

# COMMUNISM IN THE USSR

## Russia to 1917

### Tsar Nicholas II (1896-1917)

- married to Alexandra von Hesse (Queen Victoria's granddaughter), they had five children (see photo)
- believed that a Tsar must be an **autocrat**
- he refused to reform
- not a natural ruler and he did not understand what changes Russia needed
- he was a kind, family man



### The Russian Empire

- **secret police, censorship**
- many different nationalities, not only the Russians
- Russia was vast but **backward**
- 80% of workers lived in communes controlled by peasant councils called *mirs*
- dreadful working and living conditions, illiteracy
- **underdeveloped** industry, however, it was growing fast (oil, coal, iron industry)

### Russo-Japanese War 1904-1905

- the Tsar was interested in the Far East
- the key issue – Korea and Manchuria
- started by Japanese blockade of Russian **Port Arthur** where most of Russian fleet was present
- Japan soon took control of the sea
- fighting in Manchuria, huge losses
- Japan won – they got Korea, south Sakhalin, Port Arthur and considerable influence over Manchuria, and they became a new power in the Far East
- Russian failure undermined Tsar's authority at home

### Opposition against the Tsar

- the **Cadets** (constitutional democrats) – middle class people, inspired by the British system
- the **Social Democratic Party** – workers, based on Marx's ideas  
Marxism =

in 1903 the party split into two groups:

- the **Mensheviks** – did not believe that Russia was ready for a revolution
- the **Bolsheviks** – led by Lenin, believed that the purpose of the party was to start a revolution
- **Social Revolutionaries** – a radical peasant movement, violent, assassinations, they wanted to take the land from the nobility and give it to the peasants

## The Revolution of 1905

- in 1903 censorship was relaxed, which caused many anti-government newspapers and pamphlets to be issued
- government-approved unions led to strikes
- the government started losing control, tensions built up
- the last spark was the failure in the war with Japan in 1905
- this led to many rebellions, for example on the battleship **Potemkin** or the fortress of **Kronstadt**
- **22 January, 1905 – Bloody Sunday** – a crowd of 200,000 led by Father Gapon came to the Winter Palace to give a petition to the Tsar, they were peaceful, carried pictures of the Tsar to show respect, but the Tsar was not there, the guards (soldiers and Cossacks) started to shoot at them, 1,000 people died
- people were appalled by this
- in the **October Manifesto** the Tsar introduced a **Duma** (an elected parliament), the right to free speech and to form political parties (legalization)
- at the same time, however, the Tsar made peace with Japan and used the army to crush the revolt (the army remained loyal to the Tsar)
- in 1906 new laws limited the power of the Duma

## 1905-1917 – the troubled years

- the Tsar continued to limit the Duma, he dismissed it when they criticized his policies
- new Prime Minister – **Peter Stolypin** – used “a carrot and a stick” policy (harsh treatment of protesters but the peasants were given land), these measures had an immediate effect
- however, little was done for the workers in the cities
- in 1911 – Stolypin was assassinated and thus the Tsar lost the only able minister
- Tsarevich Alexei suffered from haemophilia and only Gregory Effimovich **Rasputin** seemed able to cure him

### TASK 1:

**What have you heard or read about the mysterious man Rasputin and his influence on the Tsar’s family? (See the poster to identify how he was seen by the public.) How do you think he died?**



- 1914 – World War I started, Russia was the member of the Triple \_\_\_\_\_
- Russia’s **lack of success in the war** and many deaths on the battlefield caused more public outrage, this undermined the Tsar’s authority even more. Also, there was **chaos on the home front** and people in the cities had no food or coal.
- in 1915 the Tsar took personal control of the army which made him personally responsible for the development on the front. This was a serious mistake. Meanwhile, he left the Tsarina in St. Petersburg to be in charge of the country.
- the Tsarina seemed to be under complete control of Rasputin and there were even rumours that they were lovers (not true, of course).
- finally, in 1916 a group of high aristocrats murdered Rasputin but it was already too late.

