside exploded into violence. Noble families on country estates realised that there was no functioning government to protect them and the rural police (hated by the peasants), slipped away, fearful of what might become of them. Manor houses were burned down and landowners fled, with many escaping to cities such as Moscow and Petrograd. The writer Maxim Gorky, believed that instead of being freed by the revolution, Russia was sliding into a new age of barbarity. Some peasants with a sense of loyalty towards the landowners warned them that peasants on their estates were planning to attack them and they were able to make their escapes. Other landowners, understanding that the revolution had changed everything, decided to offer their land to the peasants voluntarily. When manor houses were attacked it was more common for the contents to be destroyed in anger than stolen. This suggests that the peasants did not see themselves as thieves, the land they took was simply what they believed they were entitled to. Often when they did take property from manor houses, they were practical tools and items such as boots or hunting rifles. The peasants had little interest in the finery of the nobles.

Land

The most important question in peasant Russia was how the land would be divided after the revolution. After the peasants had seized thousands of acres of land, they hoped that a government would come to power that would allow them to keep the land they had taken. Any new government would face considerable difficulties in dealing with the peasants and trying to bring the countryside back under control. It was essential to do this because Russia needed to be fed, wartime inflation had made paper money worthless and the Russian peasants were less and less inclined to take their food to market. Instead they hoarded it, bartered it or consumed it themselves, knowing that the money they received for their produce would have little purchasing power. Russia had not ended the war with Germany and the army needed to be fed, but the sons of peasants serving on the front line became in-

creasingly anxious to return home as they heard rumours that land was available in their home villages.

Part Three: The Provisional Government and the October Revolution

Overview

In March 1917 two organisations established themselves as governing bodies in Petrograd. The first was the Provisional Government, an interim regime made up of the Tsar's former ministers and the leaders of the Duma. It was largely middle class and aristocratic and was mirrored by an organisation of workers and soldiers, the Petrograd Soviet. The soviet also claimed it was the legitimate people's government in the city of Petrograd.

Chapter Five: The problems of the Provisional Government

In the final days of Tsar Nicholas II's reign, as the February Revolution swept the autocracy away, a provisional government formed, made up of a coalition led by the Constitutional Democratic (Kadet) Party. The government appointed a new prime minister of Russia, the liberal aristocrat Prince Georgi Lvov. The previous body that effectively ruled Russia in the Tsar's absence, the Council of Ministers was replaced by the new government. The Provisional Government was only ever meant to be a short term care taker government, set up to manage Russia until elections could be held and a fully democratic government created. It is important to remember that the government was not elected and had no democratic legitimacy and Prince Lvov was acutely aware of this.

The Petrograd Soviet

The Tauride Palace in Petrograd was home to both the Provisional Government but also an elected body of workers and soldiers deputies, the Petrograd Soviet. The word soviet means council or committee and during both the February Revolution and the 1905 Revolution, workers and soldiers had elected committees of their peers in factories and army barracks to decide what to do. Bosses and commanding officers had either been chased away or killed and this meant that the workers and soldiers suddenly had immense freedom to manage their own affairs. Delegates from these soviets attended a the Petrograd Soviet, which viewed itself a a supreme city wide democratic institution. During the 1905 Revolution the soviet had established itself as a form of rival democratic government to the Tsar. It was abolished when the revolution failed, but twelve years later the delegates hoped they could project their power across Russia and attempted to act as a rival to the Provisional Government, a body the soviet believed had no legitimacy.

Within two weeks there were three thousand deputies from across the city representing army regiments and factories at the Soviet. It had established a revolutionary newspaper called Izvestia (meaning 'News'), which circulated the soviets ideas and demands to the city's residents. The first chairman of the Soviet was a member of the Menshevik Party, Nikolay Chkheidze. Meetings were chaotic as hundreds of delegates at a time shouted, argued and talked across each other, turning some meetings of the soviet into noisy free for alls.

Dual power

The leaders of the soviet formed an executive committee and believed they spoke on behalf of Petrograd's 'revolutionary peoples'. Because there were soviets in every public amenity and essential service including the railways, telegraphs and post office), the soviet could control all aspects of public life if it had to. It also had enormous influence over the armed forces. Nearly all army regiments had sent delegates to the soviet and on March 1st 1917 the first decree of the new body was Petrograd Soviet Order No. 1. This decree ordered soldiers and sailors to obey the Provisional Government as long as the government's policies did not contradict the decrees of the Petrograd Soviet. This meant that the Provisional Government was able to rule Russia, but the soviet could effectively control it. The soviet publicly criticised the government and within weeks of the revolution had sent **revolutionary commissars** to the front line in the war still being fought against Germany to ensure the rest of the army came under the control of the government and the soviet. In June 1917 the Petrograd Soviet began to add delegates from across Russia and renamed itself the All Russian Congress of Soviets.

