

The Russian Revolution and the Soviet Regime (1825-1953)

Ideas from Western Nations Inspire Russians to Revolt

You've read in earlier units about people who revolted against their governments during the 1800s. Many of those revolutions were sparked by the American Revolution and the French Revolution. People throughout Europe and as far away as Latin America were inspired by the American and French people's courage in risking their lives to gain freedom and rights. From the American and French Revolutions, people around the world also learned many exciting ideas about the way fair governments should treat their people.

The *Russian Revolution of 1917* was also partly built on the ideas of the American and French revolutions. Following the French Revolution, many Russian officers served in France in the early 1800s. They brought back to Russia many Western ideas about people's right to freedom and **democracy**. Nearly all successful revolutions come from people's efforts over a long period of time. Such was the case in Russia.

In December 1825, these officers led one of the early attempts at revolution in Russia. Although this revolution failed, the ideas that had inspired it were passed on. This *Decembrist Revolt*, as it was called, was the first step in a long process leading to the Russian Revolution of 1917.

The Power of the Czars

In the mid-1800s, Russia's **czars**, or emperors with almost total power over the people, began to carry out reforms. In other words, they gave the people some rights, in an effort to satisfy them. In 1881, student revolutionaries unhappy with the slow pace of political change assassinated Czar Alexander II. Alexander III succeeded his father to the throne in 1881. He stopped all reforms and returned Russia to its old ways. The people once again found themselves having few or no rights. Russia was heading towards a full-scale revolution.



In the mid-1800s, Russia's czars had almost total power over the people.

In 1894, Czar Nicholas II succeeded his father, Alexander III. The people's desire for freedom did not die. In January of 1905, about 200,000 workers and their families carried petitions to the czar's Winter Palace asking for better working conditions and personal freedoms. They wanted Czar Nicholas II to permit a **constitution** to be written. *Constitutions* state the laws and limits of the government. The czar's soldiers opened fire on these unarmed people, killing between 500 to 1,000 of them. This slaughter of the innocent civilians came to be known as *Bloody Sunday*. Waves of violence and strikes spread throughout the country. In October of 1905, Czar Nicholas II reluctantly approved the creation of a **Duma**, the Russian **Parliament** (or elected national legislative or lawmaking body). However, when the newly elected Duma's leaders wanted the Russian czar to share his power, he refused. Instead, he dissolved the *Duma*.

Finally, in March 1917, after 300 years of being ruled by czars, the Russian Revolution of 1917 forced Czar Nicholas II from power. Shortly thereafter, the **Bolsheviks**, a group of revolutionaries led by Nikolai Lenin, seized control of the government. This revolution was the beginning of **communism** in Russia (later renamed the USSR, or Union of Soviet Socialist Republics). *Communism* is an economic and political system, which have theories inspired by Karl Marx, a German philosopher of the 19th century. Communism remained the dominant political idea in the USSR until it was overthrown in 1991.

Marxism: A Response to the Industrial Revolution

After witnessing the Industrial Revolution, Karl Marx developed his own ideas about the history of mankind. He saw history as a struggle between the *haves* and the *have nots*. The *haves* were the *capitalists* who owned and ran industry. They were wealthy and had great influence in shaping government. They used their influence to produce more wealth for themselves at the expense of the workers. The *have nots* were the factory workers. They earned little money and did not share in the profits or wealth created by their factory work.

Karl Heinrich Marx (1818-1883)

Marx was a German philosopher, social scientist, and professional revolutionary. He was born in Trier of Jewish parents in what was then Prussia. He went to the University of Bonn to study law and later transferred to the University of Berlin where he became interested in philosophy. Marx became a free-lance journalist and helped create several radical journals.



Karl Marx

In 1843 Marx and his wife moved to Paris where they met Friedrich Engels, a young German radical. With his friend Engels, Marx published *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848. It predicted that the ruling class would be overthrown by the working class, and result in a classless society which he called *pure communism*.

Marx spent about 30 years writing *Das Kapital*, which expressed his views about the free enterprise system. According to Marx, all history is a struggle between the ruling and working classes.

In Great Britain, Marx saw factory workers living together in crowded slums. He believed that their suffering would unite them. Eventually the workers would rise up against the capitalists and take control of industry, farming, and government. This stage of the revolution is called **socialism**. Once the workers overthrew the capitalists, the workers would share the wealth with all members of society. They would create a classless society in which everyone would be equal. People would cooperate so well that eventually the state would *wither away*, and there would be no need for a *state*, or a government, to run society. This final stage of the revolution was called *communism*. Marx believed that the workers' rise to power would

occur as a matter of evolution. In other words, history was moving towards a time when the workers *would* rise to power. It could not be stopped.

