

UNIT 7: THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONS

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INTRODUCTION: The historical significance of the Russian Revolution

The years between 1917 and 1945 was an unstable period marked by the Russian Revolutions (the February 1917 Rev and the October 1917 Rev), the post-war crisis in most of European countries, the spread of communism, the economic crisis of 1929 and the rise of totalitarian regimes (Fascism, Nazism, Stalinism) that led to the Second World War

Historians agree that the events that happened in Russia are one of the most relevant in contemporary History, as they created the first communist state in the world (the Soviet Union) that will have a great influence throughout the 20th century until its dissolution in 1991. .

1.- RUSSIA BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

The **Russian Revolution** was the result of several elements that characterised the early-20th century Russia. The effects of liberal revolutions that had affected most of Europe were almost inexistent in Russia, where the tsar ruled with an absolute power. Industrialisation was delayed and concentrated in some cities. Yet, the Russian empire was the largest continental empire in the world, and played an important role in the international scenario. Foreign affairs will have major consequences and will trigger the beginning of the end of the tsarist regime.

1.1.-The Tsarist regime



In the late 19th century, Russia was a vast empire ruled as an **absolute monarchy**. The tsar Nicholas II (1896-1917) held an autocratic regime where he had all the power and government. While most of Europe had been introducing liberal measures throughout the 19th century, in Russia was no Parliament nor elections. The tsar was supported by the Orthodox church, the army and an outdated bureaucracy. Political parties were forbidden and the secret police persecuted the opponents.

The **economy** was semi-feudal, where a wealthy minority of noblemen owned most of the agricultural land, which was worked by a peasant majority (80%). Their living conditions were very hard and most of them were illiterate. Rural areas were completely backward, tools were rudimentary and productivity was low. Industrialisation had been delayed in comparison to the other European countries, focused on heavy industry and railway construction, which led to the emergence of the proletariat in the cities. However, there was only a small bourgeoisie because industrial development was promoted by foreign investment and the state.

In the late 19th century, clandestine political parties were founded, opposing the tsar.

-The ***Socialist Revolutionary Party***, led by Kerensky (→important role in the February Rev).

-Marxists formed the ***Russian Socio-Democratic Workers' Party***, that split in two groups:

-the **Mensheviks**, more moderate, who wanted to implement gradual reforms in a liberal regime that would make a gradual transition to socialism.

-the **Bolsheviks** were more radical. They rejected cooperation with the bourgeoisie and wanted to establish a **proletarian dictatorship**. They wanted an immediate revolution. THEIR LEADER WAS LENIN. **Anarchism** also spread through the use of violence and terrorism against important figures of the regime (such as the tsar **Alexander II**, killed in 1881 by an anarchist terrorist).

1.2.-The 1905 Revolution

In 1905 Russia was defeated by Japan in the **Russo-Japanese War**, in a time of a deep economic crisis. There were protests against the tsar's absolutist regime, they demanded improved living conditions and political reforms, but not an end of tsarism. However, they were violently repressed by the government (Bloody Sunday). The following months were marked by strikes and protests. Workers and soldiers formed revolutionary councils (**soviets**) in St. Petersburg. These popular assemblies later became very important in Russian history. The tsar finally made a few concessions, the main one was the creation of a Parliament (**Duma**) via universal male suffrage, but it was not really respected by the sovereign. He continued to govern without the Duma. The situation worsened and criticism against the tsar increased. A liberal party was founded after the 1905 revolution (**the Constitutional Democratic Party (kadets)**), that wanted to establish a parliamentary monarchy in Russia. It was mostly composed of middle-class people.

1.3.- The effect of WWI in Russia

The participation of **Russia** in the **First World War** worsened the economic and political problems that the empire was already experiencing. The involvement of Russia in war was a natural consequence of the interest in the Balkans, supporting the Serbians and hence confronting with the Austro-Hungarian empire. The war was quite unpopular and left many casualties (more than 2 million). **Discontent** and protest grew, as Russian soldiers did not have enough food or military equipment. Additionally, **military disasters** against the powerful German army followed, and frustrated soldiers led many **mutinies**. **Desertions** increased in the front, along with **strikes** in the cities, as civilians were suffering from **food shortage**, increase of prices and **starvation**. Protest were harshly repressed.

IN YOUR NOTEBOOK, ANSWER THE QUESTIONS:

- 1.- What were the reasons for political unrest in tsarist Russia?
- 2.- List the signs of Russian economic weakness.
- 3.- Explain the difference between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks
- 4.- What were the causes and consequences of 1905 Revolution?
- 5.- List the effects of the participation of Russia in WW1.