The return of exiles

The Provisional Government had to agree to policies that were unlikely to benefit it, due to pressure from the Petrograd Soviet. The Soviet created the **Contact Commission**, a body set up to communicate with the Provisional Government. On March 6th, at the demand of the soviet, the Provisional Government declared an amnesty for all political prisoners of the Tsarist regime. In Siberia, Bolsheviks such as Joseph Stalin and Lev Kamenev were freed from exile and hurried to Petrograd. When Stalin arrived in the city twelve days later he joined the Petrograd Soviet. On March 27th the Menshevik Leon Trotsky left New York, where he had been living as a political exile with his family to head back to Russia. Six days later Lenin and the core of the Bolshevik Party leadership arrived at Petrograd's Finland Station on April 3rd. The decision by the Provisional Government to amnesty all revolutionaries would have profound consequences for the government and Russia.

The problem of the war

From the outset the Provisional Government had an impossible dilemma to wrestle with. There was a widespread popular demand for Russia to exit from the First World War, by 1917 the costs of the war in human and economic terms had been enormous. However, Prince Lvov and his ministers were unable to bow to popular demands for the following reasons:

- * **Loans:** Russia was bankrupt and her economy was being propped up by loans from Britain and France, guaranteed by America. If Russia abandoned her allies, she would face economic catastrophe.
- * **Peace Deal:** In order to exit from the war, Russia would have to sign a peace treaty with Germany. The Germans would no doubt drive a hard bargain and want large swathes of territory.
- * **Patriotism:** Many Russians still believed their country could win and were determined to fight on. Relatives of the millions of Russian war dead did not want to believe their loss had been in vain.
- * **Legitimacy:** Some ministers in the Provisional Government argued that a major policy change such as an armistice that would have lasting consequences for Russia could not be carried out before an elected government had come to office.

* **Territorial Gains:** Some members of the Provisional Government believed that if they could win the war and gain territory as a result, it would cement the popularity of the new government.

Since the end of the Brusilov Offensive, there had been no clear strategy proposed to defeat Germany and as 1917 wore on, the army's position deteriorated. A combination of revolutionary ideas, low morale and a desire to return to Russia to take part in the land grab on the nobles estates.

The Milyukov Note

In April 1917 the first serious unrest in the capital after the Provisional Government's Foreign Minister, Pavel Milyukov sent the French and the British Governments a telegram. In it he reassured his allies that Russia's war aims had not changed. Russia would continue to wage an offensive war against Germany and her allies and would expect to be granted territory at the post war peace conference. The telegram was leaked to the public and angry crowds gathered in Petrograd demanding an end to the war. They were particularly enraged as the note seemed to contradict official government policy, that had committed Russia to simply a 'defensive war'. The protests were the first major show of public dissatisfaction against the Provisional Government. The hopes of February 1917 had been raised so high that it was inevitable that there would be disappointments.

Chapter Six: Lenin's bid for power

Lenin and Trotsky in Exile

Lenin

Vladimir Lenin, born Vladimir Ilych Ulyanov was the son of a well respected schools inspector from Simbirsk on the eastern edge of European Russia. His family were minor landowners but were also typical of the educated middle classes who grew to oppose the Tsar. Lenin's father had insisted that his children grow up with a sense of civic responsibility and work towards changing Russia for the better. His father died in 1886 and the following year a further tragedy struck the family when Lenin's brother, Alexander, was arrested by the tsarist police, guilty of taking part in an assassination plot to kill Tsar Alexander III. Even though he had only minor involvement in the conspiracy, Alexander was executed and the family was forced to move, exiled from the polite society they had once been members of. Lenin studied law at Kazan University but at university came into contact with radical revolutionary ideas. He was expelled and finally completed his studies in St Petersburg. He joined a party called the Social Democrats and was arrested for distributing revolutionary literature. He was exiled for three years in Siberia and when the sentence ended in 1900 he spent the following 17 years in exile developing the Bolshevik Party (see chapter one for more on the evolution of the Bolsheviks).

Trotsky

Leon Trotsky was born Leon Bronstein in 1879 into a well to do Jewish farming family in Yanovka in the Ukraine. He was intelligent, rebellious and discovered revolutionary politics when he was sent away to boarding school near Odessa on the Black Sea. He joined the

Social Democratic Party and became a well known writer and journalist in party publications. Like Lenin, he was quickly discovered by the Tsarist secret police and was imprisoned in 1898. He was sent into exile in Siberia with his wife Alexandra, where they had two daughters, but he escaped in 1902, abandoning his family to continue his revolutionary work. He lived in exile in Europe and returned to Russia to take part in the 1905 Revolution which ended in his exile to Siberia once more. It taught Trotsky valuable lessons about how to fight the authorities and how to set up a revolutionary government. He escaped once again in 1907 and travelled London where he met Lenin for the first time, but for most of the years before the war he was based in Vienna. When the February Revolution happened he was living in New York among the immigrant Russian community and raced back to Russia. He was arrested along the way by the British when the ship he was on docked in Nova Scotia and placed in an internment camp, but the Provisional Government intervened on his behalf. He was able to return to Russia and arrived on May 4th.

