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## THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION ,1917

Russia saw a fast-moving and far-reaching Revolution in 1917 which profoundly affected the history of Russia, Europe, and the whole world throughout the twentieth century. In fact, the term 'the Russian Revolution' is used for two eruptions in 1917 in March and November of 1917. The first – the March Revolution - started spontaneously on 7 March with riots and demonstrations in Petrograd. This led to the overthrow of the three centuries old tsarist regime. After this a provisional government was set up. The period from March to November saw a series of dramatic events as well as radicalization of factory and agrarian movements. In November, this government was overthrown and the Bolsheviks assumed power. Three more years were to elapse before the Bolsheviks were able to consolidate their hold. Beneath all its complexity and contradictions, the Russian Revolution proved to be a vast trauma of violence and deprivation for all sections of society in Russia. This Upheaval in Russia challenged the prevailing socio-political order, recast international relations and left a deep impact on human imagination.

For understanding this Revolution, it is necessary to have a grasp of the events, ideas, institutions and individuals, meaning of hopes and anxieties, and trauma of deprivation and violence. In this presentation, first the historiography of the Revolution, then the events leading to the fall of Tsardom and reasons for it, followed by failure of attempts at forging a democratic government and, finally, the take over by the Bolsheviks and, the reasons for it, would be discussed.

### 1. THE DEBATE ON THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

The importance of the Russian Revolution was recognized contemporaneously and scholarly publications, both polemic and literary, began to emerge immediately. The writings on the subject provoked fierce and highly politicized historical controversy. It was inspired by mutual suspicion between the Soviet Union and the Western world which turned to hatred during the Cold War period. The question at the heart of all scholarship on the Russian Revolution has been and remains: how did the Bolsheviks, a small minority party in March, and largely excluded from political power, manage to take power eight months later, and then consolidate that into dictatorship within three months?

In 1920, the Moscow government established a commission to oversee the writing on the Revolution. Thus a regime-controlled account emerged. It blended the history of the Revolution and the party with a view to establish the legitimacy of Bolshevik Party and

Lenin. It saw the revolution as the vindication of the materialist conception of history and as the supreme event in human history which inaugurated an era of freedom in the annals of humankind. It was the Bolshevik party which, imbued with the infallible scientific theory of Marx, led each of the Revolutions. Thereafter, the party led by Lenin mobilized the proletariat to defend the revolution against internal chaos and triumphed over White armies. Thus foundations were laid for the construction of the first socialist society. Memoirs and document collections were also written and edited to fit this basic interpretation.

The Western interpretation of events emerged not from historical objectivity but rather from political necessity to contradict every Soviet proposition. Thus Marxist-Leninist version not only directly shaped Soviet historiography, but also conditioned the debate in Western countries. Historians in the West relied on emigré Russian accounts and the standardized sources provided by the Soviet Union. Leon Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* (1931) became a very important source while W.H. Chamberlain's *The Russian Revolution* (1935) emerged as the most authoritative history in the West. The Western historians argued that the two Revolutions were genuine popular Revolutions which were hijacked by Lenin and the Bolsheviks who, through superior political organization and political manipulation, ruthlessly suppressed democratic aspirations of the people by crushing opposition and denying freedom of speech. Outside the Western world it was this avowedly partisan liberal version which moulded the image of this Revolution.

It is notable that until the 1960s, both the Western and Soviet historians saw the revolution in similar political terms. Western accounts too focused on a disciplined and monolithic Bolshevik party under Lenin's leadership ignoring social and economic factors, and the role of the masses. The masses were not seen as comprehensible interest group but as an ill-defined chorus chanting mindlessly in the background. This had the advantage that this way the Revolution could be seen as a coup without popular support and thus ill-legitimate. The basic difference in the two approaches was, as R. A. Wade puts it, that Soviet histories saw the Revolution as good and most Western historians saw it as bad. (Wade: 2004, p. 3)

By mid-1970s, scholars began to challenge the Soviet and Western accounts alike. In the West, self-confessedly 'revisionist' younger historians began to feel that histories of the Soviet Union were inspired by hatred of SU rather than historical analysis. In international relations this was the period of détente. Moreover, this was the period when, under the influence of the Annales School, historians began to study the impact of land-hunger and aspirations of peasants, the working conditions of workers, and the grim conditions under which the soldiers had to fight. They began to study the impact of gradual spread of literacy

on widening the horizons of workers and of the spread of the realization that only political change could improve their lot. The greatest area of consensus amongst the 'revisionists' was the view that the 1917 Revolution was a popular revolution made by politically conscious and rational workers and peasants. Several studies appeared which indicated that mass political action was not exclusively, or even mainly, Bolshevik-directed and that Bolsheviks, in many ways, reflected political aspirations of people. This made them rethink the role of accidental factors and of individuals. This examination of 'history from below' produced a wide range of important new works especially on social history. Some of the historians of this period were Mark Ferro, Stephen A. Smith and Rex A. Wade. They replaced previous focus on political leadership, ideology and high politics with a greater emphasis on the aspirations and actions of social groups, particularly the working class. However, as Edward Acton comments, despite intense work along all these lines on 'history from below', 'the interplay between organized political activity and mass social experience remained inadequately understood'. (Acton;1997, P. 10). The social history investigations invigorated the studies of the Revolution and set the ground for further investigation from different angles.

It should be noted that historians continued to produce important studies with primarily political orientation. Richard Pipes, a very reputed American professor who produced a dozen books on Russian history, in extensive works, published in 1990 and 1994 argued that the Bolshevik Revolution was a classic *coup d'etat* or a violent act carried out by a tiny minority, that the Bolsheviks were 'uniquely evil' and that they were revolutionaries not for the sake of improving the condition of the people, but for the sake of gaining domination over the people and remaking them in their own image. He attacked the 'revisionist' school of historians who legitimized the Bolshevik regime by portraying the November Revolution as a mass movement. He also emphasized the continuity between the Tsarist autocracy and the Bolsheviks one-party system. But important work on social history could not be cast aside by Pipes. New research continues to support the significant role that people played during the Revolution.

From the late 1980s, in the study of Revolutions in French, British and American History, new trends based on post structuralism, post-modernism, gender, and other approaches began to play an important role. Some historians, influenced by the cultural and linguistic turns, began to apply these to the study of Russian Revolution. They examined how during the revolutionary upheaval, new language and symbols were developed and utilized to achieve political, economic and cultural goals. Social and cultural history merged to some degree.

In 1991, when the SU disintegrated, Soviet/anti-Soviet paradigm which had dominated the writing of the history of the Revolution for seventy years was finally broken. It destroyed the orthodox Soviet account of the Revolution. Doors of archives of the SU were thrown open and it seemed that it would have enormously liberating affect on research in this field. However, new archival access to records at Petrograd did not make much of a difference on general writing and interpretation of the history of the revolution. It emerged that much of what was there at the archives at Petrograd was already known. The reinterpretation that has emerged has been from asking different questions and rethinking issues. But break up of the SU into 15 independent countries has led to important developments in regional and nationalities studies.

Effort is being made to understand the processes and experiences that contextualized the events and narratives of 1917 and to understand what was responsible for the euphoria or the trauma that was universally felt.

### Interesting Fact

#### Calendar in Russia

Until 1918, Russia followed the Julien calendar which was 13 days behind the Western (Gregorian) calendar. Hence the Revolutions, called the March Revolution and the November Revolution here, have been known as February and October Revolutions in Russia. The Bolsheviki adopted the Western calendar in February 1918. The Bolshevik Revolution began on 25 October according to the old Russian calendar. But its anniversary was celebrated on 7 November by the USSR

government and was an official holiday.

**In this chapter, all dates are based on the Western calendar.**

## 2. MARCH (FEBRURAY) REVOLUTION 1917: FALL OF TSARDOM

In March 1917 events, spread over less than a week, resulted in the fall of 300 years-old Tsarist dynasty. The chain of events was extremely tortuous and entirely unexpected. The events involved two aspects – workers' movements and demonstrations, and soldiers' mutinies. The Revolution began 8 March, which happened to be International Women's Day, when workers in Pulitov Plant a machine building factory in Petrograd which was the biggest employer in the city struck work, tore up rule books, and created committees to represent their interests. The strike spread to many other factories in the vicinity. In most cases, female wers who were very bitter about bread shortages led the way out of factories.

**Did You Know****Women's strike**

A contemporary from the Nobel engineering factory describes the bitterness shown by women as they walked out of their factories on 8 March (23 February 1917):

We could hear women's voices: 'Down with the high prices!' 'Down with hunger!', 'Bread for the workers!'...Masses of workers in a militant frame of mind filled the lane. Those who caught sight of us began to wave their arms, shouting, 'come out!' 'Stop work!' Snowballs flew through the windows. We decided to join the revolution.

By 9 March, riots and demonstrations with slogans like 'Down with the autocracy', and 'Down with the War', turned into a general strike which paralysed the city. It is estimated that some 400,000 workers participated in these activities. On 10 March, the police and military guard opened fire on the demonstrators in which about two dozen persons were killed. The next day, the soldiers refused to open fire on the crowd and a wave of mutinies swept through the barracks and thereafter, workers and soldiers intermingled. During the next two days, the demonstrators burnt the police central headquarters and seized arsenals. Similar movements swept Moscow and other Russian cities. The cabinet resigned and the ministers either fled or were imprisoned.



Figure No. 1

[www.imagestate.com/Preview/PreviewPage.aspx?i...](http://www.imagestate.com/Preview/PreviewPage.aspx?i...)

Striking Putilov workers on the first day of the March (February) Revolution, Petrograd. (Note that the number of women is overwhelming.)