2.- THE 1917 REVOLUTIONS

2.1.-The February Revolution and the formation of the provisional government

A general strike took place in Russia between 23 and 27 February 1917 (8-12 March in western calendar). Peasants, army and bourgeoisie joined to create the **Petrograd Soviet** to fight against the tsarist power. The revolutionary slogan was "Peace, bread and land". A general strike broke out, and there were mutinies among the soldiers.

Nicholas II, who had lost the support of the army, was forced to abdicate on 2 March in favour of his brother Michael, who subsequently abdicated on 3 March. The **Russian Republic** was thus established and the **Duma** took the political control in Russia. A **provisional government** was formed, first led by prince Lvov and soon replaced by **KERENSKY**, a Menshevik. Workers, peasants and soldiers formed soviets all over the country. These councils had their own armed militias (the Red Guard) and soon fell under Bolshevik control. In fact, there were two powers in Russia: the Provisional Government and the soviets.

The **first liberal measures** of the Provisional Government were: freedom of speech was allowed, political parties were permitted, the redistribution of land was promised... but as Kerensky knew Russia needed the support of Western countries, the Russians went on fighting in WWI, hoping as well that Russian victories would restore morale.

The Bolsheviks, led by LENIN, who came back from his exile in Switzerland (helped by the Germans) opposed the provisional government and presented his program in the "**April theses**". Lenin promised "*peace, bread and land*", the withdrawal of WWI, and the nationalisation of lands. He asked to give "*all the power to the Soviets*", and to stop supporting the provisional government. Helped by TROTSKY, he prepared the future and definitive revolution. His popularity increased and soon controlled the main cities (St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kiev), establishing alternative government based on the soviets. There were many demonstrations against the Provisional Government in July and Kerensky responded with a harsh repression. Lenin's opposition to the Provisional Government resulted in another exile in July, this time to Finland and many Bolshevik leaders, like Trotsky, were imprisoned.

In September, a conservative military leader (general Kornilov) tried to achieve a coup d'état against the Provisional Government. Consequently, as the soviets were well organized, the Provisional Government decided to free the Bolsheviks that were in jail and gave them weapons to respond to the coup. Trotsky's Red Guard defended the city, increasing its popularity seen as the saviours. They kept the weapons that Kerensky had loaned them! The events in the summer 1917 showed the weakness of the Provisional Government and the strength of the Bolsheviks and the soviets.

2.2.-The **October** Revolution.

On 24th October (6th November in western calendar) Lenin, who had returned from his exile in Finland, joined the Petrograd Soviet. The next day the **Bolsheviks** stormed the **Winter Palace** of St. Petersburg, which was guarded by the Cossacks, Women's battalion, and cadets. Later, they took control of banks, stations, communications, with almost no resistance. The Provisional Government surrendered. It is considered the outbreak of the October Revolution. A new **Revolutionary government** was formed by the Bolshevik leaders: **Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky**, among others. Lenin became soon the leader of Russia.

ACTIVITIES:

6.- Research and write a short biography about Lenin.

7.- What were the main proposals of the so-called April thesis?

8.- Make a chart comparing causes /development/ consequences of February and October Revolutions.

3.- THE USRR.

3.1.- Lenin government (1917-21) and the civil war.

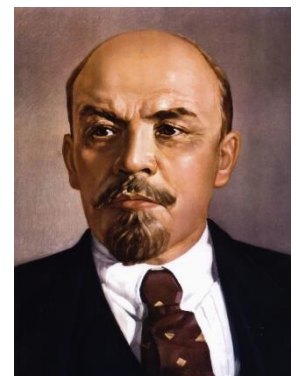
Under Lenin the Bolshevik government imposed some measures: the **Duma** was dissolved and the Red Army seized the control in Russia; censorship was imposed; right to strike was abolished; lands and banks were nationalised; as it had been promised, Russia retreated from War, signing in March 1918 the **Treaty of Brest-Litovsk** with Germany, where Russia accepted the independence of Finland, the Baltic republics, Poland, Ukraine, and Transcaucasia. The former Russian Empire became a federal state.

The **Cheka** (political police) was created in order to persecute dissidents and purge the soviets of possible Mensheviks. The government persecuted opponents, and executed the Imperial family (Romanov) in July 1918.

A communist dictatorship was established and all other political parties were banned.

In response to these events, a **civil war** broke out between:

- White Army (counter-revolutionaries, represented by liberals, conservatives and moderate socialists, supported by France and UK, that feared the spread of communism in Europe)
- the Bolshevik forces (the Red Army).