Lenin and the war

Lenin was one of the few European socialists who was completely opposed to the war. Most socialists across Europe decided to support their national governments' war policies, fearing that defeat would be far worse than supporting the governments they opposed. Lenin believed that the war was being fought by the working classes on behalf of their bourgeois masters but he also saw the conflict as an opportunity. He believed it should become a class war, and that the working classes across Europe should realise how they were being exploited and turn their guns on their class enemies.

Lenin's return and the April Theses

Because Lenin and the other members of the Bolsheviks in exile did not anticipate the February Revolution, they were not prepared for the complex journey back to Russia. Lenin travelled by train from Zurich, a journey that took eight days across Germany and German held territory. Lenin was helped by the German Government who believed that sending him back to Russia would undermine the Provisional Government and bring about an end to the war on the Eastern Front. The Bolsheviks travelled on a 'sealed train', meaning that its passengers were not recognised as legally entering Germany, instead they had to stay onboard until they arrived in Russia. The journey took them through Germany, by ferry to Sweden and then by train again to Finland and Petrograd. Along the way he wrote an essay called 'The tasks of the Proletariat' also known as Lenin's April Theses. He used the points in the April Theses to angrily attack the Bolshevik Party when he returned to Petrograd (see below). He argued that the job of the Bolsheviks should be:

- * To oppose the Provisional Government, which in Lenin's eyes was no better than the Tsar's regime.
- * To secure an immediate peace with Germany.
- * Power to the workers and poorer peasants.
- * The abolition of the state.
- * The creation of a republic of soviets.
- * Confiscation and nationalisation of all land.

He summed it up with by demanding: 'Peace, bread, land and all power to the Soviets.'

Lenin's rage

Lenin and the other Bolsheviks arrived in Petrograd on April 16th 1917 and he was greeted by party members, representatives from the soviet, workers and soldiers. However, despite the enthusiastic welcome, Lenin was extremely displeased by the actions of the Bolshevik Party in Petrograd. He demanded to know why they had not already started to plan the overthrow of the Provisional Government and why the party's newspaper, Pravda, had preached caution. The Bolsheviks Joseph Stalin, Lev Kamenev and Matvei Muranov had taken over the paper's editorship and they all believed that the Bolsheviks stood little chance of overthrowing the Provisional Government. Instead they thought that conciliation and cooperation were the only options; by working with the Provisional Government they hoped they would wield some influence. Lenin believed that the Provisional Government would very quickly reinstate the Tsar's policies if not the Tsar himself and that it had no potential for any kind of change at all. He demanded an immediate change of policy and threatened a showdown with Stalin if he disagreed. Stalin realised that Lenin was far more influential and powerful than he was and backed down. This was part of a long campaign by Lenin to stamp his influence on the party and get it ready for revolution.

The June Offensive

In June 1917 the Russian Army launched its final offensive of the war. The Provisional Government's Minister of War, Alexander Kerensky ordered the offensive and gave General Brusilov the task of commanding Russia's armies. The offensive was doomed from the outset, partly because of the unpopularity of the war among Russia's civilian population, but also because the Petrograd Soviet's decision to introduce Soviet Order No 1 had resulted in chaos on the front lines. Soldiers, now represented by the Soviet's revolutionary commissars who had been dispatched to the front line, refused to take orders from their officers. Bolshevik agitators also infiltrated the army, spreading a revolutionary message against the continuation of the war. The offensive was meant to drive the Germans and Austrians from Poland and it succeeded in devastating the Austrian forces with heavy artillery, but the German Army was far more resilient. Heavy losses led to a break down in Russian morale and military discipline. Troops began to refuse to take orders or to listen to their committees over their officers. The committees held the power within the army and by the time they had finished deliberating, the Russian Army had lost the initiative. When the Germans counterattacked they broke through the disintegrating Russian lines marching into the Baltic states of the Russian Empire and occupying Riga, the capital of Latvia in September. The failure of the offensive was a disaster for the Provisional Government and it showed that they could not rely on the ordinary Russian soldiers to fight for them.

The July Days

The failure of the offensive intensified anti war feelings in Petrograd and when the scale of the disaster was revealed, thousands of Petrograd workers downed tools and went on strike. The outbreak of city wide protests against the Provisional Government were not greeted by immense excitement or enthusiasm by Lenin, the Bolsheviks were not leading the protests and so a path to revolution that did not involve them was in his eyes, a potential disaster. Lenin believed that he had correctly interpreted Marx's writing and adapted it for Russia's circumstances and that as a result, only a Bolshevik seizure of power could be allowed.