From Marx's observations of the Industrial Revolution, he described the relations between workers and capitalists. He then based his theory on the notion that in the future **capitalism** would look the same as it did during his lifetime. He failed to foresee, however, that *capitalism* would change in the future to partially satisfy the workers. As workers made gains, they were less likely to rise up and end capitalism. Some of the ways that capitalism and its workers have changed since Marx's time are as follows.

- Marx did not foresee the formation of labor unions, social security systems, etc. These were some of the changes that satisfied workers enough to keep them from revolting.
- Marx did not foresee that people would use their political systems to control capitalism. For example, even though the United States government encourages capitalism, the government also places limits on capitalists.
- He did not foresee that many workers would rather become capitalists than destroy capitalism.
- Marx could not have imagined the impact that emigration from Europe would have. Many of the people whom Marx believed would rise up against capitalism simply left Europe. They came to America to work for a better life.

Marx would probably find it quite strange that the worker's revolution he predicted occurred in Russia. Marx had imagined the workers' revolution taking place in the highly industrialized nations of Great Britain, France, and Germany—not in Russia. Russia, after all, was not as industrialized as the rest of Europe, and it did not have a very large working-class population.

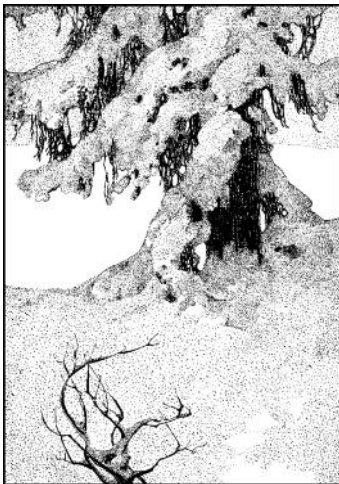
Background to the Russian Revolution: Russia in 1900

When a nation's people attempt a revolution, they have usually been moved by harsh and unfair treatment by their government. Often, revolutionaries want to change the kind of government that rules their nation. In other words, the people want to change the political system under which they live. They may also want to change their economic and social system. Sometimes, the things that have caused the greatest failure in a nation lie beyond the political and economic or social issues. These things may include the nation's geography, such as where a nation is located and its physical features.

As you read more about the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the unsuccessful revolution of 1905, it is necessary to understand what Russia looked like geographically, socially, politically, and economically as this nation entered the 20th century.

The Geography of Russia: A Huge Land and Harsh Climate

In the year 1900, Russia covered one-sixth of the world's land area. Russia was more than twice the size of the present United States! It was so large a country that half of it was in Europe and half was in Asia. The Ural Mountains marked the split between Europe and Asia in this giant-sized nation.



Russia's harsh climate and rough terrain made it difficult for foreigners to invade.

The geography of Russia did offer the country some advantages. Russia's huge territory provided almost unlimited natural resources, including oil, coal, and natural gas, to name just a few. Russia's harsh climates and rough terrain made it difficult for foreigners to invade. (You might remember reading about Napoleon's army and its heavy losses during the brutal Russian winter.) Russia also had an excellent river system. These rivers were the easiest way to travel from one region to another region in Russia.

Russia's geography also had its disadvantages. Russia's harsh climate made it difficult for its ships to travel in and out of its ports. The Arctic Ocean, which bordered much of Russia, was

frozen most all year. Those ports that would allow Russia's ships to sail were blocked by other nations. And the large Caspian Sea was **landlocked** and did not connect to any other waterways. Vladivostok, the only port which could stay open all year, was in Asia—more than 5,000 miles away from the Russian capital of Petrograd! (Petrograd is the Russian name given to St. Petersburg. Today Russia's capital is Moscow.)



The size and climate of Russia presented other problems, also. For example, the Russian government did not have a large enough army to adequately defend its millions of miles of territory. Because Russia bordered so many foreign countries, it was often drawn into wars with both Asian and European countries. Large areas of Russia were unusable because of the freezing climate. And the Russian government was not able to govern effectively so large and harsh an area.

Russia's Social Problem: Many Nationalities under One Government

One of the many problems the Russian government faced in 1900 was the many different nationalities of its people. Only about 10 percent of the people who lived on Russian territory were actually Russian. Other groups who lived under the Russian government are listed below.

