

Research paper on the russian revolution

[History](#), [Revolution](#)



Part A. In 1917, several revolutions took place in Russia which upended the monarchy of the Tsars and ended with the establishment of the Russian SFSR. The last Russian Tsar was compelled to abdicate in February 1917; at that time, a provisional government was established. A second revolution followed in October, at which time the provisional government was ousted, and the Communist government took its place. Between February and October, there was considerable conflict between the Communists (Bolsheviks) and the provisional government; at the point when the provisional government opted to keep fighting the Great War against Germany, the Bolsheviks were able to use popular discontent with the war to their advantage and take control over the country. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, signed in March 1918, marked the exit of the new Russia from the Great War (Figes, p. 28). At that point, war broke out between the Reds (the Bolsheviks) and the Whites (the forces supporting the provisional government and the Tsars), which raged until 1922, when the U. S. S. R. was established.

Part B. When many of the nations in Europe had their monarchies removed through force or through more peaceful constitutional means between the years 1780 and 1848, Russia remained mostly immune to the political shifts. While some modernization took place under Catherine the Great, the government of the Tsars was able to hold real power much longer than many of the other European monarchies. However, in 1905, there was an initial revolution that included peasant dissidence, labor strikes, and mutinies in the military. The government changed significantly at that time, with the monarchy accepting the limits of a constitution, and Russia received its first

legislature, in the form of the Duma (Wood, p. 178). However, the progress that had begun with this revolution would not begin, as the movement toward government by the proletariat had started. Even after the 1905 revolution quieted, the rumblings of the working class began to gain volume.

When the Great War broke out, the Russian economy took a substantial blow. The Ottoman Empire entered the conflict in the fall of 1914 on the side of the Central Powers, the Russians lost some of their major trade routes (Beckett, p. 47). Because of this crisis, Russia could no longer send munitions to its military during the first few years of the Great War (Wood, p. 180). Within St. Petersburg, the war caused a great deal of protest, because the disruption of agricultural work had created shortages of food, which became both scarce and highly expensive, as the government had printed millions of rubles to pay for the war; the effect was to make the currency worth much less. The members of the lower classes had to pay more for what they bought, but those who sold their own agricultural products had to take prices at original levels from their middlemen. The result was a return to subsistence practices of farming, in which people would keep their own crops instead of selling them. This led to a massive shortage of food in St. Petersburg and other cities (Wade, p. 122).

The rising prices also led to turmoil in the cities. Workers started to demand higher wages, and the arrival of German-funded propaganda in the cities in the early months of 1916 began to propagate large strikes. The mood of the country turned more critical of the government rather than that of the war. The country had been caught up in such patriotic fever at the start of the

Great War that St. Petersburg took the less Teutonic name of Petrograd during that time. However, when the war began to go badly for the Russians, there was widespread doubt in the ability of Tsar Nicholas II to lead the country (Fitzpatrick, p. 84). The Tsar had become commander-in-chief of the military, leaving civil government in the hands of the Empress, who was thought to be heavily influenced by the advice of the ill-reputed monk Rasputin. A member of the Duma accused the government of considering making peace with Germany in the winter of 1916, and Rasputin was assassinated in January of 1917. These rumblings led to the swift downfall of the monarchy after the February revolution (Fitzpatrick, p. 86).

There was significant discord among the revolutionary factions about the proper way to protest in the years leading up to 1917. V. I. Lenin wanted to turn the Great War into a civil war featuring the proletarian soldiers fighting the governments over them; if the proletariat were to prevail in Russia, then the war should spread to liberate all of the working masses on the European continent. Leon Trotsky, on the other hand, demanded that the war end and that any settlement be based on national self-determination, with neither side losing territory nor having to pay any indemnity (Wood, p. 191). What the factions had in common was a dissatisfaction with the monarchy and, later, with the elements of the provisional government still associated with that monarchy (Wade, p. 77).

Part C. I am selecting the Wade and Fitzpatrick sources for this portion of the assignment.

The Wade source comes from one of the eminent scholars of Russian history and culture from the modernizations of Catherine the Great through the

consolidation of power under Stalin. In this book, he debunks some of the myths that have long informed popular culture about the years leading up to the Russian Revolution. For example, he clarifies many of the differences between the Lenin and Trotsky camps, and he also takes away many of the superstitions associated with Rasputin. While he may have been associated with helping the young prince avoid his spells of hemophilia, Wade's scholarship has found that there is much less of a mystical connection between Rasputin and the policy of the Russian empire than popular culture has been led to believe. Wade also brings in other contemporary scholars in his discussion of the time period, making a narrative that describes the time period clearly, making what might have been the most complex political transition of the twentieth century understandable, even for the layperson. His work also takes into account social history, incorporating minorities, peasants fighting on the front, and women, which are all groups generally left out of historical consideration. This book makes Trotsky come across as somewhat more sympathetic than one might expect, though, which distorts his actual connection to the revolution at some key points.

The Fitzpatrick source is fairly difficult to follow in some passages. While the book follows the course of the revolution, the language is turgid at quite a few points, making the text difficult for a layperson to follow. Also, the text stays closer to the standard narrative of the revolution, leaving out the stories of many not associated with the winning side. It is easy to look back on the family of the Tsars as inept and perhaps even insane; given the recessive genes that had been starting to emerge all over Europe with the intermarriage of royal families, starting with such phenomena as King

George III's insanity but perhaps best symbolized by the prince's hemophilia, this is an easy course to take. However, given the limitations forced upon Russia by the entrance of the Ottoman Turks into the war, it would have been difficult for any leader to make a serious dent in the forces of Germany, beset as they were on both sides by battle fronts.

Part D. Initially, Leon Trotsky said that the goals of the socialist movement in Russia would not be fulfilled if the worldwide revolution did not succeed. Right after the Bolsheviks toppled the provisional government, a wave of communist-motivated revolutions broke out around the world, making the political landscape very interesting until 1923 (Wade, p. 202). The German and Hungarian revolutions in that time period came the closest to mirroring the success in Russia at that time. While China, Vietnam, Cuba and North Korea would also come under communist control, the revolution came nowhere near the worldwide influence that Trotsky and the other creators of the socialist movement imagined.

However, the ideals of Trotsky and his allies cannot be said to have prevailed, and those ideals did not take long after the death of Lenin, and the exile of Trotsky, to fail. The brutal repression that Stalin had to undertake in order to silence his opposition ended up killing, arguably, as many people as Hitler's Holocaust had. The top-down brutality that Stalin and those who followed him had to use in order to ensure obedience among the populace was a sure sign that the idea of sharing material possessions and property in common was not something that a government could manage without intrinsic greed.

Part E. The overthrow of the Tsarist regime brought an end to monarchies

with real power among major powers on the European continent. The ideas of the Russian Revolution were powerful ones – people making decisions and living in common, rather than subscribing to the capitalist ideas of private property and chasing as much wealth as one could. However, the disparities that soon began to open between the leadership of the “proletariat” and the rest of that same group just showed that human nature is not compatible with the tenets of socialism. As people begin to settle into leadership role, they begin to justify their own ascendancy over others; as soon as that happens, though, the socialist ideal has failed.

Works Cited

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