While chaos reigned in the city, on 12 March, two parallel centres of power emerged. The members of the Duma formed a committee to run the country. On the same day Soviet of Representatives of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies was formed at Petrograd. Its leadership was assumed by self-appointed executive committee of best-known leaders of the labour movement and socialist intellectuals. At this time, the Tsar decided to return to the capital from his headquarters. But he could not do so because the general strike paralyzed all railroad transport to the capital. There, he was persuaded by some leaders of the Duma and his generals to abdicate. He abdicated on a railway platform on 15 March in favour of his brother who refused to accept power. Tsarist regime thus ended unceremoniously. No group in Russia extended support to the Tsarist government. On the same day the Committee of the Duma became the Provisional Government that ruled Russia for eight months. Those loyal to the monarchy were either killed or arrested.



Figure No. 2

[historyrhymes.wordpress.com/.../](http://historyrhymes.wordpress.com/.../)

Tsar Nicolas II and his family

(After the Tsar was arrested, he and his family were kept in strict confinement. His family and family's servants were killed in July 1918. The evidence strongly suggests that orders for his death came personally from Lenin. Source: Acton:1997, 181)

People in Petrograd treated the fall of the Tsar as the proclamation of universal freedom, equality and direct democracy. The news of the new order was disseminated by wire and rail to other cities of the empire. The atmosphere became euphoric. People raved in freedom. Parades and processions were organized and political prisoners were released. The masses were thus suddenly filled with confidence in their ability to decide their own fate. At the same time, they were possessed by constant fear that this fragile power might be taken back at any moment by their real or imagined enemies. The March Revolution thus marked both the end of the old regime and the beginning of a new revolutionary process. It should also be underlined that the victory of the Bolsheviks was not implicit in the events of March 1917, it emerged from later developments.

### **3. REASON FOR THE FALL OF TSARIST STATE**

This Revolution grew out of massive discontent which was a result of a complex web of long- and short-term causes. Ultimately, its overthrow came in 1917 as a result of popular revolt precipitated by social and economic crisis, the emergence of revolutionary movement of exceptional persistence and the refusal of the monarchy to share power. The First World War precipitated the crisis.

#### **3.1 POLITICAL**

During the closing decades of the nineteenth century, society in Russia was changing rapidly which produced dislocations and anxieties. The Tsarist regime was seen as incompetent and indecisive. Various sections of society had been discussing the ways of overthrowing the Tsarist government. There was a Revolution in 1905, when there were wide-spread and violent insurrections which lasted throughout the year. It arose out of political, social and economic crisis and brought the tsarist regime to its knees. The regime survived in 1905 by accepting many of the demands of the revolutionaries. But, constitutional changes, some agrarian reforms and factory reforms that it introduced, were too piece-meal in nature and failed to satisfy the peasants and workers.

In granting the Manifesto, the Tsar did recognize the need for democratization if only to pacify the people and to put an end to protests and strikes. In 1906, Stolypin was made the Prime Minister and continued till 1911. He was a reformist and was convinced of the need to combine firm assertion of governmental authority with measures to assuage popular discontent. Constitutional reforms, as promised in the October Manifesto, were introduced. Provision was made for a bicameral legislative body. In the upper house, half the members were appointed by the Tsar. The lower house, or the Duma, was to be elected by secret ballot and a system of doubly indirect elections. Though franchise was greatly widened, it favoured

the wealthy and politically conservative sections. It discriminated heavily against the workers and peasants. Yet many members of Kadets, Octoberists, i.e. those who had welcomed the October Manifesto, and some Social Democrats managed to enter the Duma.

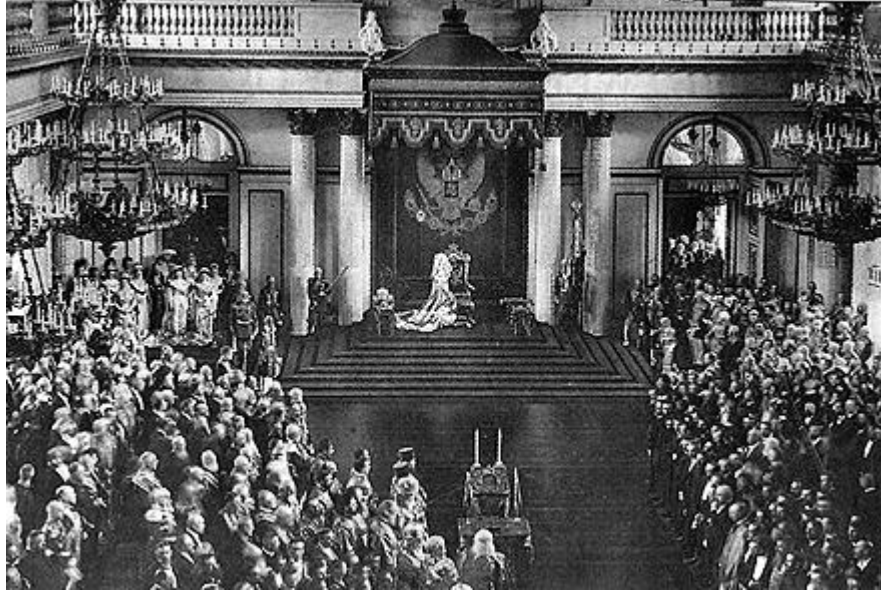


Figure No.3

<https://.../citd/RussianHeritage/11.MR/MR.8.htm>

#### The tsar opens the first Duma

When the First Duma met in May 1906, the members demanded a government resembling a constitutional monarchy. But the Tsar was not ready to accept any restraints on his powers. He dissolved this Duma after 73 days. The second Duma, in which 65 Social Democrats were elected, proved to be more radical than the first. It lasted three months. Thereafter, the Tsar altered the system of elections to ensure the election of members who would support the government. The Third Duma (1907-12) and the fourth Duma (1912-17) served their full term. Many foreign observers were surprised at the ease with which the Tsar was able to ignore the promises made in the October Manifesto and was able to dismiss the first two Dumas without provoking another general strike. Thus, though in a time of intense and violent opposition, the Tsar had agreed to introduce changes in the government in the liberal direction, subsequent events showed that he was hostile to the demands of the citizens which the latter considered to be just.

### 3.2 CONSTITUTION OF POPULAR DISCONTENT

The Russian Government was aware of discontent amongst the people in the rural and urban areas. It had made efforts to stem it from the 1860s. But, efforts to relieve discontent in rural areas by 'emancipation of serfs' and other measures had failed to tackle the problems and aspirations of peasants. What the peasants resented the most was the payment of redemption dues and lack of private ownership of land. Similarly, the efforts to industrialize made after 1880s did not produce desired results. This industrialization proved insufficient to increase prosperity, it produced explosive social consequences. It encouraged the migration of people to the cities where living and working conditions became despicable.

Stolypin did make efforts to retrieve the situation. The government cancelled the redemption dues and, in the village community, allowed the peasants to take their own share of land as private property. But landless peasants remained dissatisfied. He also took steps to encourage education, industry and commerce. As a result, this period saw a new spurt of industrial growth. The economy grew at an impressive rate of six per cent per annum. But wages of workers remained low and strikes continued. These strikes led to political radicalization of workers. In any case, Stolypin's death in 1911 cut short this effort. Peasant disturbances revived. It has been estimated that during 1911-14, there were 17,000 peasant rebellions in European Russia alone. In July 1914, there was a violent and widespread strike in industries. A feeling began to grow that a change of regime, probably including the overthrow of the monarchy, was essential for the betterment of people.

There has been an intense debate amongst historians as to whether the discontent amongst the people was the result of grinding poverty or of growing prosperity. Some historians have argued that the peasants were becoming impoverished because of overpopulation, soil exhaustion and taxation by the state and were discontented. Others have argued that harvest yield was improving and that people were spending more on consumer goods. In fact, the situation was quite complex with marked differences in the living standards not just in the major regions but in neighbouring villages. Whatever the reasons, all commentators agree that there was deep discontent. Many historians tend to portray the peasants as primitive and ignorant people who could only play a destructive role in a revolution. But, in 1917, peasant communities were extremely quick to fill the vacuum with their own institutions. One reason was that, after 1905, peasant organizations like the peasant unions and cooperatives, as well as primary socialist organizations, did not become moribund but took root in the countryside. Historian Orlando Figes comments: '...during 1917-18 the peasants quickly restructured the whole of rural society, from the system of land relations

and local trade to education, justice and social welfare, and, in so doing, they often revealed a remarkable political sophistication, which did not come from a moral vacuum.' (Figs: 1997, 546)

### 3.3 IDEOLOGICAL FACTORS :THE 'INTELLIGENTIA'

For decades intellectuals and the people at large had been discussing ways and means to relieve social distress and individual deprivation which had come to wreck tsarist Russia, improve material well-being, and assure a secure future. It is necessary to appreciate this ideological wish for betterment to understand the political activism as the state moved formally from the old regime to the Provisional Government and then became so violently contested with the creation of the Bolshevik regime.

In Russia intellectuals and political activists had been discussing ways to relieve social distress and to improve the quality of life for all Russians. They came to be known as the 'intelligentsia' though they never formed any organized group. They promoted enlightenment ideas such as dignity of individuals, democratic representation etc. They also developed contending explanations about what was wrong with the then existing situation, which particular attributes of Russia's 'backwardness' could be alleviated, and how. Many streams had emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century – Anarchist, Populist, Nihilist amongst them.