Anarchists began the revolt amongst the army, but the All Russian Congress of Soviets (which had formerly been the Petrograd Soviet), forbade the protests. They were fearful that a collapse of order in the city might end in a German occupation of Petrograd and believed it was still worthwhile to support the Provisional Government. The fact that many soldiers now ignored the congress indicated that support for it had declined and its support for the Provisional Government had caused it to lose much of its credibility. After initially having misgivings about supporting the striking workers and mutinous soldiers, Lenin eventually decided that he needed to try to direct the uprising, but the results were less than successful. Whilst some Bolsheviks demanded that the party use the opportunity to seize power, Lenin was unsure, not convinced that the time was right. When troops loyal to the Provisional Government opened fire on demonstrators the protests came to an end. The July Days had several far reaching consequences:

- * Because the Provisional Government authorised the use of deadly force against protesters, it was seen by many Russians as little better than the Tsar's government.
- * Lenin was forced to flee into exile in Finland in the ensuing crack down, and other leading revolutionaries such as Trotsky were arrested and imprisoned.
- * Prince Lvov, the first Prime Minister of Russia stepped down, he was exhausted and depressed by the scale of problems that faced the country and had no idea about how to address them. He was replaced by Alexander Kerensky.

Exile again

Kerensky now identified Lenin as the chief threat to the stability of the Provisional Government and was determined to eliminate him. He announced that Lenin was an agent in the pay of the German Government and ordered his arrest. Lenin was convinced that if he were arrested he would be executed by Kerensky's police and by August 1917 he fled to Finland, along with fellow Bolshevik Gregori Zinoviev. Whilst he was in hiding, he wrote an essay called *State and Revolution*, which spelt out how Russia would be governed after a Bolshevik revolution.

Some members of the Bolshevik Party such as Nikolai Bukharin believed that if capitalism was overthrown then an oppressive state would no longer be required (the role of the state in the eyes of some Bolsheviks was simply that of protecting private property and the rich and powerful). Lenin argued in *State and Revolution* that a powerful centralised state would be essential after the revolution. The state would be needed to seize the wealth of the upper classes and the bourgeoisie, to imprison class enemies and to defend the revolution itself. Lenin had originally agreed with Bukharin, but from 1916 onwards he came to see the state as a tool of class repression; if Lenin seized power he would use it to repress the wealthy classes.

Lenin demanded that the Bolshevik Party now work towards the armed overthrow of the Provisional Government. He believed that the time was right to seize power and impose a Bolshevik regime on Russia, but few in the rest of the party agreed. Lenin was isolated in his own party in his demands for revolt, but he was unable to see what conditions were like for the Bolsheviks in Petrograd. The majority of the party's leadership had been arrested and the rest were in hiding, so Lenin's demands for revolution seemed wildly unrealistic.

The Kornilov plot

Lenin was not the only person planning the overthrow of the Provisional Government in August 1917. Following the disaster of the June Offensive Kerensky dismissed Brusilov as head of the army and appointed a new general, Lavr Kornilov. The new head of the army had never accepted the outcome of the February Revolution and he demanded that ruthless military discipline was reintroduced to the army, blaming revolutionary ideas for its weakness at the front. Following the July Days, a number of businessmen and aristocrats on the right offered their support to any leader who might be able to take charge of an increasingly chaotic Russia. Kornilov commanded his men at the front, attempting to hold together some kind of resistance against the German Army, but he was more concerned with saving Russia from herself. He believed that the All Russian Congress of Soviets needed to be crushed and did not think Kerensky had the support to do it.

Some historians argue that communications between Kerensky and Kornilov became confused during August 1917, and that the general was not initially considering a coup. Other historians argue that Kerensky had a plan arranged with Kornilov to initiate a military coup, with both men ruling Russia, but as the plan was put into practice Kerensky had second thoughts and called Kornilov a counter revolutionary. Kerensky, highly nervous and suspicious about potential threats to his power, suspected Kornilov might be planning a coup and dismissed him as the head of the army, leading Kornilov to mount his bid for power. The extent to which Kerensky is at fault for partially initiating the attempt is unclear, but what is certain was Kornilov's intentions during August 1917.

A panicked Kerensky, realising he had very little armed military support in Petrograd turned to the soviet for help. He was forced to release the Bolsheviks he had recently imprisoned, knowing that they were the only potential source of opposition to Kornilov left. He armed the Bolsheviks, a fateful decision, as they refused to return the weapons they had been given and would turn them on Kerensky's government just weeks later.

Railway workers who were members of the Bolshevik Party disabled the railway network that Kornilov hoped to use to bring troops into Petrograd and Bolshevik agitators spoke in secret to the general's troops, causing many to mutiny and desert. When Kornilov realised his forces were disintegrating he called off his counter revolution but before he could flee he was captured and arrested by some of the few troops still loyal to the Provisional Government.