Estonians	Romanians	Mongols
Lithuanians	Poles	Finns
Turks	Jews	Armenians
Latvians	Georgians	

Consider that most of the people in Russia did not speak Russian! Most of these other nationalities had their own language. Many non-Russians were nationalists. They had intense loyalty to their own cultures and practices. Therefore, most people who lived in Russia had different and often conflicting interests and needs.

Non-Russians were treated terribly by the Russian government. Jewish people were treated worst of all. Jews were forced to live in certain areas. The number of Jews allowed to study in the universities and to practice professions such as law and medicine was limited. If Jews wanted to travel outside of their villages, they needed special permits. Jews had to wear special clothing. Every so often, the Russian government allowed the Cossacks (government police) to attack Jewish villages. The Cossacks would beat, rob, and sometimes massacre the Jews and then burn their villages. These attacks were called **pogroms**. The treatment of Jews was so horrible that, between 1881 and 1914, millions of Jews *emigrated* or moved from Russia to the United States.



Woodcut printing of a poor town in Russia.

The Russian Political System: The Harsh Rule of Czars

All power in Russia rested with the czar. The czar was an *absolute* monarch. He controlled the government and was the head of the army and the Church. Throughout history, some absolute monarchs have been

worse than others. Some of Russia's czars tended to be particularly cruel. They did very little to improve the lives of the people. Russia's political system was also dominated by nobles. Nobles in Russia were like those in prerevolutionary France. They were wealthy and owned huge farms. They lived off of the work done by *serfs* or peasants. Those czars who attempted reforms to help the poor met oppositions from the nobility.

The reign of Czar Nicholas II is just one example of how difficult it could be to live under a czar. Nicholas II became czar in 1894 when his father, Czar Alexander III, died. When the people asked for reforms and changes, Czar Nicholas II continued the rigid policies of his father and past czarist governments. When the people demonstrated in the streets, he used force to stop them.



Woodcut printing of a Jewish man in Russia.

From 1894 to 1917, Nicholas II refused to surrender any of his power. He permitted **anti-Semitism** in Russia. The treatment of other minorities worsened, as well. Throughout his reign, the czar and his government continued to lose the support of the people. During his reign, a revolutionary mood spread throughout Russia.

The czar faced problems from all parts of the society. Unhappy peasants worked for the rich, landowning **aristocracy**. Non-Russians were ruled and controlled by the Russian army. Liberals, those who demanded reform, were put in prison. And the *intelligentsia*—those who understood the country's problems—were ignored, imprisoned, or murdered.



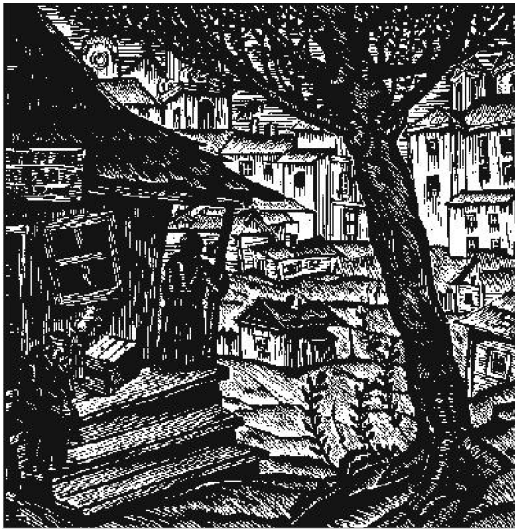
Woodcut printing of a poor town in Russia.

One czar in the 19th century had enacted an important reform. In 1861 Czar Alexander II decreed the **emancipation** or freeing of all serfs (peasants). Until this time, serfs in Russia were under the control of the nobles who owned the land. Serfs were not free to move to different places without the permission of their noble. The decree to free serfs did not improve their condition very much. Although serfs were legally free, they received no land. Many serfs gave up

farming and moved from the farms to the cities. This was, however, an important first step in ending the power of the nobles over the Russian people.

Economics: The Pains of Industrializing Russia

In 1900 Russia was far behind the countries of Europe in economic development. Russian agricultural and industrial methods had barely improved in hundreds of years. While many European countries were using technology to industrialize, Russia remained undeveloped.



Woodcut printing of a poor peasant house in a Russian town.

Consequently, there was not enough food and other goods to feed and satisfy the Russian people. Unlike countries such as Great Britain, Russia lacked people with enough money to invest in industry.

When the Russian government finally decided to turn Russia into an industrialized nation, they faced the same problems that other industrial nations did. Masses of peasants were uprooted from their farms to become factory workers. Working conditions in the factories were horrible. Towns rapidly became large cities filled with

workers living in slum-like conditions. These unhappy workers would later become the *core* or central part of the revolution.