The civil war would last until from 1918 until 1921. Bolsheviks won the war, 8 million people lost their lives. **War Communism** was imposed to guarantee supplies to the cities and the war fronts. Industries and lands were nationalised, crops were seized to feed the army. Protests against these measures were harshly repressed

After the Civil War, the USSR, **Union of Soviet Socialist Republics** was proclaimed (1922), organised as a federal state governed by the Communist Party. The **Constitution of the USSR** was passed on 6 June 1923: only the **Communist Party of the Soviet Union** was legal; the legislative power was held by the **Supreme Soviet**; the executive power was held by the **Presidium** and **Council of People's Commissars**, who were in charge of controlling the Head of the State; the capital was fixed in **Moscow**; each republic of the **USSR** would have some autonomy. It soon began to expand by incorporating other republics.



In 1921, the Kronstadt sailors - who had been the **Bolsheviks** fiercest supporters - **mutinied**, demanding an end to War Communism. Trotsky put down the rebellion, but Lenin decided to replace War Communism by a **New Economic Policy (NEP)** which was in use until 1927: some economic freedom was given to the peasants; small companies could be private; some foreign investments were allowed; they allowed some international exchanges; the nationalised companies would be self-managed by the workers. At the same time, local nationalities who had been forced to follow a strict

Communist line were allowed to bring back their own language and customs. Churches, mosques and bazaars were re-opened. The improvement in the economy was significant, but some old Bolsheviks said Lenin had sold out to capitalism, and left the party.

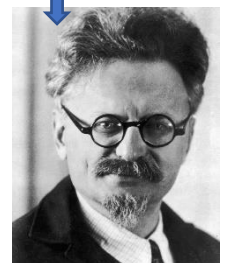
QUESTIONS

- 9.- Why was there a civil war after the October Rev? Explain the main features of the two opponent sides.
- 10.- Explain how the Russian civil war was an international issue.
- 11.- Summarize the economic measures imposed during the civil war. Research about its results.
- 12.- What type of economic policy was established replacing War Communism? List its main economic and political consequences.

3.2.- **Stalin's** government (1924-1953)

Once **Lenin** died in 1924, he was succeeded by **Joseph Stalin**, who had fought with **Trotsky** to get the government. This struggle for power between Stalin, the secretary of the Communist Party, and Trotsky, the brilliant Commissar for War, was about what the Soviet Union would become: Trotsky believed in encouraging world revolution, whereas Stalin advocated Communism in one country' and said Russia had to establish its power before there was any attempt to spread revolution. Stalin used his position as secretary to put his supporters on the Central Committee of the party. Stalin became party leader in 1924, and Trotsky was dismissed, then exiled and murdered in 1940.

Stalin established a totalitarian regime until his death in 1953. It is the so-called **Stalinism**:



- **Politically**, there was a total centralisation of the state and all the enemies of **Stalin** were purged, even within the Communist party - 93 of the 139 Central Committee members were put to death. Some 20 million ordinary Russians were sent to the **gulag** forced labour camps system mostly in Siberia - where perhaps half of them died. The Christian Church and the Muslim religion were

forbidden. Ethnic groups were persecuted, and **Russification** - the acceptance of Russian language and customs - was enforced throughout the Soviet Union.

- In **economic** terms he implemented the **Five-year Plans**, which favoured the heavy industry (coal, oil, steel and electricity). They created the **Kolkhoz** (agrarian cooperatives) and the **Sovkhoz** (state-owned farms) for peasants. Private property was completely prohibited. The State should own the wealth and would lead its redistribution. These plans made the **USSR** a very important economic and military power. However, consumers goods industries (food, textiles) was deficient, and thousands of people died of starvation and cold. Recent research estimate that only in Ukraine, more than 4 million people died of famine in 1932-33.

The Soviet Union also gave **opportunities to women** - crèches were set up so they could also work.



92. Ефимов Б.
Капитан Страны Советов ведет нас от победы к победе! 1933

Women became doctors and scientists, as well as canal diggers and steel workers.

The use of **propaganda** presented Stalin as a caring father to his people.

His leadership was reinforced after the participation of USSR in WW2. The victory over Hitler and the freeing of Western Europe would increase Stalin's popularity and would lead to the spread of Communism from Poland to Yugoslavia (the so-called "iron curtain"), dividing Europe into two blocks.

The division will also affect other areas of the world (Korea, South Eastern Asia, South America).

The confrontation between USSR and USA and his allies will be maintained during the **Cold War** by Stalin successors after his death in 1954. The reforms introduced in the 80's will finally put an end to the USSR (dissolved in 1991) and therefore to Cold War.