## Revolutions of 1917

### the March Revolution

- in January 1917 **strikes** broke out all over Russia and they spread quickly
- **the Duma** set up a Provisional Committee to take over the government but the Tsar ordered them to disband, which they refused to do
- on 12 March the Tsar ordered **the army** to crush the revolt – but they refused, this was the decisive moment
- some soldiers even joined the revolution
- the revolutionaries set up the **Petrograd Soviet**, which took control of the food supplies to the city
- it was not clear who was in charge of Russia now – but the Tsar definitely wasn't!
- on **15 March 1917** – **the Tsar abdicated**

### TASK 2:

Compare the revolution of March 1917 to the revolution of 1905:

1. Which factors were present in both revolutions?
2. Which March 1917 factors were not present in 1905?  
(think about wars, the army, strikes, food, the public image of the royal family etc.)

- however, Russia's problems were not solved by the abdication
- the **Provisional Government**
  - led by **Alexander Kerensky**
  - tried to solve the situation at home (e.g. by the promise of free election)
  - promised the allies that Russia would continue the war
- but people also paid attention to the **Petrograd Soviet** which started presenting itself as another possible government
- in March 1917 **Vladimir Illych Lenin** (an exiled Bolshevik revolutionary) heard about the revolution and returned to Russia immediately, in a sealed railway car provided by Germany

### TASK 3:

Why would Germany support Lenin (also financially) in his revolutionary movement?

- Lenin arrived in Petrograd and set out the Bolshevik programme – in his *April Theses* he urged the people to support the Bolsheviks in the second revolution
- Lenin's main slogans were *Peace, Land and Bread!*  
*All Power to the Soviets*
- support for the Bolsheviks rose sharply and peasants in the country tried to take the land from the aristocrats but the Provisional Government tried to stop them
- June 1917 – riots broke out in Petrograd so the Provisional Government used the army and ordered Lenin's arrest. Lenin escaped to Finland.
- September 1917 – Russian army general Kornilov decided it was time to restore power so he marched with his army to Petrograd to remove the Provisional Government from power
- Kerensky was in a desperate situation because the army had turned against him – so he turned to the Bolsheviks for support
- the Bolsheviks used their army **the Red Guards** and General Kornilov's troops refused to fight members of the Soviet so his plan collapsed

### the October Revolution of 1917 – the Bolshevik Revolution

(which was in fact in November, according to the Gregorian calendar!)

- Kerensky's government was too weak (no support of the army and the peasants or workers, they also lost the war)
- on the other hand, the Bolsheviks promised what the people wanted most (bread, peace, land)
- Lenin decided that it was time for the revolution by which the Bolsheviks would seize power. He returned to Russia and started acting:
- the **Red Guards** led by **Leon Trotsky** took control of many strategic sites
- on the next day, the Bolsheviks were in control of most of Petrograd, including railway stations.
- on the evening of **7 November** the Bolsheviks **stormed the Winter Palace** and arrested the ministers of the Provisional Government. There was almost no resistance. Kerensky escaped and tried to gather some loyal army support, but with no success. So, he fled into exile.

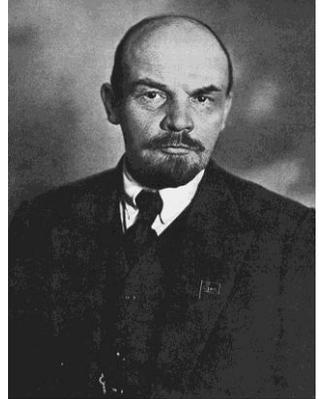
#### TASK 4:

**Why were the Bolsheviks successful? Compare the March revolution of 1917.**

## Lenin's Russia and the Civil War

### TASK 5:

For your homework, find some information about Vladimir Illych Lenin and his life before 1917:



### Lenin's reforms

- Lenin knew that if they failed to deliver what they promised, they would lose people's support just like Kerensky's government. He immediately set up the **Council of People's Commissars**. They issued many decrees:
  - **land** belonging to the Tsar, the aristocracy and the Church was **given to peasants**
  - **factories** were handed over to the workers
  - Russia **asked for peace with Germany**
  - all non-Bolshevik **newspapers** were **banned**
  - **the opposition** (e.g. the Cadets) was **banned** and its leaders were arrested
  - **the Cheka** (secret police) was set up to deal with spies and counter-revolutionaries
  - marriages could be made without priests and it was also easier to get divorced
- Lenin also promised free elections to the new Constituent Assembly and they were held in 1917. However, the Bolsheviks did not gain the majority in the election. – So Lenin sent the Red Guards to close down the Assembly.
- the Congress of Soviets was used to pass the laws because Lenin believed that establishing a **dictatorship of the proletariat** would give way to true communism

### Peace treaty with Germany

- in the meantime, Trotsky was put in charge of negotiating a peace treaty with Germany. At first, they believed that soon a revolution would start in Germany, too. But as there was no revolution in Germany in 1918 and the Germans started advancing, Lenin had to accept the terms of the **Treaty of Brest Litovsk in March 1918**:
  - loss of 25% of the population of Russia
  - loss of 27% of farmlands
  - loss of 26% of railways
  - loss of 75% of iron ore resources
  - a fine of 300 million gold roubles



## Opposition against Lenin and the Civil War

- by his actions, Lenin made many enemies
- at the end of 1918 an unlikely collection of anti-Bolshevik groups **united to crush the Bolsheviks**. They became known as **the Whites**, to contrast with the “Reds.” They consisted mostly of the **Social Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, Tsar’s supporters, landlords, capitalists, foreign troops (e.g. British, French, the Czech Legion)**
- the Bolsheviks were strongest in western Russia while the rest of the country supported the Social Revolutionary Party and the Whites.

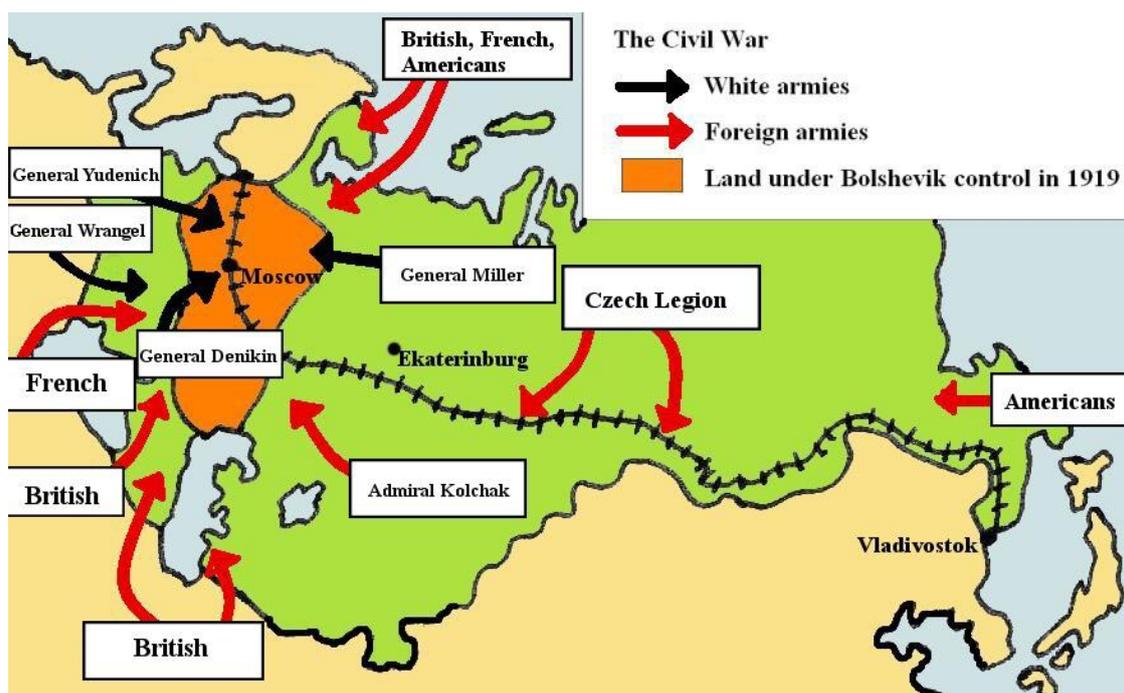
### TASK 6:

Study the given map. Write down the main movements of the Whites:

General Denikin –

Admiral Kolchak –

the Czech Legion –



- surprisingly, in a short time **Trotsky** managed to create an army of over 300,000 men. Also, the Cheka threatened everybody if they co-operated with the Whites – people called this the **Red Terror**.
- in 1918 the **Tsar was executed** with his whole family (the Tsarina and their five children) because he was still a threat to the regime and the Whites were approaching Ekaterinburg where the royal family were held prisoners.

### TASK 7:

Why did Grand Duchess Anastasia become so famous?



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- There was savage fighting and cruelty on both sides. Peasants and workers suffered most.
- Gradually, Trotsky's Red Army started winning. By the end of 1919, Kolchak's forces were destroyed. Also the foreign armies of intervention withdrew because they were not able to form a compact force. One after another, Trotsky defeated them. The last White army was defeated in Crimea in November 1920. By the next year the Bolsheviks were in complete control of Russia.

#### **TASK 8:**

**Why did the Bolsheviks win in the Civil War? Revise your notes and consider:**

**1. The advantages of the Reds:**

**2. The disadvantages of the Whites:**

## The USSR in 1920s and 1930s

### Lenin's economic policy

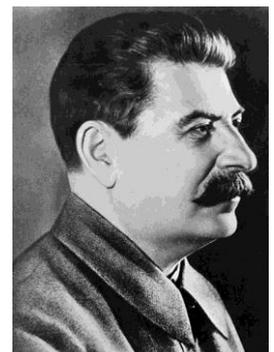
- **War communism** – harsh economic measures the Bolsheviks adopted during the Civil War, its purpose was to keep towns and the Red Army supplied with food or weapons
  - all large factories were placed under the control of the government
  - production was planned and organized by the government
  - discipline for workers was stricter and the punishment for strikes could be to be shot
  - peasants had to give their surplus food to the government
  - food was rationed
  - free enterprise became illegal and all production was controlled by the government
- War communism helped the Red Armies win the Civil War but it caused terrible problems. Food being taken from the peasants led to severe food shortage and catastrophic **famine**, especially in 1921. Seven million Russian people died.
- In February 1921 sailors at **Kronstadt** naval base rose against the new policy but their uprising was crushed by Trotsky's army.
- In March **1921** Lenin announced his new economic strategy - **New Economic Policy (NEP)** which brought back capitalism to some sections of Russian society:
  - peasants were allowed to sell surplus grain and pay taxes instead of giving it directly to the state
  - small factories could return to private ownership
  - minor trading was allowed
  - heavy industries remained under control of the state (e.g iron, coal, steel works)
  - NEP was meant to be temporary but it was very efficient and food production rose steeply (despite this, many Bolsheviks saw that as betrayal of communism)
- In **1922** the **Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)** was established and Lenin was supervising the drawing up of the new constitution
- However, in 1923 **Lenin** was paralysed by strokes and he **died in 1924**.

### Struggle for power

- There was need for a new leader. The possible candidates were:
  - Lev **Kamenev**
  - Grigory **Zinoviev**
  - Nikolai **Bukharin**
  - **Leon Trotsky**
  - **Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin**

### TASK 9:

For your homework, find some information about **Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin** and his life before 1924.