The People Were Ready for Revolution

For hundreds of years Russia's czars had ignored the people's needs. Most Russians worked long hours and were often still hungry and unable to feed their families. By 1900 the people had had enough of the ruling czars. They wanted an end to czarist **absolutism** and **repression**. Both the middle class, or those people with money to invest, and the workers desired a voice in the government. And those people who were non-Russians wanted an end to the discrimination and persecution which they suffered. Czarist Russia's failure to solve its problems made revolution almost inevitable.

The Revolution of 1905

Russia was attacked by Japan in 1904 over the control of Manchuria. This began the Russo-Japanese War. In 1905 Russia lost the war and was forced to give up land and sign a humiliating treaty. The loss showed the Russian people how corrupt and weak their government really was. The Russo-Japanese War had also drained the Russian economy by raising food prices while keeping wages low. It made living conditions even worse for most Russians. Pushed to the breaking point, the masses began to demonstrate in large numbers. Strikes began to break out in many cities throughout the empire.



On a cold, snowy Sunday in January 1905, a large group of workers and their families peacefully marched towards the Winter Palace of the czar in St. Petersburg. Marchers carried petitions for political reforms. Without warning, the czar's soldiers opened fire on the crowd. When it was over, the snow was stained with the marchers' blood. Known as *Bloody Sunday*,

this murderous act by the czar's soldiers led to mass demonstrations, mutinies in the military, strikes, and riots in cities throughout the Russian Empire.

Frightened by the people's demonstrations, Czar Nicholas II agreed to a constitution in October of 1905. The events of October forced Nicholas to give in to the demands of the people. The Czar issued the *October Manifesto*, which guaranteed civil rights to citizens. A parliament, or elected national legislature known as the *Duma*, was set up. Many believed that Russia had become a *constitutional monarchy*, a government that limited the power of the monarch. The czar, however, never followed the Duma's suggestions. He continued to keep his powers. He eventually ordered that the Duma be disbanded. Pogroms against Jews and arrests of peasant and labor leaders continued. The Revolution of 1905 had failed to make any real changes for the Russian people. But some important lessons had been learned by the leaders of the revolution. They learned that to make a successful revolution in Russia, they needed the support of both the workers and peasants. And the revolutionaries learned that the government was surviving on a weak foundation, since the people did not support the czar and his government. Although the Revolution of 1905 had failed, it was another important step leading to Russia's most dramatic and lasting revolution: The Revolution of 1917.

World War I Weakens Czarist Russia: 1914-1916

In the years leading up to World War I, Russia became more and more involved in European affairs. The Russian government supported the Balkan nation of Serbia in its effort to unify the Slavic people. To accomplish this goal, Serbia wanted to take territory owned by the Austria-Hungary Empire. When this conflict between Serbia and Austria led to war, the Russian government supported Serbia. Russian troops prepared for war and moved to the Russian-Austrian border. Because Germany supported Austria-Hungary, Russia also sent troops to the German border. This *Balkan crisis* was the start of World War I. The czar's decision to involve Russia in World War I would lead to the end of czarist reign in Russia for good.



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Russia had a large army. However, because Russia had few industries it could not feed, clothe, or arm its army. The Russian economy simply could not support a war. Before 1914 was over, more than four million Russian soldiers had been killed, wounded, or taken prisoner. By 1916, two million Russian soldiers had deserted to the German side. One Russian defeat followed another; the Germans were destroying the Russian army.

The Russian people grew weary of the war. Food was scarce. Revolutionaries demanded an end to the war. Then Czar Nicholas II made a serious error in judgment. In 1915 he moved his headquarters to the Russian Front so he could inspire his troops to victory. He left the government of Russia in the hands of his wife, the Czarina Alexandra. She ignored the czar's chief advisers. Instead she was strongly influenced by a self-proclaimed **mystic** healer named Gregory Rasputin. Rasputin, described by some as a *holy man*, claimed to have magical healing powers. Alexis, Nicholas and Alexandra's only son, suffered from hemophilia, a genetic disease. This life-threatening disease prevents the normal clotting of blood. Alexandra relied on Rasputin's powers to cure her son. Rasputin seemed to be able to ease her son's symptoms.

Rasputin eventually gained great influence in the Russian government. He obtained powerful positions for dozens of his friends, many of whom were unqualified for their jobs. He urged the Czarina Alexandra to ignore the people's demands for reform. His influence spread corruption throughout Russian government. Most Russian nobles resented the influence that Rasputin had over the royal family. They also feared his increasing role in the government. Rasputin's advice was leading czarist Russia down the road to ruin. In December 1916, three aristocrats killed Rasputin.

