



## The Revolution (s)

- Russia is the largest country in the world, with over 6.6 million square miles and eleven time zones. Despite its size and manpower advantage, it suffered serious setbacks during the Crimean War of 1854-1856 and the Russo-Japanese Naval War of 1904-1905. Finally, the Great War proved fatal for its centuries-old, archaic, and stubborn power structure.
- Most surprisingly, a Marxist Revolution replaced the old order in a predominantly rural social structure (about 85 percent). At its inception in 1917, the world also had no idea that it would be short-lived. By the end of December 1922, it created the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which collapsed in 1991. Born amid a war, the USSR ended another type of war, the Cold War, before Gorbachev dissolved it.

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# The Revolution (s)

- Revolutions are a complex historical phenomenon. So is the Russian Revolution.
- We will try to understand it, focusing on the following three elements:
  - Three dates: one from 1905-07, and two from 1917.
  - Two Provisional Governments of 1917, dealing with three major pressure groups of the rejuvenated and well-organized Soviets, the disgruntled army, and the angry peasants.
  - The Bolshevik revolutionaries' victory and elimination of the Allies-supported White Army.

## The Dates: 1905-1907

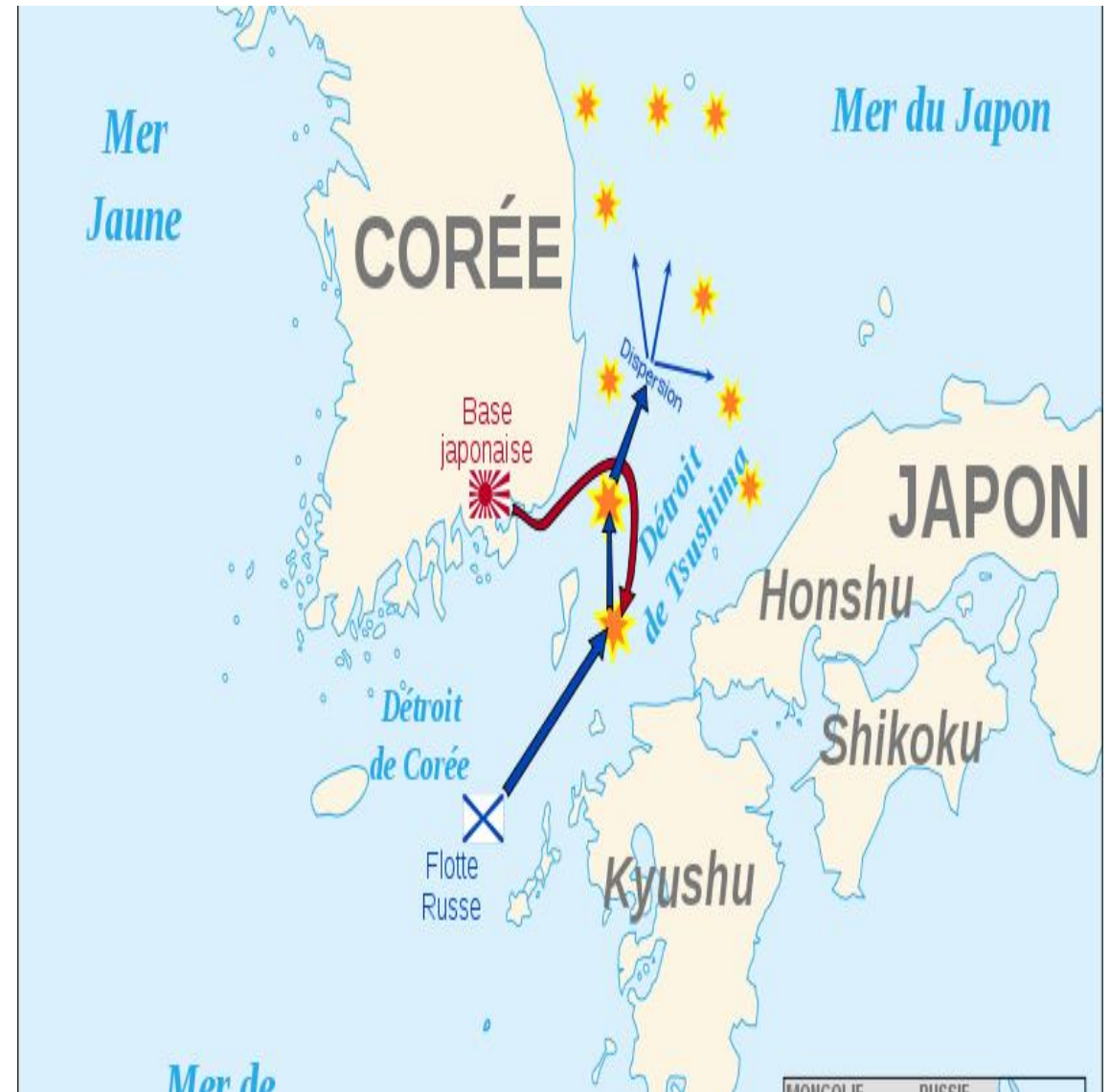
- On January 22, 1905, thousands of workers gathered in front of the Czar's palace in Saint Petersburg. They chanted slogans to express their plight while reaffirming their respect for the existing power structure, singing "God Save the Czar."
- The Czar's troops fired on them, killing and wounding hundreds of women, men, and children. The Russian Bloody Sunday further frustrated the masses.
- In sharp contrast, an oppressor at home, the Czar was defeated in the Russo-Japanese War, May 27-28, 1905.