Lenin's coup

One of the most significant results of the failed Kornilov coup was a significant increase in support for the Bolshevik Party. The party's propagandists presented them as heroic defenders of the revolution, but the reality of the coup (see above) was far less dramatic. The Bolsheviks gained a majority on the All Russian Soviet and the Moscow Soviet that had been established which demonstrated a growth in support. However the control of both soviets was also explainable by the fact that other political parties began to boycott them and delegates from factories and army regiments that were not allied to any political party attended sessions with less and less regularity. Following the euphoria of the February Revolution a growing political apathy gripped the soviets as the intractable problems that Russia faced took up the time and energy of many of the delegates. The Bolsheviks were the only party who did not succumb to apathy; one of Lenin's achievements was to instil discipline into party members, who were able to take advantage of the opportunities presented to them. Lenin decided that it was safe to return to Russia, in September 1917. He set about organising the party for the seizure of power, stating that: "Revolutions do not

make themselves.” He sensed that the opportunity the Bolsheviks had been waiting for was near, particularly because Russian society had begun to dramatically polarise following the Kornilov plot. Workers and peasants began to flock to revolutionary parties, including the Bolsheviks, as they interpreted the Kornilov plot as a ‘bourgeois’ attempt to undo the revolution.

The party decides

Lev Kamenev argued that all the parties of the left should form a revolutionary coalition to seize power but Lenin overruled him, stating that the party should take power alone. Lenin believed that the Bolshevik Party was the only real representative of Russia’s working class. Lenin was suspicious that other political parties would disagree with the violent class war he wanted to unleash on Russia following a successful seizure of power.

Lenin finally convinced the central committee of the party to vote for his planned insurrection on October 10th 1917, by a margin of ten votes for, two votes against. He was particularly keen to seize power before planned elections to the soviet in November. If Russians went to the polls in their millions, the new government they elected would have democratic legitimacy, and if that new government did not feature a Bolshevik majority, he wanted to be able to abolish it.

Lenin had begun planning the revolution in September and knew that he needed to control Petrograd’s military forces. He established a Military Revolutionary Committee to coordinate the soldiers and sailors in the city who were loyal to the party. The committee was a Bolshevik organisation but it presented itself to soldiers in their garrisons as Soviet organisation. This was crucial, because the soldiers would only serve the Soviet, which was not completely under Bolshevik control. When Trotsky was released from prison at the start of September, he joined and led the Military Revolutionary Committee. Once the party was able to direct the activities of soldiers, they were able to overthrow the Provisional Government with ease.

October 25th

The revolt was concluded with remarkably little fighting. The Military Revolutionary Committee directed the revolution from the Smolny Institute in Petrograd and Red Guard detachments of workers and soldiers fanned out across the city to capture key bridges, telegraph and post offices and government ministries. They encountered very little opposition (several important facilities, such as railway stations) had been occupied by workers loyal to the Bolsheviks for days, meaning that forces loyal to Kerensky would have been unable to relieve the government. Sailors from the Kronstadt naval base in the Gulf of Finland sailed up the River Neva in the battleship Aurora and fired the ship’s guns at the Winter Palace. Even though the ship used blank shells, it signalled to the remaining ministers of the Provisional Government that they had little choice than to surrender. Bolshevik soldiers were able to wander into the Winter Palace where the government met virtually unopposed. The Provisional Government had no military force to speak of to defend it by late 1917, meaning that the Bolsheviks did not so much seize power as acquire it without a fight.

Kerensky fled the city when he realised there was no one to support him, but Lenin was not particularly concerned with him or the rest of the Provisional Government. Instead he

wanted to inform the soviet and the other parties that the Bolsheviks had seized power. Initially they hoped that the Bolsheviks had seized power on behalf of the soviet and the other parties, but they quickly realised that it was a Bolshevik coup.

The New Government

Lenin established a new 'Council of People's Commissars' or SOVNARKOM, to run the country. During the two days that followed the coup a congress of soviets took place in Petrograd, where there were angry scenes as Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries decried what Lenin had done, declaring it illegal. Lenin ignored their objections and threats of civil war and Trotsky, who had joined the Bolsheviks from the Mensheviks prior to the revolution dismissed the SRs and Menshevik parties from the soviet as they walked out in protest, telling them to go to "the dustbin of history". The soviet reconvened at 9am the following morning and cheered as Lenin announced the first decrees:

- * The abolition of all private ownership of land and its control by the state. Lenin hinted that the state would hold the land in trust for the peasants but that they would get to use it. It was designed to encourage the peasants to seize more land with greater violence, but without formally granting it to them. Lenin ultimately planned to take land into state ownership.
- * He issued a decree on peace, stating that the new government would seek peace terms with Germany without conceding any territory. Lenin must have been aware when he uttered these words that this was virtually impossible, the Germans would demand a high price for Russia's exit from the war.

Lenin knew that the revolution would not come about because of decrees alone; the extreme social revolution he had in mind needed a new revolutionary secret police force in order to prosecute it. In December 1917 he established the "All-Russian Emergency Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage", or Cheka. It was led by the former Polish aristocrat and Bolshevik revolutionary Felix Dzerzhinsky. Its job was to root out class enemies (the bourgeoisie) and to prevent counter revolutionary activities such as hoarding food or speculating (keeping food back to sell when prices rose). Initially their role was to arrest 'counter revolutionaries' and take them to revolutionary tribunals, but the Cheka quickly began to dispense their own justice, executing prisoners without trial and imprisoning the city's helpless middle classes. They also shut down opposition newspapers and parties and became a new organ of state terror, helping Lenin by 1921 to transition Russia to a one party state.