Gregory Rasputin (1872-1916)

Gregory Rasputin, a Siberian peasant known as the mad monk, exerted harmful influence over the czar's wife Alexandra. In his middle thirties, he joined a religious sect and was known as a holy man. Rasputin met the czar and czarina in 1907 in order to try to heal their son, who suffered from hemophilia, a genetic blood disease. Rasputin apparently had some success in stopping their son's bleeding using hypnosis, and this gave him influence with the czar. He soon began to interfere in political decisions and appointments.

Rasputin contributed to the undermining of the imperial government. A group of aristocrats feared that widespread hatred of Rasputin would turn the people against the czar himself. In December 1916, they assassinated Rasputin. But this did not save the empire; revolution in Russia broke out within three months.

The March Revolution of 1917

By the winter of 1916-1917, conditions in Russia were desperate. Crowds were uncontrollable. Riots over food and fuel shortages spread. Bread lines in the capital of Petrograd turned into riots. When police were unable to control the mobs, the army was brought in. Rather than fight the mobs, however, many soldiers joined them. Discipline had completely broken down in Russia. Large groups shouted "Down with autocracy!" "Down with the war!"

The leaders of the Duma begged Nicholas to make reforms to satisfy the Russian people. When Nicholas refused, the people demanded his *abdication*, or giving up his throne. When Nicholas learned that even the soldiers supported the revolutionaries, he had no choice but to give up his throne.

A new, temporary government was created after the czar abdicated. It was called the **provisional** government. The first act of the new government was to declare Russia a *democratic republic*. Its goal was to write a new constitution for Russia. The *provisional* government made a fateful mistake, however. They chose to continue the war against Germany. Many leaders in the provisional government felt honor-bound by treaties Russia had made with the Allies. The Russian army, however, was no more willing to fight and die for the provisional government than it had been willing to die for the czar. Desertions in the Russian army continued. While the Russian army was falling apart, the Germans secretly smuggled the radical Russian revolutionary Vladimir Ulyanov, who used the *alias*, or false name, of Lenin, into Russia. Lenin and his Bolshevik followers were able to topple the provisional government in November 1917. When the provisional government fell, the Bolsheviks seized power and established a **regime** led by Lenin (see page 190) and Red Army leader Leon Trotsky.

Leon Trotsky (1879-1940)

Leon Trotsky was a Russian revolutionary communist and a founder of the USSR. He was born of well-to-do parents in the Ukraine. He was arrested in 1898 for his revolutionary activity as a Social Democrat. Exiled to Siberia, he escaped in 1902 and went to London, where he met Lenin. He returned to Russia in 1905 to take an active part in the revolution. He was jailed in 1905 but escaped in 1907 and became a revolutionary writer and editor in western Europe. He was expelled from France and Spain during World War I and came to New York, where he heard the news of the czar's downfall in 1917. Trotsky then returned to Russia, and with Lenin successfully plotted the Bolshevik (Communist) seizure of power in November 1917. He became the first Soviet commissar of foreign affairs, and then the commissar of war.

Trotsky was an efficient organizer of the Red Army (Bolsheviks) in the Russian Civil War of 1918-1920. Many believe Trotsky would be the new head of the Soviet government after Lenin's death, but he was outsmarted by Stalin. In 1927 he was expelled from the Communist Party, and in 1928 he was exiled to Soviet Central Asia. After being deported to several different countries, he settled in Mexico. Stalin's secret police eventually sent an agent to Mexico and murdered Trotsky on August 20, 1940.

New Technology Solves the Mystery of Anastasia Romanov

Sixty-five years after the execution of the Czar Nicholas II and his family, a woman named Anna Anderson claimed that she was the Grand Duchess Anastasia Romanov, the czar's daughter. She claimed to have escaped her assassins.



Many believed that she was telling the truth because of the detailed knowledge she had about the Romanov family. In 1984 Anna Anderson died. In 1993, Prince Philip of Great Britain, a descendant of the Czarina Alexandra, gave DNA material to scientists to compare with Anna Anderson's DNA. This test solved a 75-year-old mystery. The DNA analysis proved that Anderson was not a blood relative of the Romanovs.

Anna Anderson's claim to the royal family of Russia inspired Hollywood movie makers to produce the movie *Anastasia* (1956). In 1997 an animated film version of Anna Anderson's story, also called *Anastasia*, was released.

Background of the Communist Revolution



Lenin believed that only the Bolshevik Party could lead the revolution.