In early twentieth century, three broad streams emerged which played a key role in the events of 1917: the Social Revolutionaries, the Social Democrats and the liberals. The Social Revolutionary Party, established in 1902, grew out of 'populism'. It developed close connection with the peasantry and aimed at social control over land and its equal distribution amongst those who worked on it. Politically, it aimed at the abolition of the monarchy and the establishment of a democratic republic. This Party was not Marxist. Its members did not approve of increasing industrialization and did not think in terms of a proletarian revolution. Marxists called them 'peasant lovers'. This party played a very significant role in 1905 as well as 1917.

The second stream was that of the followers of Karl Marx which proved most influential. In 1898, a Marxist socialist party was established by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870-1924), Julius Martov and Plekhanov – the Social Democratic Labour Party – which became the forerunner of the Communist Party. Its aim was to bring about a revolution in Russia to establish socialism. For this purpose it wanted to unite Marxist radical groups which had been active in

Russia since the 1880s. Its members propagated Marxist ideas. Marx believed that economic forces were the real cause of historical change. With industrialization, capitalists came to dominate the economy and overthrew feudal society dominated by monarchs and aristocrats. He further argued that capitalism 'digs its own grave' by continuous expansion, creating more factories, more capital and more workers. When a society would become industrialized, workers (proletariat) would rise against their exploiters, take control of the state and run it in their own interests. Marx called this 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'. As imperialist capitalism would spread all over the world, communist revolution would become international, and ultimately global. This Social Democratic Labour Party published a journal – *Iskra* (The Spark). But gradually, differences arose amongst leaders over issues relating to party organization and relationship to workers. In 1903, this party split into two – the Bolsheviks (Russian word for majority) and the Mensheviks (Russian for minority). Each party claimed to be the true voice of the Social Democratic Movement. Lenin, the Bolshevik leader, exalted the importance of leadership, favoured discipline and centralization, and distrusted initiative from below. In his treatise *What Is To Be Done?*, he had argued that a country where police oppression was extreme, there should be a cadre of people professionally engaged in revolutionary activity and a large fringe of supporters. Mensheviks, led by Martov, wanted a large party of activists. They were more democratic in spirit, believed in evolutionary role for Russian Marxism and were ready to cooperate with other political groups. The two factions remained in a state of flux during 1903-04 with many members changing sides. But this split proved long-lasting. Both blocs developed secret underground organizations and their structure remained conspiratorial. But police proved fairly successful in infiltrating them. Surveillance of police forced their leaders to operate principally from outside Russia. The two groups were still squabbling when the news of Revolution in Russia reached them in 1905. The Bolsheviks did not play an active role in the events of 1905 because most of their leaders were in exile while the Mensheviks made gains in soviets and trade unions.

From 1906, the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks remained intensely involved in the debate on whether to abandon underground revolutionary activity in favour of participating in elections and in legislative activity and whether to cooperate with liberal parties and the middle classes they were assumed to represent. In view of the experiences of 1905, Lenin revised his strategy. He turned the Bolshevik party resolutely against cooperation with the liberals. He continued to express himself in favour of a proletarian revolution. Social Revolutionaries as well as some Mensheviks opted to cooperate with the liberals and participate in elections which they saw regarded as the early stage of revolutionary transformation. In 1912, the Bolsheviks expelled the Mensheviks from the party. This dispute

helped shape the image of Bolsheviks as the more radical and uncompromising wing of social democracy and the Mensheviks as the more moderate. This influenced their attitude to the issue of cooperation with the Provisional Government in 1917.

Another political stream was that of the liberals. The liberals believed in constitutionalism, rule of law, civil rights and parliamentary government within either a constitutional monarchy or a republic. The party that developed as a major voice of political liberalism was the 'Constitutional Democratic Party' or the *Kadets*. It was established during the Revolution of 1905. This was the only non-socialist party that played a role in the events of 1917. Its leader, Paul Miliukov, a university professor, was one of the men responsible for the formation of the Provisional Government in 1917.

Members of these parties worked to spread their ideas amongst better educated, and highly-skilled workers whose number was increasing because of industrialization. They formed study circles and discussion groups, and organized reading of political tracts. This opened for these workers a window to a different, better world. These became vehicles for the spread of revolutionary ideas. This led to the emergence of a cadre of politically oriented worker activists. Persecution by their employers and the police strengthened their resolve as well as political identities. This made factory workers very active participants in the events of 1917.



Figure No.4

<https://russianheritage/4.peas/peas.20html>

A literacy class in 1905

### 3.4 THE IMPACT OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Historians have convincingly established that the Tsarist regime was pregnant with irreconcilable internal contradictions which it had no capacity to resolve. But these did not make the Revolution inevitable. The Revolution took place in the midst of the most devastating war in human history till then. It makes the issue of role of Russia's participation in this war in triggering the March Revolution important.

When the First World War began in August 1914, there was an upsurge of patriotic feelings and people rallied around the Tsar. Anti-German feeling was strong which was symbolized by renaming St. Petersburg as Petrograd because St. Petersburg was a German name. Initially, in the war against Austria-Hungary, Russia won some victories. But, by 1915, it became clear that Russia was poorly prepared for war militarily, industrially and politically. In September 1915, the Tsar took command of the army personally and left for the front. But situation did not improve. By the end of 1915, Russia had lost a large and rich slice of empire in the west: all of Poland, parts of Ukraine, the Baltic region and Belorussia (now Belarus). In 1916, Russian army was able to inflict defeat on Austrians. But the army never recovered from the experiences of 1915. By the end of 1916, Russia had lost 57,00,000 men. As the War dragged on inconclusively, war-weariness grew.

#### Did You Know

##### The St. Petersburg Story

Moscow had been the capital of Russian Tsars. The palace there was known as Kremlin.

Tsar Peter the Great (1689 – 1725) built St. Petersburg on the Baltic Sea. In 1712, he shifted the capital from Moscow to St. Petersburg. It grew into world's most magnificent cities.

When Russia was engaged in War against Germany, this German sounding name was changed to Petrograd. In 1918, the Bolsheviks shifted the capital to Moscow. Moscow has remained the capital since then.

In 1924, after Lenin's death (1923), Petrograd was renamed Leningrad.

In 1991, after the disintegration of the USSR, the citizens of this city voted to change the name again to St. Petersburg.



The participation in the World War made problems of the Tsarist government insurmountable. First, the tsarist authority eroded with great speed after the Tsar moved to the front because this enabled Empress Alexandra to play a larger role in the government. She lacked credibility because she was a German and was under the influence of one Rasputin, a self-professed holy man. After this, supporters of autocracy began to desert the government *en masse*. Second, it led to break between the liberals and the autocracy. In the Duma, the liberals hoped to use growing popular discontent to force Nicholas II to agree to changes in the political system as had happened in 1905. In the summer of 1915, moderate conservatives and liberal political leaders formed the 'Progressive Block'. They were able to enlist the support of moderate socialists, mainly Mensheviks. But their hopes dashed after the Tsar moved to the front. The Tsarina was adamantly opposed to any accommodation with the Liberals. Third, the War increased discontent amongst the soldiers. Continued shortage of arms and ammunitions, defeats, war-fatigue and retreats exhausted the soldiers. Arms were in such short supply that a horrified British general observed that unarmed men had to be sent into the trenches to wait till their comrades were killed or wounded and their rifles became available. The new recruits seemed devoid of the sense of patriotism. They carried their grievances as citizens with them to the army. Fourth, the economic problems arising out of the War radicalized the workers. As industries expanded, workers and refugees flooded the cities. This overtaxed municipal services and created shortage of housing, food and fuel. When the German army advanced and the Russian army retreated, the Russian High Command began to burn the crops on the way to deny food to the advancing German army. This increased shortage of food and, hence, starvation everywhere. There were widespread strikes and riots in 1915 and 1916. In these, soldiers' wives became very active. With their husbands on the War-front, they became the sole or main support for their families. They expected that, since their husbands were on the front serving the nation, they would have greater entitlement to food and other goods. A police report mentions that 'mothers exhausted from standing endlessly at the tail of queues, and having suffered so much in watching their half-starving and sick children, are perhaps closer to a revolution'. No wonder, women's protests demanding bread made a significant contribution to the onset of the Revolution in March.

The socialist parties sought to capitalize on popular discontent to promote, even lead, any revolution that might be developing. To win over the people, the government allowed establishment of associations though strict censorship continued. This made educated and professional classes politically active. They used varieties of fora to discuss political matters. Some of these were: the Central War Industries Committee and its

local branches which had been created by industrialists to increase production and co-ordinate war-efforts; the societies to organize aid for the wounded, sick and displaced persons; and various professional societies and Masonic lodges in Moscow, Petrograd and other places. In other European countries, the socialists supported their countries' war-efforts. But, most socialists in Russia refused to do so and denounced the war as an imperial venture and called for unity amongst socialists. Though the major party leaders were in exile, the second-level leaders made efforts to organize themselves. The nature and amount of their activities and influence remain unclear. But archival sources, that have become available after 1990, suggest that the activities of socialist parties other than the Bolsheviks were more extensive and more important than previously thought. It is difficult to say whether socialist parties helped start a revolution or merely capitalized on popular discontent. But, it is clear that the Social Revolutionaries, kadets, Mensheviks and Bolsheviks were all united in one aim – the end of Tsardom. The Bolsheviks who eventually established themselves, however, never cooperated with the Tsarist government up to the end of the Tsarist regime. By 1916, however, a general feeling emerged amongst all classes that some kind of eruption might happen any time. Nobody could predict the timing or occasion.