Part Four:

Overview

Chapter Seven: Interpretations

The events of the February and October Revolutions were of enormous significance not just to the history of Russia but to world history throughout the 20th Century. How a communist regime came to establish itself in Russia is still a question that divides historians. There have been several key debates about the Russian Revolution and its aftermath and this section will outline some of the arguments that have been put forward. This is by no means an exhaustive list, it is just a short introduction to some of the main interpretations that have been developed.

John Reed

The first accounts of the Russian Revolution came from people who were not so much historians as eye witnesses. Writers like the American journalist John Reed and the British writer Arthur Ransome presented Lenin and the Bolsheviks in a broadly sympathetic light. Not only in the eyes of both men did Lenin and Trotsky seem to offer Russia a way out of the First World War, but they also seemed to be able to envisage modernising Russia. Modernisation and modernity in general were extremely popular ideas in Britain in the decade after the revolution and the writing of both men (along with an entire generation of journalists and intellectuals drawn to the revolution), presented the revolution as largely positive. In the aftermath of the First World War Britain had a large and politicised working class movement that was receptive to positive stories about a new workers state that had established itself.

Trotsky and his followers

Following the death of Lenin in 1924 a power struggle to lead Russia began between Trotsky, Kamenev, Zinoviev and Stalin. Trotsky lost this battle with Stalin and was exiled from the USSR in 1929 and murdered by Stalin's agents eleven years later. He spent much of his time in exile writing about the history of the Russian Revolution and inevitably he spoke about himself in very positive terms. His followers, mainly in western countries have been labelled 'Trotskyites' and one of the main Trotsky supporters was the historian Isaac Deutscher. Deutscher wrote three books about Trotsky and the revolution, *The Prophet Armed*, *The Prophet Unarmed*, *The Prophet Outcast*. In this series the October Revolution was presented as the first step in a transition towards constitutional government. The revolution, in Deutscher's view would have eventually seen the modern democratic government emerge from the soviets. This view has been dismissed by both liberal and conservative historians of the revolution, who argue that Lenin had no intention of building a democratic society. Deutscher also lays much of the blame for the later bloodshed of the revolution at Stalin's door. He suggests that both Trotsky and Lenin carried out Marx's ideas as they had been intended, but Stalin succeeded in derailing the revolution and creating a dictatorship. This sympathetic view of both Lenin and Trotsky has been challenged by a majority of historians in subsequent decades.

The Communist Party Historians Group

In Britain between the 1930s and the 1960s onwards Marxist interpretations of history often dominated university departments. A series of Marxist historians in the 1950s, all members of the Communist Party of Great Britain, wrote a 'history from below' focusing not on great leaders but on the anonymous mass of ordinary people who they argued made historical change happen. Their impact on the historiography of the Russian Revolution has been immense, as subsequent generations of writers (see Orlando Figes below) have incorporated social history into their writing. The most prominent of the Communist Party Historians Group was Eric Hobsbawm, who was explicit about his support for the Soviet Union, even when it was later revealed that the Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin had used immense brutality against the Russian people and their neighbours in Eastern Europe. Towards the end of his life Hobsbawm declared that: "The dream of the October Revolution is still there somewhere inside me" and that "I belong to the generation for whom the October Revolution represented the hope of the world... The Soviet Union's hammer and sickle symbolised it."

Liberal views

Liberal interpretations of the Russian Revolution tend to see the February Revolution as a positive event and the October Revolution as a catastrophe. One of the earliest liberal chroniclers of the revolution was the Russian Jewish emigre and intellectual Isaiah Berlin, who came to Britain in the 1920s as a child. He said: "I remember the first Revolution quite well. There were meetings, banners, crowds in the streets, enthusiasm, posters with the face of the new Lvov Ministry, propaganda by more than twenty parties for the Constituent Assembly... The liberal revolution was greatly welcomed by Jews and the liberal bourgeoisie."

In the 1990s the most influential liberal interpretation of the Russian Revolution was Orlando Figes 'Russia: A People's Tragedy'. The book explored the period 1891-1924, ending with Lenin's death. Figes argued that the potential of the February Revolution was lost in the following months partly because of Russia's backwardness and the inability of the Russian people to create fully liberal institutions. He argued that Lenin never had any intention of allowing such institutions to develop and his most 'liberal' work, State and Revolution, called for an authoritarian state to be established.