Germany had helped Lenin return to Russia because they felt that Lenin's return would continue to contribute to the unrest in Russia. This, in turn, would help Germany's war effort. Upon arriving in Petrograd in 1917, Lenin was greeted by Joseph Stalin and other Bolshevik revolutionaries. Stalin, along with Leon Trotsky, who was a close friend of Lenin, had already begun to prepare the Bolsheviks for the revolution.

Lenin gave a speech condemning the provisional government. Lenin said that until the workers and peasants seized power, the revolution would not be complete. Lenin believed that only the Bolshevik Party could lead the revolution.

Lenin's first try at gaining power came in July 1917. The Russian army had just been crushed in a battle against the Germans. Lenin and Trotsky announced a program of "Peace-Land-Bread":

*Peace for Russia,
Land for the peasants,
Bread for the hungry.*

Lenin sent the Bolsheviks to lead the workers in demonstrations against the government. The attempt failed. Lenin escaped and Trotsky was jailed.

In September, the military tried to overthrow the provisional government and restore order in Russia. The attempt failed. However, in order to put down the revolt, the provisional government had to call upon the Bolsheviks for help. Trotsky was freed and Lenin returned to Petrograd. This was the opportunity the Bolsheviks had been waiting for.

Lenin knew that the time was ripe for the Bolshevik Revolution. The Bolsheviks organized workers, peasants, and soldiers into groups called **soviets**. Pro-Bolshevik soldiers and sailors joined Lenin in a carefully

organized revolt. On November 7, 1917, the Bolsheviks seized control of the government of Russia. Because Lenin's party, the Bolsheviks, were so well-organized, the Bolshevik Revolution was almost bloodless. The All Russian Congress of Soviets met immediately and declared the Russian Workers' Socialist State. Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin were made leaders of the new Russian government. The Bolsheviks immediately took the following steps.

1. They asked for peace with Germany.
2. They gave land to the peasants.
3. They gave control of the factories to the workers.
4. They took all Church property.
5. They ended religious instruction in schools.
6. They formed a secret police to prevent **counter-revolution**.
7. The Bolsheviks also gave their group a new name—the Communist Party. The name came from the writings of Karl Marx. He used the word *communism* to describe the final stages of the revolution in which there are no social classes and the state *withers away*.

In March 1918, the Communist government of Russia signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. For the Russians, World War I was over. In less than one year, Russia had changed from a czarist dictatorship to a Communist state.

The Russian Civil War: 1918-1920

Opposition to the revolution came quickly. The British, French, and Americans did not want Russia to withdraw from the war. When Lenin took Russia out of World War I, the Germans no longer had to fight the Russians on the Eastern Front. Now the Germans were able to use all of their military strength against the Allies on the Western Front.

Other opposition to the new Communist government the Bolsheviks had set up came from the **monarchists**, middle-class liberals, landowners, and some of the military. The Bolsheviks, under the command of Trotsky, formed the *Red Army*. (The Bolsheviks took the color red as their symbol, as had the European revolutionary Socialists.) The counter-revolutionists were called the *White Russians*. The White Russians were helped by the Allies. Nevertheless, the Red Army defeated the White Russians after a war that left much of Russia in ruins.

The key to the Communists' victory in the Civil War was the peasants in the countryside. The peasants could supply or deny food to either side. As the peasants saw it, the choice was clear. The White Russians wanted back their land; the Red Army wanted to give land to the peasants. Of course, the peasants supported the Red Army.



The Red Army defeated the White Russians after a three-year war.

In a way, the Civil War helped the Bolsheviks tighten their controls on the country. The Communist government took over all the industries in Russia and increased production to supply its army. In addition, the government strengthened its secret police in order to rid Russia of antigovernment forces.

The Civil War finally ended in 1921. The Red Army had won. Over 10 million Russians had been killed during the war. The Russian economy was left in shambles. In spite of their victory, Lenin and the Bolsheviks were worried. They knew that they would not be able to keep political power unless the economy improved.

Lenin Restores Order

Upon taking power, Lenin set up a strong, centralized government. His plan was to introduce *socialism* only where it was possible—for example, in the factories. Lenin figured that eventually he would introduce socialism to all of Russia. He believed that once the people of Western Europe saw how successful socialism was in Russia, they would also overthrow their own governments.

Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924)

Vladimir Lenin was a Russian revolutionary and the founder of the Bolshevik Party (later known as the Communist Party). Lenin was the leader of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and founder of the Soviet state.