As discussed above, the three-centuries old tsarist state headed by the Romanov dynasty came to an end unmourned, and in mere four days? The human cost was relatively modest – around seven hundred killed and around six hundred injured. Many long-term reasons have been given for the fall of monarchy in Russia: discontent amongst various sections of society, the long tradition of insurrectionary activity to which the intelligentsia made a significant contribution, the skilled organization of opposition etc. But these arguments do not fully explain why Tsarist regime collapsed so rapidly. Some historians see the link between the end of Tsardom and the Revolution of 1905. They argue that the weakest moment for an autocratic state is when it decides to reform itself because of popular pressure. Tsarist autocracy promised to introduce reforms in 1905, howsoever limited, and after this, its end was a matter of time. It cannot be denied that, after 1906, the Tsar flouted the promises he had made in 1905, that his government resorted to repression, and that all sections of society – peasants, industrial workers and educated classes – were turning hostile to the regime. One needs to stress that existence of contradictions or enduring discontent do not make a revolution inevitable. This anti-Tsarist revolution occurred in the course of the most intensely contested war in history. This leads to the question: Did the First World War make Revolution inevitable? Many historians have been arguing that, but for the accident of the First World War, the monarchy might have survived and Russian society might have

evolved into a flourishing liberal industrial society. They argue that, since 1906, economy had been improving, efforts were being made to solve the problems of peasants, the revolutionary parties were torn by disagreements, and their leaders were in exile. Whether without the outbreak of the World War, Russia might have avoided the revolution is a question that is ultimately unanswerable. But, this can be said that the War did prove devastating for Russia's government and its people. It exposed weaknesses of Russia's socio-political structure, increased discontent, and reduced government's ability to suppress it. What can be said is that it was during the War that erosion of Tsar's authority proceeded with catastrophic speed, that the War proved central to the coming of the revolution, and that it profoundly shaped the revolution that occurred.

Social and political turmoil did not come to an end with the fall of the Tsar. A provisional Government was formed that could last only eight months. Then there was another revolution – the Bolshevik Revolution. Four more years were to elapse before it became clear to whom power had passed.

#### **4. THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT: MARCH TO NOVEMBER 1917**

From March to July, the Provisional Government was headed by Prince G. E. Lvov of the Kadets Party and included mostly liberal politicians. It aimed at establishing parliamentary government on the West European model. It had the support of the professional classes, small urban middle class and reformist landowners. The Provisional government had to share power with the Petrograd Soviet which was dominated and led by members of the Menshevik Party and Social Revolutionary Party. At its first session, best-known leaders of the labour movement and political organizations constituted the executive committee. But its leaders declined to take power themselves because they did not want to be part of any 'bourgeois' government. They decided to give conditional support to the Provisional Government and to participate in government coalitions. Only one socialist minister– Alexander Kerensky – who belonged to the Social Revolutionary Party - joined the government. This strengthened Kerensky's position because he was a member of both the Provisional Government as well as the Petrograd Soviet.

In the capital, the Petrograd Soviet enjoyed popular support. Workers in vital industries like railways and telegraphs looked to the Soviet as a sort of people's parliament. On 14 March, the Petrograd Soviet issued what is known as the 'Order No. 1' to the soldiers asking them to form committees responsible to the Soviet and to disarm their officers. This deprived the Provisional Government of control over the army. Thus a period of 'Dual Power' ensued. Through Petrograd Telegraph agency, the executive committee also made an appeal for the creation of soviets in other regions. In the weeks that followed, more than 600 soviets

of workers', soldiers', sailors', peasants', Cossacks' deputies were formed. The experience of the 1905 Revolution helped in this process, and in defining its short- and long-term aims. Such soviets sprang up simultaneously throughout the country. They held power locally but did not know what to do with it or what ought to be done. Leaders of different leftist parties – Menshevik, Bolshevik, Social Revolutionary and other factions of the left – attempted to increase their influence in the soviets and convert their members to their own points of view. Relatively few Russians knew what these party labels represented.

The Provisional Government was recognized as the legal authority both by the foreign governments and the Soviets. Its members looked upon themselves as a national party representing everyone regardless of class. But it depended heavily on the support of the Petrograd soviet. During these early weeks conflict between the Provisional government and the Petrograd Soviet was minimal. Hoping to win support of the people by winning the War, the Provisional Government, decided to continue the War. But it could not muster adequate resources. It also devoted itself to dismantling Tsarist apparatus of repression. It quickly introduced civil rights such as freedom of speech, assembly and religious belief. It released political prisoners. It promised to convene democratically elected Constituent Assembly to determine the form of the new Russian state and frame a constitution. It was to represent popular will and was to be elected on universal suffrage, with secret ballot and on a proportional representation. Ironically, these measures enabled opponents of Provisional Government to campaign against it. The Provisional Government intended to rule the country only until the Constituent Assembly met. This gave it a 'caretaker status' which made it inherently weak and prevented it from embarking on long term programmes. In this situation, discipline in the army continued to deteriorate. In June, in an attempt to revive Russia's military fortunes, the government started offensive operations first in the south and then in the north. But after some success, this Russian army was driven back by German and Austrian troops in July.



Figure No.5

1917 petrogradsoviet\_assembly.jpg Wikimedia ( in public domain)

Assembly of the Petrograd Soviet, 12 ( 25) March 1917,

At the time of the March Revolution the Bolsheviks remained relegated to the margins of Russian politics. The Bolshevik Party had a membership of a few thousand. Bolshevik leaders were in exile. Lenin was in Switzerland, Trotsky was in New York and Stalin was in Siberia. Lenin had called upon the workers not to assist in the war-effort. It was with the assistance of the German government, which wanted to take advantage of turmoil in Russia, that Lenin was able to return in April. On reaching Russia he spelled his ideas in what became known as the 'April theses'. In this he demanded that power should be transferred to a socialist government as soon as possible. He called upon the Bolsheviks to disassociate themselves from the Provisional Government, to oppose the War, and gave the slogan 'all power to the Soviets'. From this time every newspaper reader in the country knew that the Bolshevik party aimed to overthrow the Provincial government. (Service: 1997, 235). However, it is significant that in the first All-Russia Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, which met in Petrograd on 16 June, the Bolshevik Party had about 15 per cent of seats. But, thereafter, the popularity of the Bolshevik party grew tremendously. By early July, its membership increased to 250,000 and it was able to strengthen its position in the soviets in major Russian cities.

**Historical Context****APRIL THESES**

The April Theses was presented by Lenin on his return to Russia in early April 1917. It was more radical than virtually anything his fellow revolutionaries had heard. In the Theses, Lenin argued that the Bolsheviks should not rest content, like almost all other Russian socialists, with the "bourgeois" February Revolution. Instead the Bolsheviks should press ahead to a socialist revolution of the workers and poorest peasants. To achieve this, immediate task before the Bolsheviks was to campaign diligently among the Russian people to persuade them of the need for Soviet power.

When Lenin presented his Theses, he was booed by the Mensheviks. Of the Bolsheviks, at first very few supported the Theses.

During 16-18 July, a period which is described as the 'July Days', the streets of Petrograd saw three days of spontaneous revolts and strikes. The situation became so serious that army had to be called from the front to bring it under control. This brought about the fall of Lvov's government and Alexander Kerensky formally assumed power and Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries joined the Provisional Government. With more socialists in the government, the popularity of the government should have increased. But this did not happen. Though it was not clear whether Bolsheviks were responsible for July turmoil, Kerensky held the Bolsheviks responsible. With the help of the army and other conservative forces, he suppressed this July rising. The Bolshevik paper '*Pravda*' (truth) was banned and their leaders were arrested or forced underground. Lenin escaped to Finland and spent next few weeks there. On 31 July, to win over the conservatives, Kerensky made L. Kornilov, the supreme commander of the army.



Figure No.6

[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f7/19170704 Riot on Nevsky prosp Petrograd.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f7/19170704_Riot_on_Nevsky_prosp_Petrograd.jpg)

[Petrograd, July 4, 1917. Street demonstration on Nevsky Prospekt (just after troops of the Provisional Government have opened fire with machine guns.)]

While the government remained hesitant, people knew what they wanted. The peasants, workers and soldiers (whom Lenin called 'peasants dressed in soldiers' uniforms') had hoped that the revolution would give them land. Many workers and soldiers began to return to countryside where they hoped to get a share in land. From the beginning of summer, when it became clear that the old regime would not be restored, there were widespread peasant revolts. Peasant-soldiers took the lead in the march on the manors where they drove the squires out, seized their land, destroyed agricultural machinery which had reduced demand for hired labour and carried away the farm-produce. This created discontent and instability in rural areas, limited the availability of food further and caused a general break down of central power. In this context Figes comments that 'in about every village the government 's decrees were used by the peasants for cigarette paper'. ( Figes: 1997, 549). The loss of local control was, in part, the result of certain policies of the government. To give people experience in local government before the Constituent Assembly elections, the government encouraged the election of a large number of overlapping committees like the zemestvos, town councils, local soviets and land committees. By May-June, peasant soviets had been elected directly by the village communes and they implemented their own local revolutions in accordance with peasants' own notions of social justice. They carried out land redistribution, in most cases, on the basis of the number of

'eaters' in a family. This action received a pseudo-legal endorsement from the resolutions in favour of confiscation of land, passed in provincial peasant congresses which were understood as laws by the local peasantry. The peasants also refused to supply food to towns because of the low procurement prices fixed by the Provisional Government and the inflated prices of consumer items which they wanted to buy. In the Ukraine, the Baltic lands, and the Caucasus, where the peasantry was dominated by the elite in the town, whom the peasants viewed as 'foreign', this became a war of liberation also.