## The Dates: 1905-1907

- Russian society had been experiencing industrialization, particularly since the 1880s, but without essential political and social reforms.
- Long-simmering discontent made Russia ripe for violent upheaval. The Russian regime resisted change throughout the 19th century and refused to adapt to the liberalizing movements that swept most of Europe.
- The Czar ruled autocratically, relying on the nobility, the church, the army, and the bureaucracy, without allowing a hint of political participation.

## The Dates: 1905-1907

- The rising number of the middle and working classes in cities such as Moscow and Saint Petersburg resented the archaic governance style.
- Frustrated Russian intellectuals turned to revolutionary doctrines and even terrorism to promote rapid change.
- In this atmosphere of domestic tension, the Czar's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 reinforced the liberal and radical groups' calls for reform.



# The Dates: 1905-1907

- Growing resentment at home deepened because of the disaster in the Pacific.
- Oil historian Daniel Yergin emphasizes the discontent spreading away from the political power centers to the new centers of economic activity in a rapidly industrializing state. He offers the example of Baku in the Caucasus.
- In 1904, oil workers in Baku went on strike and won a collective labor agreement. They went on a strike again in solidarity with the victims of Bloody Sunday of 1905.

# The Dates: 1905-1907

- In October 1905, Tatars burnt the oil wells. Burning Baku oil wells, Yergin says, was, for the first time, a violent upheaval that had interrupted the flow of oil, threatening to make a vast investment worthless (p. 131).
- Yergin also highlights the oil region's role in laying down the foundations of the October Revolution. Baku became a revolutionary hotbed on the Caspian. Hidden in the Tatar quarter was a large cellar, the home of Nina, the name given to the secret printing operation.

# The Dates: 1905-1907

- The exiled revolutionaries smuggled their paper Iskra from Europe via Persia.
- Nina printed it and the oil industry's distribution network offered a vehicle for clandestinely distributing these materials country-wide.
- The Baku alumni included a young Georgian, a former seminarian, and son of a shoemaker named Joseph Djugashvili, code-named Koba, the Turkish for indomitable.
- History will know him a little later as Joseph Stalin.

## The Dates: 1905-1907

- As the discontent spread, by October 1905, it resulted in a ten-day strike with two different consequences.
- First, it paralyzed the country.
- Second, it led to the rise of the soviets, the councils of workers, in the urban centers. We have to remember them because in 1917, they will re-emerge.
- Several incidents of public outrage shook the government. Sailors mutinied on the battleship Potemkin in the Black Sea, as did soldiers in the army. Several incidents of the peasants' revolt in the countryside also occurred, in which they attacked wealthy landowners. Several officials were assassinated.

## The Dates: 1905-1907

- Under this pressure, Czar Nicholas II yielded. He issued the October Manifesto, which later became the basis of the 1906 Constitution.
- He promised civil liberties, a popularly elected Duma, and the legalization of unions.
- It was a false promise. The repressive tactics resumed to restore order by 1907. The Czar and his advisers reduced the Duma to a non-democratically elected body and dissolved it twice between 1906 and 1907.
- Discontent continued, as did its overt or covert expression by the political and civil society.

