



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>

**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?