



Western Civilization from 1650 to the Present

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TOPIC 11.2. THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

Supplement to Chambers, *The Western Experience*, Chapter 28: The Great Twentieth Century Crisis, pp. 1005-1014.

<p>PRELUDE TO REVOLUTION</p>	<p>Tsar Nicolas II and his subjects entered World War I in a buoyant mood of enthusiasm and patriotism. By the middle of 1915, however, THE IMPACT OF WAR WAS DEMORALIZING the nation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Food and fuel were in short supply ■ War casualties were staggering ■ Inflation was mounting ominously. ■ Strikes increased among the low-paid factory workers ■ The peasants, who wanted land reforms, were restive. <p>Confronted with these danger signals, THE TSAR SHOWED LITTLE LEADERSHIP. Nicholas II was weak and incompetent and was suspected of being under the domination of his German wife and the insidious peasant faith healer Rasputin, who was assassinated by a group of Russian noblemen in 1916.</p> <p>Military and domestic failures produced massive casualties, widespread hunger, strikes by workers, and disorganization in the army. The peasant discontent that had plagued the countryside before 1914 did not subside during the conflict. In 1916, the tsar adjourned the Duma, Russia's parliament, and proceeded to rule alone. All political factions were discontented.</p>
<p>THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT</p>	<p>In early March 1917, strikes and worker demonstrations erupted in Petrograd (Saint Petersburg) and the ill-disciplined troops in the city refused to fire on the demonstrators. THE TSAR ABDICATED on March 15. The government of Russia fell into the hands of members of the reconvened Duma, who soon formed A PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT, composed chiefly of Constitutional Democrats (Cadets) with Western sympathies.</p> <p>At the same time, the various socialists, including both Social Revolutionaries and Social Democrats of the Menshevik wing, began to organize the workers into SOVIETS, councils of workers and soldiers. Initially, they allowed the provisional government to function. As relatively orthodox Marxists, the Mensheviks believed that a bourgeois stage of development must come to Russia before the revolution of the proletariat. They were willing to work temporarily with the Constitutional Democrats in a liberal regime, but they became estranged when the Cadets failed to control the army or to purge "reactionaries" from the government.</p> <p>In this climate, the provisional government decided to remain loyal to the existing Russian alliances and to continue the war against Germany. The provisional government thus accepted tsarist foreign policy and associated itself with the source of much domestic suffering and discontent. Its fate was sealed by the COLLAPSE OF THE LAST RUSSIAN OFFENSIVE in the summer of 1917. Disillusionment with the war, shortages of food and other necessities at home, and the growing demand by the peasants for land reform undermined the government. This occurred even after its leadership had been taken over by the moderate socialist Alexander Kerensky (1881-1970). Moreover, discipline in the army had disintegrated</p>
<p>LENIN AND THE BOLSHEVIKS</p>	<p>Ever since April, the Bolshevik wing of the Social Democratic party had been working against the provisional government. The Germans, hoping to cause trouble for the revolutionary government, rushed the brilliant BOLSHEVIK LEADER V. I. LENIN in a sealed train from his exile in Switzerland across Germany to Petrograd. Lenin saw the opportunity to achieve the political alliance of workers and peasants that he had discussed before the war.</p>

THE COMMUNIST DICTATORSHIP	<p>In speech after speech, he hammered away on the theme of peace, bread, and land. The Bolsheviks demanded that all political power go to the soviets, which they controlled. The failure of the summer offensive encouraged them to attempt a coup, but the effort was a failure.</p> <p>Lenin fled to Finland, and his chief collaborator, Leon Trotsky (1879-1940), was imprisoned. The failure of a right-wing countercoup gave the Bolsheviks another chance. Trotsky, released from prison, led the powerful Petrograd soviet. Lenin returned in October, insisted that the time was ripe to take power, and by the extraordinary force of his personality persuaded his colleagues to act.</p> <p>TROTSKY ORGANIZED THE COUP that took place on November 5 and that concluded with an armed assault on the provisional government. The Bolsheviks, almost as much to their own astonishment as to that of the rest of the world, had come to rule Russia.</p> <p>The victors moved to fulfill their promises and to assure their own security. The provisional government had decreed an election for late November to elect a Constituent Assembly. The Social Revolutionaries won a large majority over the Bolsheviks. The Red Army DISPERSED THE ASSEMBLY when it gathered in January. All other political parties also ceased to function in any meaningful fashion.</p> <p>In November and January, the Bolshevik government issued decrees that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ NATIONALIZED THE LAND and turned it over to its peasant proprietors.■ Factory workers were put in charge of their plants.■ Banks were taken from their owners and seized for the state■ The debt of the czarist government was repudiated.■ Property of the Church reverted to the state. <p>The Bolshevik government also TOOK RUSSIA OUT OF THE WAR, which they believed benefited only capitalism. They signed an armistice with Germany in December 1917. On March 3, 1918, they accept the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, by which Russia yielded Poland, the Baltic states, and the Ukraine. Some territory in the Transcaucasus region went to Turkey. The Bolsheviks also agree to pay a heavy war indemnity.</p> <p>These terms were a terribly high price to pay for peace, but Lenin had no choice. Russia was incapable of renewing the war effort, and the Bolsheviks needed time to impose their rule on a devastated and chaotic Russia. Moreover, Lenin believed that communist revolutions would soon occur across Europe as a result of the war and the Russian example.</p> <p>Until 1921, the new Bolshevik government met major domestic resistance. A CIVIL WAR erupted between the “Red” Russians supporting the revolution and the “White” Russians, who opposed it. In the summer of 1918, the Bolsheviks murdered the czar and his family. Loyal army officers continued to fight the revolution and eventually received aid from the Allied armies. Under the leadership of Trotsky, however, the RED ARMY OVERCAME DOMESTIC OPPOSITION. By 1921, LENIN AND HIS SUPPORTERS WERE IN FIRM CONTROL.</p>
ONLINE RESOURCES	<p>For more information on this topic, explore one or more of the following online resources:</p> <p>Lecture Five on the Russian Revolution: Covers February-October, 1917. Good summary</p> <p>Lecture Six on the Russian Revolution: Covers Red October and the Bolshevik coup.</p> <p>Lecture Seven on the Russian Revolution: Covers the aftermath of the Bolshevik revolution.</p> <p>Alexander Palace Time Machine: Everyday Life in a Romanov Palace: A fun place to explore.</p>

**DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS**

Drawing on the resources you have had an opportunity to explore (textbook, course documents, online resources, library resources), answer one or more of the following questions:

By the year 1917, how was World War I going and how was it affecting Russia? How did the Russian people react?

Discuss the validity of the following statement: “For the first time in history, a revolution is being engineered not from below but from above, not by people against their government, but by the government against the welfare of the people.”

How do you think the Western democracies should have dealt with communism in Russia during the 1920s? Why?