## The Dates: 1917, March 8-15

- Amid the Great War, the Russian working women marked International Women's Day on March 8, 1917. Frustrated by the war, they had decided to be in the vanguard of the anti-government protest.
- Industrialization had increased their role in the labor force. In Petrograd, they made up more than half of the labor force and endured long hours, low wages, shortages of staples such as bread, and rising prices. On March 8, ten thousand of them mobilized and marched into Petrograd, chanting anti-war, anti-inflation, and anti-government slogans.
- Initially obeying the instructions to suppress the protest, the troops joined the women protesters on the second day.
- On March 12, the Duma organized a provisional government, and three days later, the last of the Romanov Czars abdicated.

## The Dates: 1917, November 7.

- Beginning mid-March, Russia, a major power, thus faced an unprecedented crisis of governance. The political groups filled up the power vacuum with an immediate provisional government, replaced in July. These two provisional governments collapsed one after the other.
- On November 7, the Bolsheviks emerged as the most stable force, although the civil war with the White Armies posed a threat to their rule for another two years.
- We will look at the provisional governments first and then discuss the defeat of the White Army.

## The Provisional Governments, 1917

- A “liberal” prince, Georgy Lvov, led the first provisional government with different coalitions. They hoped that Russia would move toward constitutional parliamentary democracy.
- The provisional governments enacted into law civil liberties, religious freedom, amnesty, equality before the law, and union rights. They also promised more fundamental land and social reforms in the constitution, yet to be drafted.
- The Lvov government collapsed after the July Days of Soviet protests. Alexander Kerensky (1881-1970) replaced him.

## The Provisional Governments, 1917

- The provisional governments encountered three challenges:
- First, they were not the sole authority. De facto, they were uncomfortable partners in a *dvoyevlastiye*, Dual Authority. The Soviets of the 1905-07 era had revived and asserted themselves as the political organizations of workers, soldiers, and radical intellectuals. The provisional governments had to share power with them, particularly the strong Petrograd Soviet. The Soviets favored socialist self-rule and stood against the upper classes represented in the provisional government.
- As the parallel government, the Soviets remained the most stable and growing force in the chaotic months that separated the February abdication of the Czar and the Bolshevik takeover in November 1917.

## The Provisional Governments, 1917

- Historian Figs defines the Russian Revolution as “the popular realization of Soviet power as the negation of the State and the direct self-rule of the people...”(p. 460-473).
- The July Days, the first week in 1917, refer to a violent confrontation between the two components of the Dual Authority in Petrograd. Although the loyalists had an edge, says Figs, the encounter revealed the depth of Soviet impact on the army and the people. A faction within it contended that the Soviets failed to seize power in July because of indecisiveness (p. 421-432).

Because of the July Days, the Soviet headquarter displaced from the [Taurid Palace](#) to the outskirts of Petrograd in the [Smolny Institute](#), which gradually graduated from the stronghold of the Soviets to the launchpad of the Bolshevik Revolution.



## The Provisional Governments, 1917

- Second, the war divided the Russians. While there was some sympathy for the Allies in the provisional governments, the Soviets resented the continuation of Russia's draining involvement in World War 1.
- On March 14, the Soviets issued [Order Number One](#) to stipulate that military officers would be democratically elected by soldiers and that military decisions would be democratically made, in consonance with the Soviet instructions. The governments' war efforts continued to collapse.
- Kerensky had to balance the pressure from the Soviets and the misplaced right-wing military ambitions. The aborted Kornilov coup was the most crucial example of this tightrope walk. The Soviets opposed the revival of the old regime's rules of punishment and preserved the newfound voice of soldiers in the decision-making.

## The Provisional Governments, 1917

- Third, the end of the czarism ignited the peasants' hopes for immediate land reforms. Neither the government nor the Soviets (initially) controlled the peasants, part of the eighty-five percent rural population and major contributors to the conscript army.
- The peasants began to seize land and hoard food for themselves, worsening supplies in urban areas.
- Soldiers began to desert the front to make land claims of their own.
- Gradually, the urban Soviets and rural peasants began to join forces. The soldiers strengthened their ranks as the Red Guards of the impending revolution.

## The Provisional Governments, 1917

- The land and freedom, say Finkel et al, were two great drivers of the peasants' unrest on the anvil of the Revolution. The peasants had faced one disappointment after another following the 1861 Emancipation of some 23 million serfs. The scraps of land that the nobility agreed to surrender against outright compensation paid by the state were neither enough nor convert into farmers' personal property.
- Says historian Pushkarev, the complexity of the Emancipation decree was such that the former serfs had to engage in over 111,555 frustrating negotiations with the aggrieved owners of that many estates. The resulting land yields of different types were all collectivized as Communes to be managed by elders who allotted strips of land to families proportionate to their needs and available labor. The communes had to raise enough resources to pay installments of the cost the state had borne on their behalf.