Lenin was born Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov. He became a revolutionary after his oldest brother was executed in 1887 for participating in a plot to kill the czar. Lenin was a follower of Karl Marx and was exiled to Siberia (1887-90) for his revolutionary activities. On his release, he traveled to western Europe where in 1902 he published his famous pamphlet *What Is to Be Done?* He argued that only professional revolutionaries could bring Marxist socialism to Russia.

In 1905 Lenin and his fellow Marxists returned briefly to Russia for the abortive Russian revolution. Aided by the Germans, Lenin returned again for the 1917 Russian Revolution. Within six months the Bolsheviks controlled the state. Lenin maintained power against overwhelming odds.

In 1921 he introduced the New Economic Policy (NEP). Lenin influenced communism more than anyone else except Karl Marx. Before his death from a series of strokes, he warned others against Stalin's growing desire for power.

During the Civil War (1918-1920), Lenin faced problem after problem in his fight with the White Russians. His ability to solve these problems kept him in control of the government. However, when the Civil War ended in 1920, Lenin knew that the Communist government would not survive without some changes.

A New Economic Policy

In 1921 Lenin introduced the New Economic Policy (NEP). Lenin felt that the NEP was a necessary step backwards for the Communists. It called for a temporary compromise with capitalism. Farmers were allowed to sell any surplus instead of having it taken by the government. Individuals were permitted to buy and sell goods for profit. The government allowed small, privately owned businesses to operate. Lenin even tried to encourage foreign investment. During the period of the New Economic Policy, the Communists were able to stabilize the Revolution.

Political Reforms

The Communist leadership divided the many diverse nationalities in Russia into several self-governing republics under the central government. Each republic was controlled from the new capital, Moscow. In 1922 the Bolsheviks gave Russia a new name—the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), or the Soviet Union—in honor of the councils that helped start the Bolshevik Revolution. This new name represented the shift in power from the czar and the aristocrats to the *soviets*, or the working people. After a decade of turmoil, life seemed to have returned to normal for most people in the Soviet Union. By 1928, the country's farms and factories were producing as much as they had before World War I.

Lenin did not live to see his country's recovery. Lenin, the Father of the Soviet Union, died in 1924, after spending the last two years of his life as a semi-invalid. In the year before Lenin's death, a quiet struggle took place within the Communist Party to determine who would succeed Lenin.

Stalin Becomes Dictator

Joseph Stalin led the Soviet Union from 1928 to 1953. He was a **ruthless** dictator. Stalin was directly responsible for the murders of millions of Soviet people. He was also responsible for the murder of his co-revolutionary, Leon Trotsky.

Between 1918 and 1923, Stalin played an ever-increasing role in the Soviet government. He was one of Lenin's most trusted advisors. Following the Civil War, Stalin was given the job of General Secretary of the Communist Party. Stalin made this a very powerful position. He used his power to appoint his friends to the Communist Party.

Joseph Stalin (1879-1953)

Joseph Stalin was the dictator of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) from 1929 until his death in 1953. Stalin was born Josif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili, but adopted the name Stalin from a Russian word meaning *man of steel*. His father was an unsuccessful village shoemaker, and Stalin was supposed to become a priest after receiving a scholarship at the religious seminary in Tiflis. But his interest in Marxism probably played a part in his dismissal from seminary.

Stalin joined the Georgian Social Democratic Party in 1905. Between 1906 and 1913, Stalin was arrested and exiled a number of times. In 1912 Lenin brought Stalin into the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party. In 1913, with Lenin's help, Stalin wrote a long article called "The National Questions and Social Democracy" and signed the article *Stalin*, a name he had just begun to use. In the same year he was arrested and exiled for the last time.

After the Bolshevik Revolution, Stalin advanced rapidly. In 1922 he was elected general secretary of the Russian Communist Party. By the end of 1922, Stalin's growing power had begun to disturb Lenin. Before dying, Lenin wrote a secret note warning that Stalin must be removed as general secretary because he was rude in personal relations and abused the power of his office. Lenin died before he was able to carry out his plan to remove Stalin, and Stalin cleverly got rid of all who were against him. By December 1929, Stalin had become a dictator. Stalin later rewrote history books to say that he had a more important role in the revolution than he actually had. He also ruled by terror and was a ruthless dictator.

During this time, Stalin had one major rival in the Soviet government. This was Leon Trotsky. Trotsky, responsible for the success of the Red Army during the Civil War, was very popular. Stalin knew that when Lenin died, Trotsky would be the likely choice to lead the Soviet Union.

After Lenin's death, Stalin continued to gain more power. By 1928 he was the most powerful person in the Soviet Union. He exiled Trotsky, or forced him to leave the country. With Trotsky gone, Stalin was now the absolute dictator of the Soviet Union.