The factories workers wanted better wages and shorter working hours. Industrialists and business community opposed any attempt by the government to accept these demands or to regulate the economy. For example, they opposed legislation to introduce eight-hour working day for industrial workers. As availability of goods declined, goods became costlier, inflation increased and, consequently, real value of workers' earnings declined. All this radicalized workers. To protect their interests, the workers formed factory committees which encroached upon the autonomy of management. Unwilling to accept the demands of workers, many industrialists began to close down factories. This increased unemployment. The non-Russian nationalities within Russia also began to organize and assert themselves which added to the problems of the government. Power thus moved from committee-rooms of the government and the Petrograd Soviet to the local soviets in villages, factory soviets and streets. The people viewed political parties and intellectuals with suspicion.

Meanwhile, the sub-structure of government continued to crumble. A committee was appointed to report on the issue of land reforms. It could not come up with any concrete solution. The election of the Constituent Assembly had to be repeatedly postponed. Inflation continued to accelerate and availability of food continued to decrease. On 3 September, Riga, a major city in Latvia, fell to the German army. Soon thereafter, with the help of conservative leaders and the army, L. Kornilov, the commander-in-chief of the Russian army, attempted to seize power for himself at Petrograd. Kerensky was able to defeat this attempt with the help of the Petrograd Soviet and its military wing, the Red Army. The biggest beneficiaries of this attempt were the Bolsheviks who gained by release of their leaders and were able to rearm their military wing. By this time peasants and workers saw the Revolution in terms of class conflict and social change. The failure of the government to solve economic problems was seen not just as proof of incompetence but of counter revolution. This made the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, who were associated with the government, unpopular. In this situation, Lenin claimed that the Bolshevik Party was



willing to take power and introduce socialism. The peasants were lured by the promise of land, bread and peace that the Bolsheviks made and did not oppose the formation of a Bolshevik government by the Bolsheviks in November though they voted overwhelmingly for the Social Revolutionaries in the election to the Constituent Assembly.

All these developments were making the country ungovernable. In this situation, the Bolshevik party, under the leadership of Lenin, decided to seize power. The Provisional Government, faced with such amazing social upheaval at home and a devastating war abroad, could not survive the onslaught of the Bolsheviks.

## 5. THE NOVEMBER (OCTOBER) REVOLUTION

As already discussed, the Bolsheviks had remained on the sidelines during the March Revolution. But they were able to strengthen their position in the soviets after Lenin returned in April. Other Bolshevik leaders - Molotov, Trotsky and Stalin- returned around the same time. Lenin emerged as the dominant figure in the Bolshevik party. His ideas were radical and ruthless. But he kept them deliberately flexible. Realizing what the peasants were asking for, he gave up the slogan of 'land nationalization' and began to talk of 'land socialization'. He stopped calling for 'socialist dictatorship' and began to talk of 'workers' control'. Trotsky had been a leader of the St. Petersburg Soviet in the 1905 Revolution. He played an important role in the Bolshevik party in 1917 and showed genius for revolutionary improvisation in the administrative and military fields. Kerensky's efforts to weaken the Bolsheviks were foiled because of Kornilov's plot. It not only made Kerensky dependent on the support of the Bolshevik Party but also made the people, who began to fear counter-revolutionary conservative forces, support the Bolsheviks. By the middle of September, they got majority of seats in the Moscow Soviet and Trotsky was elected President of the Petrograd Soviet.

### Did You Know

#### Lenin, 1870-1924



#### Lenin, 1870-1924

Lenin was a Russian Marxist revolutionary, an accomplished writer, a prolific political theoretician, organizer and speaker. He was the leader of the Bolshevik Revolution, creator of the communist Party of Russia, founder of the USSR, the first officially socialist state. Premier of the USSR from 1917-1924.

He was born in an affluent family. His name was Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov and it was in 1902 that he assumed the name Lenin. He founded the newspaper - Iskra (Spark).

He spent major part of his life outside Russia.

He had boundless confidence in his own abilities and, in every situation; he seemed to assume that he had the correct policy. He published articles and books

. As the prospects of success for the Bolsheviks appeared on the horizon, in a meeting of the Bolshevik Central Committee during 23-29 October, the Bolshevik leadership debated various ways of seizing power. The Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets was scheduled for 7 November. Trotsky wanted to use this occasion to seize power peacefully. Others wanted to wait for the elections for the long-promised Constituent Assembly and use the popularity of the party for winning these elections. A proposal for insurrection too was put forward. But many feared that such a step could be used by right-wing forces to attempt a coup to come to power. Lenin managed to persuade the top leadership that time was ripe for seizing power. After a hot debate, it was decided, in principle, that preparations should be made for an armed insurrection and, for this purpose, Military Revolutionary Committee was established. Lenin was one leader who had consistently insisted that power should be seized before the Congress of Soviets met on 7 November. According to a preliminary report of the Credentials Committee, of the 670 delegates to this Congress, 300 were Bolsheviks, 193 were Social Revolutionaries and 68 were Mensheviks. It seemed that the Congress would form a socialist coalition in which moderate socialists would have a significant voice.

On 6 November, Kerensky tried to close Bolshevik newspaper. This galvanized pro-Soviet soldiers and the Red Guards and provoked an armed struggle during which the Bolsheviks took over important buildings, bridges and key positions in Petrograd. By 7th morning they established control over the whole city except the Winter Palace, then the headquarters of the Provisional Government. On the same day, at 10.40 in the evening, the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets opened at the headquarters of the Bolshevik Party in Petrograd. As it began deliberations, sounds of canons firing at the Winter Palace were heard and this enabled Lenin to report that power was in the hands of the Bolsheviks. Last minute efforts were made by the Social Revolutionary and Menshevik members to form a broadly representative socialist government. Very soon it became clear that the Bolsheviks had little intention of sharing power and that they would not form a coalition. Finding that troops in Petrograd were not supporting him, Kerensky fled the city. The Provisional Government was declared deposed and Bolsheviks assumed power. On the morning of 8 November, members of the Provisional Government were arrested.

Thus on 7 November, the Bolsheviks had acquired power suddenly. Before them was an enormous struggle for consolidating the power of their party, converting their party into a regime and of establishing a permanent government. To gain legitimacy and acceptance for the new government, their first act on 8 November was pass decrees on peace, land and workers' control over factories. With these, it seemed that they were ready to offer solutions to the three major problems that the Provincial Government had failed to tackle. The decree on peace dubbed the ongoing War as a 'monumental crime against humanity' and called for 'a just and democratic peace'. Another decree nationalized all land without compensation. The third decree peace'. The second decree nationalized all land so that it could be distributed placed industries under workers' surveillance.

#### **Interesting Fact**

#### **Proclamation adopted on 8 November (26 October) by the Congress of Soviets.**

(It was drafted by Lenin.)

The Soviet Government will propose an immediate democratic peace to all the nations and an immediate armistice on all fronts. It will secure the transfer of land of the landed proprietors, the crown and the monasteries to the peasant committees without compensation; it will protect the rights of the soldiers by introducing complete democracy in the army, , it will establish workers' control over production; it will ensure the convocation of the Constituent Assembly at the time appointed; it will see to it that bread is supplied to the cities and prime necessities to the villages; it will guarantee all the nations inhabiting Russia the genuine right to self-determination.

The Congress decrees: all power in the localities shall pass to the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers', and peasants' Deputies.

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Source: Wade: 2000, p. 241

This merely put an official stamp on what the workers were doing any way. The government also appealed to the workers to keep production going.

The Bolsheviks formed a new government made up entirely of their own party. They called it the Council of People's Commissars with Lenin at the head, Trotsky as Commissioner for Foreign Affairs, and Stalin as Commissioner for Nationalities. With the help of the Red Guards, the Bolsheviks threw Social Revolutionary and Menshevik members out of the Soviet leaving Bolshevik members in control. Thus, an astonishing sequence of events quickly

placed a small group of quarrelling leaders in-charge of the largest country on earth. It is interesting that during this revolution, there were no street demonstrations. Yet this government was very insecure. It had to struggle with armed opponents and demands for broadening the government. It also watched anxiously whether or not the rest of the country would support them.

### Biography

#### TROTSKY, 1869-1940



Trotsky was a Bolshevik revolutionary and Marxist Theorist. He was the key figure in Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917, second only to Lenin in early years of Communist rule.

He was born in a prosperous Jewish family. In 1903 he joined the Mensheviks. It was only in 1917 that he joined the Bolshevik party. He was Foreign Minister during 1917-18 and War Minister during 1918-1925. He played a leading role in Soviet victory during the Civil War. After Lenin's death Trotsky was seen as his successor. But, in the power struggle, he was outmaneuvered by Stalin. From 1929 he lived in exile. In 1940, he was stabbed in Mexico. He wrote extensively.

Elections had to be held for the Constituent Assembly because Lenin had been criticizing Kerensky for repeatedly postponing them. Lenin realized that the Bolsheviks were unlikely to get a majority. Elections were held in the last week of November. Lenin's worst fears were realized. Bolsheviks won about 25 percent of seats while Social Revolutionaries got almost a majority. Lenin was determined not to let power slip out of his hands. The Constituent Assembly opened on 18 January 1918. Next day Lenin had the Assembly forcibly dispersed by Bolshevik Red Guards. It was not allowed to meet again. The struggle between the Soviet and the Constituent Assembly was thus brought to an end forcibly. Dispersal of the Constituent Assembly was, as Wade says, 'one of the most fateful decisions that Lenin was ever to take'. (Wade, 2000: 297) It made it clear that the Bolsheviks were determined to rule alone, and that common effort to ameliorate social conflict and distress had collapsed. It destroyed all hopes of establishing a constitutional and democratic state which had been envisaged at least since 1906. It made clear that the Bolsheviks would not give up

governmental authority peacefully through elections. The opponents of the regime would have either to retire or to take up arms against the Bolsheviks. A brutal Civil War followed. It also made it clear that the government that would be established would be a dictatorial one. Thus the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly had profound consequences for Russia and the world. No fair elections would be held in Russia until 1990.