Conservative views

Two contemporary conservative historians of the Russian Revolution, Richard Pipes and Robert Service, believe as Figes did, that the outcome of the revolution was a tragedy. Pipes argues that the term revolution should not be ascribed to the events of October 1917. Instead he believes that it should be viewed as a coup d'état for which there was little popular support. Service's writing on the Russian Revolution focuses on what he views as the flawed ideas of socialism and the ideas of Lenin, which enjoyed very little support from the people. With little actual support and nothing to incentivise the peasants and workers with, coercion was the only alternative.

Chapter Eight: Activity

This activity is based around source analysis. Below are three sources and after it a key question. The final part of this section is a discussion of how to approach the questions, so you can read this after you have completed your answers, or if you are finding the questions difficult you can read it first as a general guide. The question does not conform to those set by any particular exam board, instead it has similarities to most source based questions set by UK examiners.

Source 1: Taken from *Five Days* by Leon Trotsky (Here Trotsky writes about the February Revolution).

“Cutting their way with the breasts of their horses, the officers first charged through the crowd. Behind them, filling the whole width of the Prospect galloped the Cossacks. Decisive moment! But the horsemen, cautiously, in a long ribbon, rode through the corridor just made by the officers. "Some of them smiled," Kayurov recalls, "and one of them gave the workers a good wink" This wink was not without meaning. The workers were emboldened with a friendly, not hostile, kind of assurance, and slightly infected the Cossacks with it. The one who winked found imitators. In spite of renewed efforts from the officers, the Cossacks, without openly breaking discipline, failed to force the crowd to disperse, but flowed through it in streams. This was repeated three or four times and brought the two sides even closer together. Individual Cossacks began to reply to the workers' questions and even to enter into momentary conversations with them. Of discipline there remained but a thin transparent shell that threatened to break through any second. The officers hastened to separate their patrol from the workers, and, abandoning the idea of dispersing them, lined the Cossacks out across the street as a barrier to prevent the demonstrators from getting to the centre. But even this did not help: standing stock-still in perfect discipline, the Cossacks did not hinder the workers from "diving" under their horses. The revolution does not choose its paths: it made its first steps toward victory under the belly of a Cossack's horse.”



Source 2: Russian mounted troops in Petrograd during the February Revolution

Source 3: Letter from the Tsarina Alexandra to the Tsar on February 26th 1917, explaining how she saw the uprising in Petrograd.

'The whole trouble comes from these idlers, well-dressed people, wounded soldiers, high-school girls, etc. who are inciting others. Lily spoke to some cab-drivers to find out things. They told her that the students came to them and told them if they appeared in the streets in the morning, they should be shot to death. What corrupt minds! Of course the cabdrivers and the motormen are now on strike. But they say that it is all different from 1905, because they all worship you and only want bread.'

Question

How far is the interpretation in Source 3 supported by the evidence in Sources 1 and 2?

Guidance

A source based question is a bit like a maths equation, it needs to be done carefully in stages and a series of problems need to be resolved before you can give a satisfactory answer.

Problem No 1: Understanding the interpretation

If you are being asked about the interpretation given in a particular source, this is the first source to discuss. You are not being asked to repeat the source, but simply to translate it. What is the Tsarina getting at? Why is she saying what she is saying? These questions need to be resolved before questioning whether the evidence in other sources supports her view. She might be right in what she is saying, she might not be, but leave that discussion until later in the essay, deal with the translation task first. Most exam boards will expect you to combine the source with your own subject knowledge to create an overall picture of the Tsarina and her motivations. It is also important to think about dates and context (this letter is being written during the February Revolution, at a time that events are moving extremely quickly)

Here's one way of interpreting the Tsarina:

In source three the Tsarina Alexandra has written down her opinions in a letter to her husband. She writes about the disorder in Petrograd, where she was living, to her husband who was not in the city at the time; she was one of the few people he trusted to give him what he viewed as the truth. Alexandra's information is coming from a third party called Lily (one of her ladies in waiting), who had been informed by the city's cab drivers. This suggests that Alexandra did not have an objective picture of what was going on. The Tsarina was confined to the Winter Palace during the events of February 1917, she and the rest of the royal family had withdrawn from the outside world following the death of Rasputin in December 1916. The Tsarina appeared only to have a vague understanding of the protests and did not fully grasp how serious they were, believing that: "idlers, well-dressed people, wounded soldiers, high-school girls, etc" were responsible. She also seemed divorced from reality when she claimed that: "...they all worship you and only want bread." The interpretation of the events of February 1917 that the Tsarina has presented to the Tsar is incomplete as it does not explain what the protests are about, why there are so many peo-

ple on the streets and it implies they are not political protests but simply the work of idlers and trouble makers.

Problem 2: Comparing this flawed interpretation to a primary and secondary source.

Now we've distilled the essence of what the Tsarina was saying, we need to compare her words to Sources 1 and 2. Source 1 is written by Leon Trotsky and was first published in 1930, a considerable period of time after the events of the revolution. The book was his own personal first hand account of the revolution and will inevitably be influenced by his personal views, political ideas and biases. The fact that this is a subjective account of the revolution does not necessarily detract from its usefulness but the reader must bear this in mind when considering its accuracy. Trotsky presents a completely different view of events to that of the Tsarina, Trotsky did not witness the insubordination of the Cossacks first hand and was informed about it by others. We do know what Leon Trotsky's political sympathies were, but this does not necessarily discount this as a valuable source. All people have biases, perspectives and opinions so every source comes laden with them.