## The Provisional Governments, 1917

- Prime Minister Stolypin (1906-11) legislated major land reforms of 1907 aimed at decommunization of the land and increasing the number of enclosed, personal properties. The reform offered additional land for those who would migrate to Siberia. In a major concession, says [Gaudin](#), the state wiped out the remaining payments for the commune lands.
- Figes surmises that while the number of private landowners increased, up to one third, the progress stalled after initial enthusiasm waned. Up to 1917, the commune had survived as the preferred system of the farmers, reluctant to opt for private farming (p. 232-241).

## The Provisional Governments, 1917

- By 1917, the farmers' ambition was to enhance the land available to them to increase the per capita share of the commune residents and figure out a convenient path to personal ownership. Bolsheviks were to make that possible. They had farmers' support.
- It is a sad story, however. The peasants were unaware of the future yet to come. Collective farming was not on the horizon yet. By the late 1920s, the Communists would replace the communes with collective farming to their great dismay.

## The Provisional Governments, 1917

- The provisional governments faced another challenge, the radicals returning from the West. Lenin was one of them.
- The Czarist oppression had pushed many radicals to safer locations in the West.
- Lenin led the most influential of these groups, a group of Marxist revolutionaries, the Social Democrats, particularly the Bolsheviks, i.e., the majority.
- Lenin was the revolutionary name of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (1870- 1924).

## The Bolsheviks Win

- Marxism had become influential among some Russian intellectuals, revolutionaries, and groups critical of Russia's czarist autocracy. In 1898, Russian Marxists formed the Social Democratic Party. Lenin was among its leaders.
- When they had to flee the country, they held a conference in London in 1903, where the radical Bolshevik wing of the party under Lenin split from the more moderate Mensheviks, i.e., the minority.
- Lenin kept the Bolshevik faction alive during his seventeen years of exile in Switzerland.

# The Bolsheviks Win

- In April 1917, the German government secretly transported Lenin to a Baltic port from where he made his way to Russia via Finland and Petrograd.
- Back home, Lenin opposed the post-Czarist power structure and unfurled slogans such as Peace to the Army, Land to the Peasants, Ownership of Factories to the Workers, and All Power to the Soviets.
- Lenin argued for a socialist revolution and, as part of the struggle to get there, urged his followers to gain control over the Soviets, particularly the powerful Petrograd Soviet.



**LENIN'S JOURNEY FROM ZURICH TO ST. PETERSBURG, APRIL 1917**

— BY TRAIN    - - - BY FERRY

100 MI.



# The Bolsheviks Win

- Lenin laid down three principles for the Bolsheviks' organization.
- First, the party should be an elite, highly trained group of dedicated Marxist revolutionaries capable of instructing and leading the masses. The party must constantly purge the disloyal ideas or people.
- Second, the socialist revolution must include, besides the industrial working class in Russia, as Marx wanted, the poor and hungry peasants to stage a broader socialist revolution that, he hoped, would sweep through other European countries. Frustrated over insufficient land distribution and acquisition since the disappointing effort made in the 1861 Emancipation of Serfdom, peasants found hope in the Bolsheviks.
- Third, the party should firmly oppose participation in the war, which Lenin considered a product of imperialist rivalries and a continuing civil war among capitalists.

## The Bolsheviks Win

- Kerensky remained in control, initially. When the Bolsheviks agitated in July 1917, he unleashed a fresh wave of oppression against them.
- Lenin had to exile himself again. He went to Finland this time.
- Kerensky had to change his policy and seek the support of the Bolsheviks and the Soviets to abort a coup attempt by General Lavr Kornilov (1870-1918). He failed because the Petrograd Soviet obstructed troop movement by train and encouraged his soldiers' desertion.
- By October, the Bolsheviks under the leadership of Lenin and Leon Trotsky (1879- 1940) finally gained control over the Petrograd and Moscow Soviets. Bolshevik women also became active in the workplace.

# The Bolsheviks Win

- On November 6, Lenin and Trotsky launched a well-organized seizure of power through the Red Guards, workers' militia units. Within hours, they took over crucial control centers and transferred power to the Soviets and Lenin. Trotsky projected the uprising as a defense of the Soviets rather than a Bolshevik offensive.
- On November 7, the Bolsheviks elected Lenin as the head of the new Government. The Soviets throughout Russia endorsed him. The Bolsheviks assumed the name of Communists.