The Bolsheviks had seized power and they were determined to rule Russia. At the seventh party congress held in March 1918, Lenin proposed that the name of the party be changed to the Communist party. He argued that the new name would indicate that the aim of the Bolsheviks would be to achieve communism as outlined by Marx and Engels in their treatise 'The Communist Manifesto'. The Bolshevik Party was thus renamed the Communist Party. Lenin remained the most powerful member of the Soviet government and the party until his death in January 1924.

## 6. CONSOLIDATION OF POWER BY THE BOLSHEVIKS

Having seized power, retaining it was not easy. Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders knew too well that they had inherited a ruined country engaged in War, and a shattered army. On the top of it, they had to face stubborn and prolonged opposition of all kinds. There were peasant revolts, workers' strikes, mutinies in the Red armed forces and, above all, a Civil War. To complete the revolution the Bolsheviks had to smash resistance and to take up the task of reconstructing the state.

For Lenin, democratic ideals had no intrinsic value. He believed that masses of workers were blind to their true class interests and were driven by spontaneous and irrational instincts. Revolutionary elite which knew what was right and could guide the masses. Lenin instituted a very brutal totalitarian regime in which Terror was used as state policy. He demanded unswerving loyalty and purged all whom he perceived to be 'enemies'. All civil rights, including freedom of press, were withdrawn. To crush all opposition, Lenin established a secret police force - Cheka - in December 1918. It became infamous as an instrument of oppression and terror throughout the entire soviet period. Lenin also established concentration camps and work camps for 'unreliable elements' of society. Anyone deemed possibly dangerous to the revolution - priest, shopkeeper, non-socialist - was sent to these camps. To escape from death, about one million Russians emigrated.

The most important issue before the new government was what attitude it should adopt towards the War. Lenin had pointed out repeatedly that the Russian army had disintegrated and that there was nothing left to fight the Germans with. Bolsheviks also believed that the Revolution in one country would be accompanied by revolutions in all belligerent countries and, when this would happen, World War would come to an end. The

Decree of Peace had called upon the proletariat in Britain, France and Germany to bring the War to an end by resorting to revolution. But this appeal did not bring about any such result. Germany responded by advancing triumphantly across Ukraine and, in December 1917, forced Russia to accept an armistice. Thereafter, on 3 March 1918, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was imposed Germany. The terms it imposed were cruel. Russia had to surrender vast territories covering one-third of its population, a third of its arable land and two-thirds of its coal-mines to Germany. The treaty was seen as a humiliation by all groups in Russia, even by a substantial section of Bolsheviks. It left the Bolshevik party isolated.

To prevent the Bolsheviks from consolidating their position, Tsarist officers and a spectrum of Social Revolutionaries, Mensheviks and liberals resorted to armed rebellion. It turned into a devastating civil war which continued from 1918 to 1921. These counter-revolutionary forces, in their battle against the Bolsheviks - the 'Reds' - became known as the 'Whites'. The Allied Powers - Britain, France, the United States, Japan and many other countries - sent troops to fight alongside the 'Whites'. It was a peculiar war in which there were no pitched battles and no regular battle situations. There were roving bands of irregular troops armed to the teeth by western powers. It is significant that the Allied countries carried on the fight until 1920, though Germany had surrendered in 1918. They attacked from the north, east, south and west of Russia. The Allied force that advanced from the south, reached within 400 kilometers of Moscow. Some two million people died during this Civil War.

The Bolshevik government made a determined and ruthless effort to win this Civil War. Under the policy called 'War Communism', strict state control was imposed on the economy. All opposition was crushed with a heavy hand. In short, intrusion of state into life of society grew very deep. Trotsky, at that time the Commissar for War, turned the Red Army into a well-disciplined and effective fighting machine. It included thousands of experienced officers of Tsarist army who extended support mainly because the Bolshevik party seemed to succeed. Situation improved after the defeat of Germany and nullification of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The 'Whites' were defeated only by 1921. The rebellious parts of Russia had to be virtually reconquered. Bolsheviks shifted the capital to Moscow because it was considered a safer place.

After the November Revolution, there was uncertainty as to how things would be arranged constitutionally and territorially. In formal terms, the Soviet state underwent much change. In 1922, a formal federal structure was created called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. In this Russia was simply the largest Soviet republic enjoying equality of power and status with all the rest within the Union. Provision was made for an elected Parliament - the All Russian Congress of Soviets. Lenin described the system as 'democratic

centralism'. But, in reality, the system was underpinned by infrangible centralist foundations. One-party state was never explicitly promulgated. But, to all intents and purposes, a one-party state was created. Each member was subjected to party discipline. Each of Party's various organizations – trade union, women's association etc. – were answerable to the party. The Communist Party became the only party to participate in elections. The Communist Party Control Committee nominated all members of all executive organs of the state including the Central Executive Committee and the Politburo. Leading members of the parties which were hostile to the Bolsheviks were persecuted. In the non-Russian regions, all parties except the Bolsheviks were subjected to comprehensive persecution.

In March 1921, Lenin introduced what became known as the New Economic Policy under which a degree of private enterprise was permitted and some banks were re-established. Peasants were allowed to sell their surplus produce on payment of a tax to the state. The NEP lessened but did not remove state's domination on the economy. The years 1920-21 saw a famine during which millions died of starvation and epidemics. State intervened in cultural activities as well. In 1922, a formal structure of pre-censorship was introduced. The result of the kind of seizure of power that took place was that the state became a 'bureaucratic Leviathan'. (Service: 1997, 312). The regime which was established within two years of the November Revolution was maintained in tact through the late 1980s.

Initially, the biggest achievement of the Bolshevik Party was to survive. It survived the penal treaty imposed by Germany at Brest-Litovsk. It survived the armed struggle waged by counter-revolutionary forces, foreign armed intervention, hunger, and administrative and economic collapse. Having survived, it was able to preserve the national territorial unity of the old Tsarist state over seventy three years of its existence. After the Second World War, the Soviet Union not only emerged as a superpower and played a decisive role in world affairs but also became a beacon of hope for the less privileged in the world. But in the transition from an absolute state to a communist state, Tsardom to Union of Soviets, and from a backward state to an alternative modern state, the Bolsheviks created a regime which had a monolithic power base enforced by ruthless terror.

## **7. REASON FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE BOLSHEVIKS**

On the morning of 8 March, Tsar's position seemed unchallengeable and on 15 March, he abdicated never to return again. By November, i.e. after eight months, a revolutionary government headed by Lenin was running the country. Even contemporaneously, the establishment of the Bolshevik, and eventually a communist, state in Russia was seen as a very significant event which arose out of an extraordinarily rapid sequence of events. The question at the heart of scholarship on the Russian Revolution has

been: how did the Bolsheviks, a small minority party after March and largely excluded from participation in political power, manage to come to power eight months later and then consolidate its position?

In the Soviet Union, analysis of the issue was influenced by the cult of Lenin-worship and the demands of the Soviet state. It was accepted that the Bolshevik party under its farsighted leader, Lenin, planned and engineered the entire scheme of the Russian Revolution and led the masses to victory. In the West, writing on the Russian Revolution reflected intrinsic distrust for soviet regime and historians tended to portray Lenin as an ambitious and unscrupulous conspirator who exploited the masses to win power for himself and his party. On the basis of recent research, one can say the reasons for the success of the Bolsheviks were: the social and political turmoil that followed the fall of Tsarist regime and the inability of the Provisional government to provide an alternative, the revolutionary activism of the masses; and the organization and strategy of the Bolsheviks under Lenin's leadership.

## 7.1 THE FAILURE OF THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT

The leaders thrown up after the March Revolution failed to execute the awesome task of solving the problems which had led to the demise of the Tsarist state or which emerged as a result of this demise. A situation of uncertainties and despair had arisen out of sudden collapse of 300 years old tsarist regime. In the tsarist regime, what constituted the essence of autocracy was not just formal political institutions but rather an array of self-replicating and culturally legitimized social and cultural relations. In March 1917, not just political institutions collapsed but also the thick social networks of village community, peasants' relations with officials and gentry, their links to church and religious life, collapsed. Each involved well-defined patterns of domination and subordination. All were formally justified by shared concerns about social order. In non-Russian areas, extension of Russian fields of social dominance and subordination was the core of imperial power. After March, efforts were made to enlist the support of people by reformulating the structure of state on democratic lines. These efforts failed because the leaders of the Provisional government could not cut themselves from the past they had inherited or overhaul the system so as to create a new state which could meet the aspirations of the masses. The Provisional government was not an elected one and, hence, suffered from lack of legitimacy. Two centres of power that emerged - the Provisional Government and the Petrograd soviet - tried to collaborate on various issues. Some members of the Soviet joined the coalition governments in May and July. But these efforts at collaboration did not succeed basically because the Provisional Government



had responsibility without power while the Petrograd Soviet had power without responsibility. The War proved crucial to the failure because the government could never muster enough resources to win it.