ACTIVITIES

- 13.- List the main political and economic measures established under Stalin dictatorship.
- 14.- Research the influence of the Russian Revolution. Which other countries became communist?
- 15.- How long did the communist regime in Russia last?
- 16.- What was its conflict with the USA called?

INTERESTING LINKS:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/history/mwh/russia/>

<https://www.history.com/topics/russian-revolution>

UNIT 7: THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONS

Topic 1: RUSSIA BEFORE THE REVOLUTIONS

1.- What were the reasons for political unrest in tsarist Russia?

From 1896 to 1917 Russia was ruled by the tsar Nicholas II that held an **autocratic** regime. Political discontent increased during this period, due to the poor decisions Nicholas II took and the promises of reforms he made, such as the creation of a Parliament (Duma) or a new Constitution, but he did not comply. Elections or political parties were inexistent, while **repression** was common.

2.- List the signs of Russian economic weakness.

Economy was semi-feudal, which means that a wealthy minority of noblemen owned most of the agricultural lands, worked by a peasant majority. This led to an economic weakness in Russia.

- Living and working conditions of the peasants were harsh.
- Rural areas were completely backward, productivity was low, tools were rudimentary. Hence, there was an increase in prices and starvation
- Industrialisation was delayed and limited to some cities.

3.- Explain the difference between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks

1. Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, were both, groups that came from the Russian Socio-Democratic Worker's Party formed by Marxists. The difference between these two was that, while Mensheviks was a moderate group, ruled by Plejanov, who wanted to implement gradual reforms in a liberal regime that would make a gradual transition to socialism. T
2. he Bolsheviks were a more radical group, ruled by Lenin, which rejected cooperation with the bourgeoisie and wanted to establish a proletarian dictatorship, and an immediate revolution.

4.- What were the causes and consequences of 1905 Revolution?

Causes: The 1905 Revolution happened after they were defeated by Japan in the **Russo- Japanese War**, in a time of **deep economic crisis**.

Consequences: The tsar was blamed for this situation. There were protests against the tsar's absolutist regime in Saint Petersburg, demanding for an improvement of living conditions and political reforms, but were harshly repressed (Bloody Sunday). This revolution increased the criticism against the tsar, and he made some concessions, creating a Parliament (Duma). However, the tsar governed without the Duma, and opposition increased, leading to the creation of a liberal party, Constitutional Democratic Party, that wanted to establish a parliamentary monarchy in Russia.

5.- List the effects of the participation of Russia in WW1.

Participation in WW1 worsened the economic and political problems. Other effects were: casualties (more than 2 million), discontent and protest grew among soldiers, which did not have enough food and military equipment to continue fighting. Desertions and mutinies spread in the army, as well as military disasters against German army.

Strikes broke out in the cities by the civilians, suffering from food shortage, increase of prices and starvation.

A final consequence would be the outbreak of February revolution in 1917, which eventually ended with the abdication on the tsar.

RUSSIAN REVOLUTION: CORRECTED VERSION OF ACTIVITIES 9- 16 (LENIN&STALIN).

9. Why was there a civil war after the October Rev? Explain the main features of the two opponent sides.

After the October Revolution Lenin's government imposed some measures turning Russia into a communist dictatorship. These measures, along with the execution of the Romanov (Nicholas II and his family) by the Bolsheviks provoked a response, as many Russians were against this new order. A civil war broke out, confronting the Red and the White armies. The civil war will last from 1918 until 1921. The White Army was a counter-revolutionary movement represented by the liberal, conservative and moderate socialists, who also had the support of France and the UK who feared the spread of communism throughout Europe. The **Red Army**, led by Trotsky, was formed by the Bolshevik forces. They defended the revolutionary government.

10.- Explain how the Russian civil war was an international issue.

If the government established by Lenin and represented by the Red Army won the war then communism had a big chance of spreading throughout Europe and threatening the French and British politics. Therefore, these two countries backed up the counter-revolutionary side of the war, the White Army. In spite of this great effort, Lenin still won the war and the USSR was proclaimed in 1922 as a federal state formed of republics, recovering some territory that had been lost in the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, as in Ukraine or the Caucasus (see map in: <https://reasilvia.com/2017/06/la-revolucion-octubre-la-guerra-civil-rusa/>)

11.- Summarize the economic measures imposed during the civil war. Research about its results.