# Proletariat of All Countries Unite.

- The Communists took immediate steps to secure the revolution. Here are a few of them:
- A pyramid of people's Soviets or councils replaced the Czarist hierarchy. These councils were elected by universal suffrage but were dominated by relatively few Communist Party members.
- When national elections failed to return a communist majority to the Constituent Assembly, Lenin had armed sailors disperse that elected body.
- Capitalism was abolished outright. A barter system of exchange replaced money because inflation and devaluation had destroyed the value of the ruble.

## Proletariat of All Countries Unite.

- Committees of workers, responsible to party commissars, took over management of industry and commerce.
- The government nationalized the land and turned over its management to local peasant committees, who then distributed it to individual peasants to be worked by their labor. All crop surpluses were to be given to the state.
- The state expropriated church lands.
- Enacted laws to establish the legal equality of the sexes, the first Western government to do so.

# To Brest-Litovsk

- Lenin immediately opened peace negotiations with Germany and, in March 1918, signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Russia lost Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Bessarabia, the Polish provinces, and some of the Transcaucasian territory.
- This was an expensive peace. Russia lost 1/3rd of its European population, 3/4th of its iron, and 9/10th of its coal. Germany also compelled Russia to pay a heavy indemnity.



# The Bolsheviks Win

- Internally, Lenin faced a civil war as some Russian aristocrats and higher army officers rebelled against communism.
- The “White” forces had the support of the French, British, Greek, Polish, Czech, and US troops as well. The Western engagement with the rebels will dominate Russian-Soviet perception for the years to come.
- The US joining the anti-Bolshevik crusade was indicative of a Wilsonian dilemma.



The end of the civil war, 1920/21

# The Bolsheviks Win

- After the Bolshevik victory, President Wilson presented his famous 14-point peace plan to Congress on January 8, 1918. Point VI concerned Russia:

“VI. The evacuation of all Russian territory and such a settlement of all questions affecting Russia as will secure the best and freest cooperation of the other nations of the world in obtaining for her an unhampered and unembarrassed opportunity for the independent determination of her own political development and national policy and assure her of a sincere welcome into the society of free nations under institutions of her own choosing; and, more than a welcome, assistance also of every kind that she may need and may herself desire. **The treatment accorded Russia by her sister nations in the months to come will be the acid test of their goodwill, of their comprehension of her needs as distinguished from their own interests, and of their intelligent and unselfish sympathy.**”

# The Bolsheviks Win

- President Wilson could not implement point VI.
- Russia lost another four to six million soldiers and civilians during the civil war, but finally, the Red Army of Lenin won not only the internal conflict but also regained Ukraine.
- Several factors helped them win. Above all, the Bolsheviks projected the Whites as a regression to the old oppressive system. Russia showed no preference for such a return.
- The White forces had no unified command structure.
- Revolutionary steps such as the nationalization of land built up hope and support.

# The Bolsheviks Win

- The Bolshevik government mobilized Russia, but in addition to the civil war, it encountered some of the challenges that the worsening economy posed.
- The troops, for example, confiscated grain from the peasantry to feed the cities and the army.
- Suppression of any internal opposition began, and the secret police force, the Cheka, embodied the Red Terror to hunt down class enemies and ensure internal conformity to the Bolshevik regime.

# The Bolsheviks Win

- When Communist policies hampered economic progress, Lenin opted for the National Economic Policy, incorporating some market-based solutions, which Stalin would drop.
- A radically different and yet firmly anchored and functional political, economic, and legal system had, nonetheless, irreversibly replaced the ousted, decadent czardom within nine months.

# Conclusion

- The Russian Revolution emerged out of a chaotic situation. The Czarist Russia had ended serfdom in 1861 and begun industrializing in the late nineteenth century, but failed to pursue reforms that would empower farmers and respond to the urban workers and elites' pressing demand for change.
- Lenin introduced a revolutionary system top-down. Stalin will have a longer imprint on it beginning in 1924. He aggressively pursued change from above, and, by the end of the Second World War, restored and enhanced the stature of Russia as the USSR, a world power that challenged capitalism and market economies for seven decades before Gorbachev strived to change that colossal structure, beginning in 1985. His efforts failed. By the end of 1991, he had to dissolve the Union.