

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

The Russian Revolution of 1917 was one of the most explosive political events of the twentieth century. The violent revolution marked the end of the nobility and the emperors of Russia. During the Russian Revolution, the revolutionary Bolshevik party, led by Vladimir Lenin, seized power and became the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In 1917, the revolution which swept through Russia ended centuries of imperial rule and set into motion political and social changes that would lead to the formation of the Soviet Union. While the revolutionary events took place within a few short months, social unrest in Russia had been simmering for decades.

In the early 1900s, Russia was one of the most impoverished countries in Europe with an enormous peasantry and a growing minority of poor industrial workers. Much of the world viewed Russia as a backward society. The Russian Empire practiced serfdom—a form of society in which poor peasants were forced to serve the land-owning nobility. The practice had disappeared in Western Europe by the end of the Middle Ages. Only backward Russia had a powerful monarch, known as the Czar, and old fashioned nobles and aristocrats who took advantage of workers in the cities and ultra-poor farmers in the country.

RUSSIA BREAKS DOWN

Russia industrialized much later than Western Europe and the United States. When it finally did, around the turn of the 20th century, it brought with it immense social and political changes. Between 1890 and 1910, for example, the population of major Russian cities such as St. Petersburg and Moscow nearly doubled, resulting in overcrowding and poor living conditions for a new class of Russian industrial workers

Large protests by Russian workers against the monarchy led to the Bloody Sunday massacre of 1905. Hundreds of unarmed protesters were killed or wounded by the czar's troops. After the bloodshed of 1905, Czar Nicholas II promised the formation of a democracy, or Duma, to work toward reform. But the events of World War I made it impossible to reform the country. Russia entered into World

War I against Germany and in support of the Serbs and their French and British allies. Their involvement in the war would soon prove disastrous for the Russian Empire. Militarily, imperial Russia was no match for industrialized Germany, and Russian deaths were greater than those sustained by any nation in any previous war. Food and fuel shortages plagued Russia. The economy was hopelessly disrupted by the costly war effort against powerful Germany.

REVOLUTION

The people revolted against the losing war. Demonstrators clamoring for bread took to the streets of the cities. Supported by huge crowds of striking industrial workers, the protesters clashed with police and refused to leave the streets. On March 11, the troops of the army were called out to destroy the uprising. In some encounters, the regiments opened fire, killing demonstrators, but the protesters kept to the streets and the troops began to give up.

A few days later, Czar Nicholas abdicated (abandoned) the throne, ending centuries of Russian Czarist rule.

THE BOLSHEVIK'S TAKE POWER

On November 6 and 7, 1917, revolutionaries led by Bolshevik Party leader Vladimir Lenin launched an attack against the temporary democratic government. The Bolsheviks and their allies occupied government buildings and other strategic locations in the city of Petrograd, and soon formed a new government with Lenin as its head. Lenin became the dictator of the world's first communist state.

RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR

Civil War broke out in Russia in late 1917 after the Bolshevik Revolution. The warring factions included the Red and White Armies. The Red Army fought for the Lenin's Bolshevik government. The White Army represented a large group of loosely allied forces, including monarchists, capitalists and supporters of democratic socialism. The Russian Civil War ended in 1923 with Lenin's Red Army claiming victory and establishing the Soviet Union. Communism would rule

Russia until 1989, when the people overthrew the communists and demanded democracy