



The Russian Revolution

Why was there a Revolution in Russia in 1917?

Tsarist Russia

Until 1917, Russia was ruled by a Tsar. Nicholas II had become Tsar in 1894. He was an autocrat (a ruler who has absolute control over the country). People who spoke out against the government were sent to prison. Rioters were attacked by the Cossacks (Russian soldiers).

In 1905 there had been a revolution against the rule of the Tsar. In order to keep his position, Nicholas had been forced to accept a Duma (parliament) but nothing really changed, Nicholas kept power and if members of the Duma disagreed with him they were sent away.



Nicholas II

In 1914 Germany declared war on Russia and in 1915, Nicholas took control of the army. The Russians faced a series of defeats and Nicholas was blamed. While Nicholas was at the front fighting the war his wife Alexandra was left in charge of the country. She was very influenced by the holy man Rasputin. People resented the influence of Rasputin and he was murdered. The Romanoffs were very unpopular. By 1917 there were food and fuel shortages. High unemployment meant that huge numbers of people were living in poverty. People were dying.



Karl Marx

Communism

Karl Marx (1818-1883) had said that industrialisation had made the middle classes rich and powerful but had made the workers slaves. He said that the workers should rebel and take power away from the rich. He believed that nothing should be privately owned and that everything should be commonly owned. This theory is called communism. A group of people called the Bolsheviks believed that the royal family should be overthrown and communism introduced.

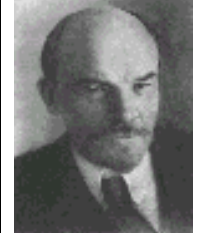
The leader of the Bolsheviks was Vladimir Lenin but he had been forced to leave Russia to avoid being imprisoned. Lenin continued to be leader of the Bolsheviks while in exile – publishing communist leaflets and raising money for their cause. He also spoke against the war.

The February Revolution

In February 1917 people rioted on the streets in Russia. They were joined by soldiers and members of the Duma. Nicholas II was forced to abdicate and a new government called the provisional government took over. Many Bolsheviks, including Joseph Stalin believed that the Russian people would not accept a Socialist government and supported the provisional government led by Alexander Kerensky who became President of Russia. The workers, soldiers and peasants elected their own councils called Soviets. The Soviets were as powerful as the government.

The October Revolution

Kerensky had not ended the war as the people had hoped but had planned a new offensive against the Germans. Soldiers began deserting and returning to their homes. Many of them used their weapons to take land from the rich. In April 1917, Lenin returned from exile. He was angry that Russia was still fighting in the war and that many Bolsheviks supported the provisional government. Joseph Stalin had to decide whether to oppose Lenin or whether to abandon his support for the provisional government.



Vladimir Illich
Lenin

He chose to support Lenin and on 24th October the Bolsheviks seized the Winter Palace, the headquarters of the provisional government. In December 1917 Lenin signed the treaty of Brest-Litovsk which took Russia out of the war. In 1918, the Russian royal family were murdered by the Bolsheviks.

Civil War

Many Russians did not support the Bolshevik government and tried to oppose the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks were known as the 'reds' those that opposed them were known as the 'whites'. There was civil war between the reds and whites. Armies from Britain, France and America supported the whites but the Bolsheviks were more powerful and by 1922 the Bolsheviks were in charge of Russia.

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Directions: On a separate piece of paper, answer the following questions.

1. Explain the following terms:
a. Autocrat, b. Communist, c. Cossack
2. Who was:
a. Nicholas II, b. Karl Marx, c. Vladimir Lenin, d. Alexander Kerensky
3. Make a list of the things that people hated about Russia.
4. Make a timeline of events that led to the two revolutions of 1917.
5. How did the feelings of the people in Russia in 1917 help the February revolution to succeed?
6. Why was Lenin unhappy with the results of the February revolution?
7. What steps could Nicholas II have taken to avoid revolution in Russia?