- To reach the highest position, Stalin had to **get rid of the competition**. In 1923 he started as an outsider in the Communist Party. After Lenin's death he presented himself as the chief mourner. Soon after that he formed a triumvirate with Kamenev and Zinoviev to get rid of Trotsky and Bukharin. Trotsky was sacked as a War Commissar. When this was done, Stalin turned against Zinoviev and Kamenev and allied with Bukharin! During the next years Kamenev, Zinoviev, Trotsky and Bukharin were expelled from the Communist Party. Finally, in 1929 Trotsky was expelled even from the USSR and Stalin became the undisputed leader of the Party (and therefore, all of the USSR).

## Modernization of the USSR

- Stalin ended Lenin's NEP and introduced a series of **five-year plans** drawn up by the state planning organization. The plans organized the whole economy of the USSR and they were very ambitious.
  - the First Five-Year Plan (1928-1932) – focused on **heavy industry** and even though the targets were not met, production was increased using natural resources
  - the Second Five-Year Plan (1933-1937) – it was built on the achievements of the first plan, heavy industry was still a priority, also mining, transport, Moscow underground and agriculture (here the heavy industry helped with tractors)
  - the Third Five-Year Plan was launched in 1938 but it was interrupted by World War II.
  - On the whole, the plans were **not successful**:
    - they were often inefficient, they promoted wasting (money, labour forces, material, time)
    - there was no unemployment because it was illegal not to work, for women too
    - prisoners (also political prisoners) had to work on large-scale projects e.g. dams, human cost was enormous (e.g. one hundred thousand dead from the construction of the Belomor Canal)
    - life was harsh, factory discipline strict
    - to encourage people to work, the Party used **propaganda** very efficiently, e.g. miner Alexei Stakhanov was awarded the title of *Hero of Socialist Labour*
- **Collectivization** was meant to modernize agriculture
  - **tractors** were used on a largescale
  - peasants were to put their lands together to form kolkhozes
  - a **kolkhoz** was a large collective farm, 90% of produce was sold to the state
  - **kulaks** (landowners, farmers) struggled against this but they were forced, it turned into a social war and many were imprisoned or sent to Siberia (and their property was confiscated)
  - collectivisation **resulted in chaos and dreadful famine in 1933-1934**. Millions of people died.
  - by 1941 almost all agricultural land was under the collective system

## Keeping control

- in 1936 a **new constitution** was written
  - it contained freedom of speech and free elections
  - but this was only “cosmetic” because only communist candidates were allowed and only certain newspapers were published
- **purges**
  - were used to get rid of Stalin's opponents and critics of the regime
  - it was a reign of terror
  - **political trials** – Kamenev, Bukharin, Zinoviev (they had to confess to being traitors of the state)

- NKVD (secret police) threatened everyone (night house searches and arrests, people disappeared, were tortured)
- nobody could be sure, people spied or reported on each other
- **army purges** – expelled many able generals which was later fatal for USSR in WWII
- **gulags** – labour camps, especially for political prisoners, 18 mil. people went there by 1938
- **propaganda** - posters, radio, schools (Pioneers) etc.
- **censorship** - newspapers, magazines, books, many writers were persecuted
- **religion was banned** and priests were persecuted
- **Stalin's personal cult**
  - replaced religion
  - Stalin made himself very popular and thanks to good propaganda people mostly trusted him
  - history of the USSR was rewritten so Lenin and Stalin were the only heroes of the revolution (sometimes people were literally “erased” from his past – see photo below)
  - he presented himself as Lenin's closest friend (see photo below)
  - Stalin was everywhere (statues, photos, street names, town names, poetry etc.)\_(poster below)



#### TASK 10:

Look at the cover page of the Time Magazine published in USA in 1933. What is the title of the article referring to? Comment on Stalin's image abroad.





INVESTICE DO ROZVOJE VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ

**REVISION:**

**TASK 11:**

**Give reasons why Russia at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was economically and socially more backward than the rest of Europe:**

**TASK 12:**

**How did World War One affect Russian history?**

**TASK 13:**

**What do you know about the origin and further development of the Czechoslovak legions?**

**TASK 14:**

**What was the difference between Lenin's and Stalin's economic strategy?**

**TASK 15:**

**What means did Stalin use to keep power?**