In addition, the Government was deemed to be provisional until a Constituent Assembly could be called to decide upon a form of government for new Russia. But the calling of such an assembly was repeatedly postponed. This postponement was not the result of helplessness or adverse circumstances but was a calculated decision. The Kadets, who were the backbone of Provisional government, were likely to lose power after the election because only 'the middle class' would have voted for them. The peasants were likely to vote for Social Revolutionaries while workers were likely to vote for Marxists, and increasingly for their more radical wing, the Bolsheviks. As the calling of the Constituent Assembly was delayed, the central government found power slipping out of its hands. It could not deal with revolts of peasants or strikes of workers. Nor was it able to find solution to peasants' demand for redistribution of land or to demand for autonomy in various regions. As had happened in 1905, sometimes whole regions began to ignore the central government and run affairs themselves through their soviets. Kerensky tried to win over the conservative forces appointing Kornilov as the supreme commander. After the Kornilov Affair, the Provisional Government in the then form was doomed. Only issue to be settled was the nature of state that would replace it. Ultimately, the Bolshevik Party, led by Lenin, showed a determination to take power with promise to establish a socialist state.

## 7.2 ROLE OF THE MASSES

It is not clear whether the peasants' soviets and the workers' committees approved of the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks between 6-9 November. But they did not try to prevent the Bolsheviks from assuming power and this contributed to the success of the Bolsheviks. As to the role of the masses, Soviet historians had maintained that the farsighted Bolshevik leaders widely represented the masses of workers and peasants and that they mobilized and 'prepared' the masses for struggle. On the other hand, western historians have been arguing that the Bolshevik *leaders* manipulated the masses by applying pressure at key points to neutralize any opposition and that the Bolsheviks could not get a majority in the elections for the Constituent Assembly held in November 1917. In both these interpretations, 'masses' were seen as largely absent or inert. But it cannot be denied that mass revolutionary current played a vital role in the events leading to the Bolshevik Revolution and that peasant, workers and soldiers were active participants in the political process. It is significant that they did not rally behind liberal forces. They despised the bourgeoisie and did not share their belief in political reforms. The performance of the Duma during 1906-17 did

not give any reason to hope that the parliamentary system would satisfy their demand for social reform. Moreover, their violence was not mindless. The peasants had been demanding ownership of the land for those who worked it, justice through peasant courts, more facilities for education etc. Similarly, workers in towns, especially skilled workers, were radicalized by their own aspirations. The soldiers were demanding early end to war. In the 1970s many studies appeared which indicated that the mass movement in the summer and autumn was not exclusively or mainly Bolshevik-directed.

It was the slogan, 'All power to the Soviets' or the idea of Soviet power which made the Bolsheviks immensely popular. The meaning of soviet power or purposes of soviet power was not fully defined. It was assumed that Soviet power involved a broad multi-party socialist government. There is ample evidence that when the workers supported the Bolsheviks during July Days and in November, they wanted a broad all socialist coalition government and not Lenin's centralized dictatorship that emerged. Popular support was based on the assumption that change of government would allow fulfillment of their aspirations for peace, workers' supervision on factories, land-redistribution, nationality autonomy and other demands. In November, all these sections did not oppose the formation of Bolsheviks government because of the promises it made. It is important to recognize that the November Revolution was carried out in the name of the Soviet power. In the elections to the Constituent Assembly turn out was good. The majority voted for the Social Revolutionaries. The reason might not have been that the people were uneducated as Lenin argued. The reason could be that this is what they wanted - a party that espoused the interests of peasants. However, Lenin was not ready to share political power and accept a coalition government. In fact, it was the immense popularity of the ideas of Soviet power which allowed the new government to defeat initial armed opposition and to successfully spread Soviet power across much of Russia.

At this moment of deep socio-economic turmoil and cultural dislocation, there was also a disposition to accept a strong government which could govern and provide security. People were ready to accept authoritarianism in some form. Bolsheviks led by Lenin exploited this disposition effectively and, ultimately, established a centralized, authoritarian state under the control of the Bolsheviks Party.

### 7.3 ROLE OF THE BOLSHEVIK PARTY

The orthodox Soviet position has been that the Bolshevik party led by Lenin had been the driving force of the Revolution and that it had led the people on a path irreversibly bound towards revolution. Collapse of the USSR has, however, destroyed this view. Historians in the West have tended to argue that the Bolshevik seizure of power was a *coup d'etat* when they usurped state institutions in a sudden, swift and forceful manner. There is not much dispute

about Bolshevik brutality and passion for power. But Bolshevik seizure of power during 6-9 Nov was not just a narrow, consistorial coup by a disciplined party. The Bolsheviks played an important role in shaping the flow of events throughout 1917: the April and July crisis of 1917, the radicalization of factory workers' and peasants' movements, the November seizure of power and in the various episodes that map the Civil War. Research by revisionist historians since 1970 has highlighted two aspects. One, the Bolshevik party in 1917 was very different from the theoretical model proposed by Lenin in 1902 in *What Is To Be Done?* In which he had advocated the need for a highly centralized and disciplined party. Vast increase in number had made it an open, mass party. In the Sixth Party Congress held in 1917, 94 per cent of delegates were those who had joined the party in or after 1914. (Banerji: 2008, 219) Secondly, since July there had been vast social upheaval over which the Bolsheviks had very little control. But Bolshevism had also become a movement of substantial breadth and came to enjoy widespread support. It should be remembered that a revolutionary situation, by its very nature, cannot last for long and there is no time to learn by trial and error. Masses do form the motor force of revolution but their initiative has to be combined with perspective, strategy, programme and organization. These cannot be improvised on the spur of the moment. In this context, by its theorizing and propaganda, Bolshevik Party and its ideology provided certainty of vision and was able to take advantage of hopes and anxieties of people.

It should also be noted that force alone did not bring the Bolshevik state into being. The political opponents of the Bolsheviks- the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries – could not provide any viable alternative to the then existing structure. The Mensheviks continued to stick to the belief that the historical moment for the socialists had not yet arrived and that a socialist revolution would take place after a period of bourgeois rule. Lenin and Bolsheviks seized the opportunity. They took full advantage of devolution of power after the fall of the Tsar. After his return, in April 1917, Lenin and others, in asking for all power to the Soviets, formulated the ideology of the party cleverly. Their analysis of social distress seemed persuasive and convincing. They had certainty of vision and ability to explain it. They used their newspapers effectively as propaganda instruments. At the same time they worked to gain authority within and through the soviets. They also successfully cultivated the identification, representation and demonization of 'enemies'. They labeled the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries 'petty bourgeois' and claimed that only the Bolshevik party was willing to take power, introduce socialism, and fulfill future welfare needs of workers. It was able to represent itself as essential and worth defending.

## 7.4 ROLE OF LENIN

After his return to Russia in April 1917, Lenin became the overall strategist of the Revolution. He was an accomplished writer, theorist, organizer and speaker. These qualities proved crucial in his ability to lead the country. He mostly lived outside Russia.. He had boundless confidence in his own abilities. He was undoubtedly an assiduous student of Marx and he wrote extensively. At the same time he drew from the authoritative legacy of Russian Populist tradition. His greatest achievement as a revolutionary was to reshape Marxist theory to make it fit Russia conditions. He also had the ability to revise his ideas according to changed circumstances. In 1905, he asked his party to seek out the peasantry as their main revolutionary ally. After April 1917, his interpretation of Bolshevism articulated the mass aspirations so well that the party attracted immense support and seized power with ease. The slogan that he gave in 1917 – peace, bread, land - was a master-stroke. When he recognized that, contrary to the socialist programme, the peasants wanted a division of the land into family farms, he did not hesitate to commit the Bolsheviks to this. Lenin's extraordinary achievement was that he was able to transform uncontrollable popular surge into political power.

At the same time, Lenin was ruthless, brutal and very ambitious. He remained opposed to any compromise with the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries. In October-November many leaders, even within the Bolshevik party, thought in terms of forming a coalition government. Either the congress of Soviets or the Constituent Assembly could have produced such a government. But Lenin decided to seize power before the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets met on 7 November. To perform the daunting task of turning Soviet power into Bolshevik power, within hours of seizing power, Lenin and Trotsky quickly introduced decrees on land, armistice and workers' authority in management of factories. These gave expression to the aspirations of people and helped in winning them over. The final manifestation of the unwillingness to yield power to any coalition and preventing the establishment of a multi-party government was the forcible dissolution of the Constituent Assembly. Until his death in 1924, Lenin remained the most influential leader of the Soviet Government and the Bolshevik party.

The success of the Bolsheviks was thus the product of the collapse of an entire system of traditional authority, the breakdown of the political acquiescence of the people in government, the failure of the provisional government to provide a viable alternative, the influence of the ideas of socialist intellectuals, especially the Bolsheviks, and ambition and ruthlessness of Lenin.

## 8.WOMEN AND THE 1917 REVILUTION

In Russia in the nineteenth century, women belonging to the noble and privileged families had been active in the Populist and other revolutionary movements. In the Revolution of 1905, women from all sections participated in strikes and demonstrations. During the War when men went away to the front, women filled in as nurses, and worked in canteens, factories and in fields.

The March Revolution had begun with massive demonstration by women on 8 March. From then on until the end of the Civil War, women from all sections of society – the nobility, the middle class of merchants, professionals, government employees and the working class - became politically engaged in ways that would have been impossible under the old regime. In fact, tens of thousands of women reached out for the new freedoms unleashed by the revolution. Women joined strikes, demonstrations and political parties, organized exclusively female trade unions, attended and voted in meetings, and were on platforms where much of the discussion on important matters took place. When the initial declaration by the Provisional Government about 'universal' elections to the Constituent Assembly did not specifically include women, the League for Women's Equal Rights organized a demonstration and about 40,000 women marched to the headquarters of the Provisional government to demand the right to vote. On 2 August, the Provisional government extended the right to vote to women. In the rural areas, peasant women participated in the confiscation of the land of squires, and in village meetings where land was redistributed. During the Civil War women worked not only as nurses but also as spies and couriers for the Bolsheviks as well as their opponents. Bolsheviks employed them as soldiers as well. In September-October of 1920 some 66,000 women were serving in the Red Army which amounted to two per cent of the entire force. From 1917 to 1921, 30,000 women joined the Communist Party. Fifty-seven percent of these women came from upper and middle levels of Russian society, 37 per cent from the proletariat and five per cent were peasants. These women, called the *Bolshevichki* in Russian, became the most powerful activists of the Revolution.