One way of writing about the source might be:

"Source 1 presents a very different picture of the February Revolution. It suggests that instead of hooligans and trouble makers, the most significant group on the streets of Petrograd was the army. The Tsar's mounted soldiers who were most often used to put down insurrection, the Cossacks, were in Trotsky's account increasingly friendly towards the protesters. This account was written long after the February Revolution, in 1930 by Leon Trotsky, who was one of the chief planners of the October Revolution. Trotsky was not in Russia when the February Revolution took place so much of the detail he describes in the text was either reported to him second hand or embellished. The account he gives is closer to the established facts of the revolution than the Tsarina's point of view and the defection of the army to the side of the revolution was arguably the most significant moment that decided the fate of the Tsar. As such, whilst this source is problematic, it contradicts and undermines the view of the Tsarina and is generally more reliable.

Problem 3: The Picture Source

Source 3 is the only primary source in the question. Arguably, the only kind of primary source that exists is a picture source as every other type of source evidence needs to be created after the event (paintings, diary entries, newspapers and books). The unwary student might assume that it is simply a source that supports Trotsky's account in Source 1, but is it? It shows Cossacks, but we have no way of knowing when it was taken. It may have been a photo taken at the start of the protests when the army was still loyal to the Tsar, or it might have been taken at the end of the revolution after the Tsar had fallen. Even though we know that the Cossacks do come over to the side of the people, we have no way of knowing this from the image. We can suggest that this might be the case (historians often have to make educated guesses, acknowledging that they might not have a definitive answer), but we cannot know for sure. It is difficult to say, therefore, how far this source contradicts the Tsarina (it certainly doesn't offer much evidence to support her), as we aren't sure when it was taken or in what context.

Having read the two previous examples of how to tackle this source question, have a go yourself.

Glossary:

Throughout this ebook, certain key terms that students often find complex have been highlighted. Here are the terms and their definitions:

Anarchists: Political revolutionaries who believe that the state is oppressive and should be abolished.

Anti Semitic pogroms: Attacks on Russia's Jews, often encouraged and organised by the Tsarist government.

Autocracy: A system of government where all power flows from one individual.

Batyushka: Meaning 'Little Father', a peasant term to describe the Tsar.

Civil Society: A society where citizens actively participate in democratic activity and work for the improvement of the nation.

Contact Commission: The committee established to communicate between the Petrograd Soviet and the Provisional Government

Duma: The parliament established by the Tsar after agreeing to the October Manifesto of 1905

Constitutional monarchy: A monarchy with limited powers that accepts the sovereignty of parliament.

Constitutional reform: To make a society more democratic and accountable by changing its constitution.

Feudal: A hierarchical system of ruling based on land ownership, with the Tsar at the top and peasants and serfs at the bottom

Hooligans: A term to describe young working class men in Russia's cities who showed open disrespect to the middle classes and aristocracy

Industrial revolution: The transition from an economy based on agriculture to one based on heavy industry and manufacturing.

Khodynka Field: A large public space in Moscow

Land Captains: Rural police introduced after the emancipation of the serfs. Hated by the peasants.

Marxism: The revolutionary ideas of Karl Marx, based on class struggle.

Narodniks: An early revolutionary party in Russia that saw the peasants as the best hope of overthrowing the Tsar.

Obschina: The village commune, which regulated peasant life and land ownership.

October Manifesto: A promise by the Tsar signed under duress after the 1905 Revolution to bring about constitutional reform.

Okhrana: The Tsarist secret police.

Orthodox Christianity: An eastern variant of Christianity that was first established in the Byzantine Empire.

Parochial: To think only locally and have no view of the world beyond ones own immediate surroundings.

Philanthropic: Charitable giving by the rich to the poor.

Police state: A society that is controlled using a secret police and terror tactics.

Revolutionary commissars: The representatives of the Petrograd Soviet who were sent to the army to ensure the troops were represented.

Russification: The Tsarist policy of imposing Russian culture on non Russian peoples.

Serfs: Landless agricultural workers who were effectively the property of the landowners.

Slavs: The ethnic people of Russia and the Balkans.

Stavka: The Tsar's military forward command.

Treaty port: Ports in China that were occupied by European powers following the defeat of the Chinese to Europeans in the 19th Century.

Voila: A sentiment that means 'to do whatever one wants'.

Winter Palace: The Tsar's palace in St Petersburg/Petrograd.

Zemstvo: Local government in Russia, established by Alexander II.

Extra Help

If you found this ebook useful there are dozens of other free resources at the following websites:

www.explaininghistory.com

www.explaininghistory.wordpress.com

www.explaininghistory.podhoster.com