Stalin Controls the Economy

In 1928 Stalin ended the New Economic Policy (NEP) Lenin had begun. He replaced the NEP with Five-Year Plans. The purpose of the Five-Year Plans was to make the Soviet Union an industrialized country. Under the Five-Year Plans, goals were set for industry and agriculture. Millions of peasants were brought to cities and paid low wages to work in newly built factories. About 100 million peasants were forced to live and work on **collective farms**, or large units worked by hundreds of families. No longer were peasants able to own their own land.

Under the Five-Year Plans, Soviet industry and agriculture improved. However, Stalin used industry to make the Soviet Union a very strong military country. Very little of what was produced was given to the people. Almost everything produced in factories or on *collective farms* went to the government. The economy of the Soviet Union produced few consumer goods. Therefore, even though the Soviet Union underwent an industrial revolution in the 1930s, life for most soviets did not improve.



Woodcut print—no longer were peasants able to own their own land.

Stalin Creates a Totalitarian State

The term **totalitarianism** describes a political system that takes total control over every aspect of public and private life. Life grew worse for most Soviet citizens. During the 1930s, Stalin began a series of **purges**. He got rid of anyone he thought to be disloyal. No one was safe. Stalin built a very powerful secret police. The secret police were ordered to spy on all Soviet citizens. This included Communist Party members, military leaders, and other high-ranking officials. Usually, these people were accused of trying to destroy the Soviet state. Millions of Soviets from every level of society were jailed, tortured, murdered, or ordered into labor camps. The bottom line was that everyone, even his closest friends, feared Stalin. No one dared criticize Joseph Stalin.

Stalin also used the **media** to hold his power. Communist **propaganda** was constant. All *media*—newspapers, books, movies, and magazines—were strictly controlled. Students were taught only what the Communist Party said they should learn. The people were discouraged from practicing religion. The only *religion* under Stalin was communism. The Soviet Union in the 1930s had become a *totalitarian state*. By the time the Great Purge ended in 1939, Stalin had gained total control of both the Soviet government and the Communist Party. The purges of 1930s led to the murder of the Soviet Union's best military leaders. It is estimated that Stalin was responsible for the deaths of eight to 13 million people.

Stalin was a ruthless dictator. He held power by terrorizing the Soviet people for almost 25 years. Stalin was responsible for the Soviet Union's rise to a position as a great world power. He transformed the Soviet Union into an industrial and a political power. Without his forced industrialization, the USSR might not have been able to stand up to Germany in World War II. The Soviet Union became a modern state under him. The Soviet people, however, paid a heavy price for the progress they made in the 1930s.

Review

For 300 years, Russia was ruled by czars. Czars held absolute control over Russia. Most people during this time were peasants. Czars, as well as the wealthy nobles who owned most of Russia's land, did little to improve the peasants' poor conditions.

In 1905 Russia lost the Russo-Japanese War. This embarrassing loss showed the Russian people just how corrupt and poorly managed the government really was. This knowledge, along with the czar's unwillingness to make reforms to help the people, caused the workers to demonstrate. This event, called *Bloody Sunday*, led to the Revolution of 1905. Although this revolution failed, it was an important step leading to the Revolution of 1917.

In 1914 Russia entered World War I. Because Russia lacked industry, it was not able to supply its army with food, clothing, or arms. Workers and peasants continued to suffer at home. Lacking support and fearing revolution, Czar Nicholas II gave up his throne. The provisional government that replaced him made the mistake of continuing the war effort. The people wanted peace.

Led by Vladimir Lenin, the Bolsheviks used the people's dissatisfaction to lead a revolution. In a quick and efficient revolution, the Bolsheviks seized power in the Revolution of 1917. The Bolsheviks quickly signed treaties and ended Russia's part in World War I.

From 1918-1920, the Bolsheviks and their *Red Army* won the civil war against Russians opposed to communism—the *White Russians*, as they were called. Lenin then introduced his New Economic Policy (NEP). He temporarily put aside his plan for a state-controlled economy.

After Lenin's death in 1924, Joseph Stalin became dictator of Russia. Under him, millions of Russians were tortured, imprisoned, and murdered. He replaced Lenin's NEP with his own Five-Year Plans. His goal was to rapidly industrialize Russia. He used the factories to build up his military. Few goods were produced for the people, and they continued to suffer, just as they had under the czars whom the Bolsheviks had fought. Stalin created a *totalitarian state*. He transformed the Soviet Union into an industrial and political power.