War Communism was the economic policy adopted during the civil war, to ensure the total control of the economy by Lenin's government. It guaranteed supplies to cities and war fronts. Lands and industries were nationalised and crops were seized to feed the army. Rich peasants (kulaks) reduced their production of crops since they knew their surplus would be requisitioned by the government. There were protests and strikes against this regime that were harshly repressed. The most important one was the mutiny of Kronstadt sailors. By 1921, after 2 years of bad harvests and the effect of the Civil War, 5 million people died of hunger. When the war was over, Lenin had to change this harsh policy to win back the support of peasants and industrial workers.

12. What type of economic policy was established replacing War Communism? List its main economic and political consequences.

After a mutiny led by the Kronstadt sailors who were the Bolsheviks fiercest supporters, Lenin put an end to War Communism and replaced it by NEP, **New Economic Policy**. This consisted of giving some economic freedom to the peasants, allowing some small companies to be private, permitting some foreign investment, international exchanges and local nationalities to bring back their own language and custom, and re-opening mosques, churches and bazaars. The consequence was a significant improvement in the economy. However, Lenin was accused of no longer being communist and being sold out to capitalism.

13. List the main political and economic measures established under Stalin dictatorship.

Stalin established a **totalitarian communist** regime in Russia from Lenin's death in 1924 until his own death in 1953.

His political measures were the following:

- centralisation of the State.
- all enemies of the regime were purged, 93 central committee members were killed.
- forced labour camps for 20 million Russians in Siberia, most of them died.
- forbidden Christianity and Islam.
- Russification, which forced people to speak Russian and follow their costumes, was adopted throughout the Soviet Union.

His **economic** measures included the following:

- **Five-year plans**, ("PLANES QUINQUENALES") favouring the heavy industry which included the use of coal, oil, electricity and steel.
- creation of the *Kolkhoz* and *Sovkhoz*, agrarian cooperatives and state-owned farms for the peasants.
- prohibition of private property. The State owned everything and was supposed to distribute it.

14.- Research the influence of the Russian Revolution. Which other countries became communist?

In the USSR the consumers goods industry meaning food and textiles was deficient and millions of people died of starvation and cold. Women became important in Russia, where they could become scientists or workers, and were an example for the rest of Europeans. Stalin became very popular after defeating Hitler in the Second World War and countries from Poland to Yugoslavia became communist forming the **iron curtain** because of this. The *iron curtain* included Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Soviet East Germany. (All of them were renamed *People's Republic of...*) As a consequence, Europe was divided into two blocks during the COLD WAR.

15.- How long did the communist regime in Russia last?

The communist regime in Russia lasted from 1922 to **1991, when the USSR was dissolved**, and therefore the Cold War ended.

16- What was its conflict with the USA called?

The Cold War was the confrontation between Stalin's successors representing the USSR and its allies and the USA and his allies.

	FEBRUARY 1917 REVOLUTION: a “liberal “revolution	OCTOBER 1917 REVOLUTION: a “socialist revolution”
CAUSES	General discontent of tsar Nicholas WW1 + its consequences (military defeats, casualties, food shortages, inflation)	Economic problems, weak provisional government, continuation of WW1, economic + military shortage Lenin return from exile, <i>April theses</i> “ <i>peace, bread, land</i> ” → increasing popularity of Lenin Kornilov coup= prov.government loses the control of the army, increasing power of the Red Guard (Trotsky)
DEVELOPMENT	Strike, mass demonstrations in ST Petersburg Nicholas II loses army support, (soldiers refuse to fire and many join the revolution) and a provisional government is formed .	Storming of the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg by the Bolsheviks (Lenin) Bolsheviks overthrown the provisional government and the Duma Revolutionary government formed,
CONSEQUENCES	Nicholas II forced to abdicate. New liberal regime, Republic The Duma (Parliament) forms a Provisional government, introduction of liberal measures 2 powers: Duma+soviets Russia involvement in WW1 continues=more losses+casualties) <i>Further consequences: Lenin return → April theses</i> -July: Kornilov conservative coup d’état (conservative) → <i>October revolution</i> .	Lenin becomes the leader of Russia with the revolutionary government, and all power is given to soviets . Repression of opponents, execution of Nicholas II family. - Withdrawal from WW1 : treaty of Brest -Litovsk with Germany (March 1918) -Civil war 1918-21 -Creation of the USSR 1922-1991

<https://www.slideshare.net/crtfinnie/consequences-and-significance-of-the-russian-revolution> SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION, DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MARXISM AND LENINISM

***Russia still used the Julian calendar, the "February" and "October" revolutions actually happened in March 1917 and November 1917 respectively*

Special thanks to Noa T., from 4^oA, who provided the basis of this chart.