Contemporaries viewed political activism of women during 1917 mainly from three perspectives. One, they saw it as a sign of utter failure of the Tsarist regime, the assumption being that even the most passive section of society had had enough. Two, some hailed it as a sign that women were throwing off the bonds of patriarchy and asserting their right to be full members of the political community. Three, many feared that the spectacle of women marching fearlessly through the streets and occupying public spaces was a sign of coming disorder and anarchy in society.

On assuming power, the Bolsheviks introduced a programme of women's emancipation. In the new constitution that the government issued within a year of coming to power, full legal

and political rights were given without gender discrimination. The government was to ensure equality of economic opportunity in civil service, in industry, in party and in the armed forces. Women were given property rights and laws on divorce were made liberal and abortion was made available on demand. Subsequently, provision was made for maternity leave for four months. Under Communist Party's programme to emancipate women, provision was made for social services like day-care centres, cafeterias, laundries etc. so as to relieve women from domestic chores. Government also made efforts to educate and draw women into paid labour-force by establishing training programmes. During 1918-19, a group of female Bolsheviks led by I. F. Armand and A. N. Kollontai, underlined that the Revolution could succeed only if the Bolsheviks made an effort to win women's support and paid more attention to women's issues. They got permission to establish *Zhenotdel*, the women's wing of the Communist Party, for the purpose. Provision was made for the propagation of principles of women's equality. The message that women were equal members of society was transmitted through magazines, newspapers poems and, later, films. Women embraced these new opportunities with enthusiasm. By 1940, 90 per cent of females below the age of 50 in urban areas were literate and women made up 38 per cent of the non-agricultural labour-force.

Peasant women in European part of Russia, were, in 1917-18, happy to partake in the confiscation of the property of landlords and tried to weaken the power of the patriarchs within the peasant family. But, during the Civil War, as availability of food and other essential items declined drastically, they tried to preserve the community which provided shelter from further dissolution even if this meant strengthening the power of the patriarch in the family. The people in Caucasus, Central Asian Parts and Siberia were initially not affected by the revolutionary process. The hold of traditional patriarchal society on peasants weakened only in the 1920s when the Bolsheviks were able to establish control over the vast hinterland and made war on the peasant culture in the process, and transmitted new notions about women's position in society to the countryside.

One of the important tasks that historians face today is to sort out what these activities meant in terms of changing gender roles. The participation of women in the Revolution of 1917, or the change in legal rights, or arrangements made by the government to relieve women from domestic work, did not bring much change in gender arrangements. There were several reasons for this. One was that the real resources of the state did not correspond to the plans and intentions of the Communist party. Whatever funds were there, the government chose to spend on guns and tanks rather than day-care centres, cafeterias and laundries. So, though women got legal rights and opportunities for education and

employment, they remained burdened by domestic responsibilities. More important reason however was that Marxist theoreticians underestimated the power of patriarchy. According to Marxist theory, men derived their power to oppress women from their ownership of property. So the full emancipation of women could occur only when the workers' revolution had abolished private property. Thereafter, the socializing of housework and childcare would enable women to participate in public life as men's equals. But when Russian Social Democrats tried to honour their commitment to women's emancipation, they failed not only because they did not have resources but also because they never critically examined the assumption they made that men should lead. Except a small number of Marxist feminists, Marxists always assumed that primary political actors would be men, that men should lead political parties and that men factory workers would make the revolution. Thus, as Clements comments, 'they preserved the core tenet of patriarchy in their political institutions, even while proclaiming their war on patriarchy' (Clements: 1997, p. 599). In fact, throughout the period of Communist rule, women had to bear the double burden of discharging domestic chores associated with nurturing the family and matching men's performance on the job.

It should be mentioned that despite its inadequacies, the early years of the Soviet state still stand as a guide-post to the future of women's liberation.

## 8. IMPACT

The leaders of the Russian Revolution created an extraordinary political order which lasted for over seven decades. There is great divergence in views on its impact. Its admirers see it as a milestone in human progress while its critics see it as a catastrophe of monstrous proportions. However, there is no doubt that it had decisive influence on the course of the twentieth century.

Bolshevik leaders were followers of Karl Marx who had argued that socialism was a pre-destined alternative to bourgeois capitalist society. Their aim was to move Russia and Europe from capitalism, through the dictatorship of the proletariat, to communism. There were very different views as to what socialism meant. Did it mean state control over means of production? Did it mean local self-government by workers themselves? For Lenin, dictatorship of the proletariat meant dictatorship of the working class led by a vanguard party of Bolsheviks. The aim was to destroy the old order and build a new society. In practice, the dictatorship of the proletariat very quickly became an uncompromising dictatorship *over*, not *by*, industrial and agricultural labour. The phrase 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' became a cover for complete control by the Bolsheviks party. Western historians began to describe it as 'dictatorship without the proletariat'.

The Communist government under Lenin and Stalin adopted a horrendously murderous path and a terrorist form of state, economy and society were induced. It carried on work of industrialization, modernization and nation-building in a manner that perverted any notion of 'cost of progress'. Unprecedented brutality was a consequence of its own ideological-political obsessions and sheer incompetence. Thus Marx's utopia devised in the Communist Manifesto was both used and abused by the Communist Party in Russia. Ultimately, because of bureaucratic control, inefficiency, corruption and lack of incentive, even after decades of total control, basic consumer goods like soap, milk and meat remained in short supply. The unavoidable long-term result was the development of a civic culture based upon the all important practical need of citizens to stand in queues, or to persuade or to bribe officials to grant them what theoretically should have been theirs by legal right. Long queues of consumers to procure their share of essential goods became a common sight in all parts of Russia.

The Russian state and communism had enormous and varied influences on the world in the decades following. To Lenin and Trotsky the ultimate aim of communist revolution was a world revolution. In the western world, the establishment of a socialist order was seen as a threat to world capitalist order. A revolutionary wave spread in Germany, Hungary and some other places in Europe that lasted until 1923. But, despite initial hopes of success, Marxist movements did not succeed in retaining power. Joseph Stalin later gave up the idea of world revolution and stated that socialism was possible in one country.

During the Second World War, the USSR played a spectacular role in the defeat of fascist forces and thus contributed to the development of the idea and praxis of democracy in Europe. After the Second World War the USSR, along with the US, emerged as a super power. A period of deep ideological distrust and intense armament race followed. For four and a half decades the world lived in the shadow of a nuclear war capable of destroying all civilized life. After the Second World War, in East Europe, communists essentially performed as local administrators of territories occupied, de facto, by the USSR.

The Russian Revolution profoundly affected the entire globe. In Asia and Africa, communism broadly provided doctrine of revolution, deployable methods, and auxiliary forces. In India, it provided inspiring ideas. Sometimes, armed assistance of the Soviet Union enabled communist parties to take power as in China, Vietnam and Cambodia and sometimes such efforts failed, as in Indonesia. In South America, Marxists and communists were not able to compete successfully with indigenous and populist social movements. The net result of Soviet interventions was that by the mid-1980s, Russian communism impacted an area that amounted to a third of the entire globe.



The communist state disintegrated in 1991 having accomplished a number of historical functions which were not part of its ideological aims. Radical self-criticism during Gorbachev's time, which played decisive role in the disintegration of the USSR, offered a number of guidelines for the political agenda of the next century.

## Exercises

Questions for essay-type answers.

1 What were the sources of discontent with the Tsarist regime? What events weakened it overtime?

2 'Bolshevism was an extreme political movement and did not have popular support.' Comment.

3 Discuss the reasons which enabled the Bolsheviks to seize power. Why they faced so little serious opposition.

## Glossary

**Cheka:** It was the secret-police organization created by the Bolsheviks in 1917. It brutally repressed any counter- revolutionary activity.

**Democracy:** a government answerable to elected representatives chosen in free elections by informed voters in a society in which minority rights are respected.

**Duma:** In Russia the term refers to a council or an official assembly. During 1905-1917, it referred to the elected legislative assembly established by Tsar Nicolas II in 1906 constituting lower house of parliament.

**Kadets:** Constitutional Democrat Party established in 1905 in Russia opposed to Tsarist absolutism and also to workers' movement.

**Nicolas II:** Tsar of Russia, 1894-1917. He belonged to Romanov dynasty. He was executed in 1918.

**Social Democrats:** socialist party founded in 1898 by followers of Karl Marx called the Social Democratic Labour Party, which appealed to the growing number of industrial workers. In 1903, it split into two factions - the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks.

**Social Revolutionaries (SRs):** a socialist (not Marxist) party, founded in 1902, which advocated the redistribution of land and won the support of peasants.

Socialism: socialists and socialist parties, in different times and in different places have defined socialism differently. In essence it means the public ownership of the means of production and distribution for the benefit of labouring classes.

Soviets: elected committees of workers, peasants or soldiers.

Stalin, Joseph: 1879–1953, Soviet political leader, Secretary- General of the Communist Party 1922-1953, Gained control of the Communist Party and the Soviet state in 1928, Premier of the USSR 1941-1953.

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