

Reading Essentials and Study Guide



World War I and the Russian Revolution, 1914–1919

Lesson 3 The Russian Revolution

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Why do politics often lead to war? How can technology impact war?

Reading HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

revolution a sudden, radical, or complete change; an overthrow of government

aid assistance such as money or supplies

Content Vocabulary

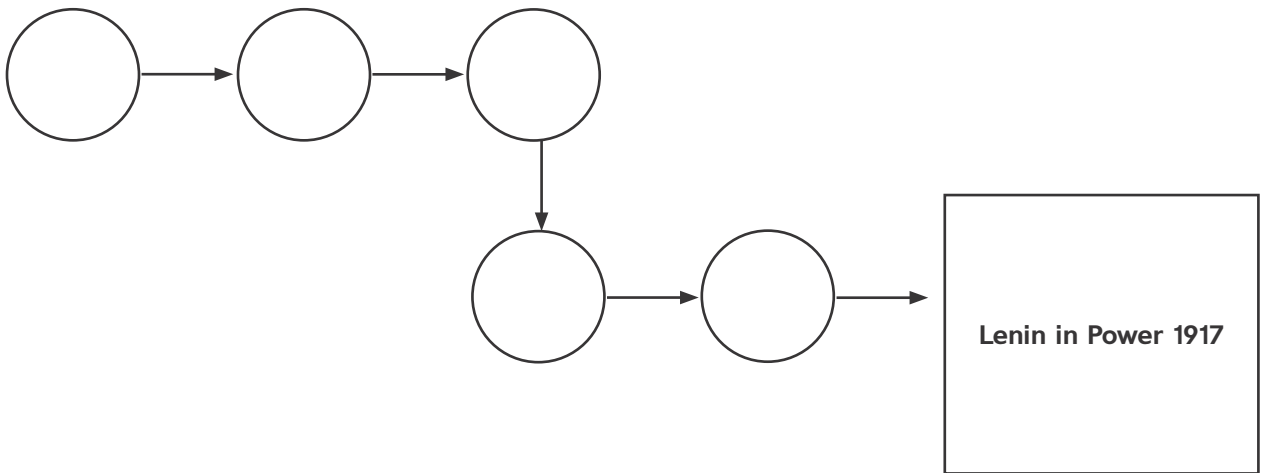
soviets Russian councils composed of representatives from the workers and soldiers

abdicate to formally give up control of a country or state

war communism in World War I and post-World War I Russia, a system in which the government controls banks and most industries, seizes grain from peasants, and centralizes state administration under Communist control

TAKING NOTES: *Categorizing Information*

ACTIVITY As you read, use a chart like the one below to identify the factors and events that led to Lenin’s rise to power in 1917.



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The logo for 'networks' features the word 'networks' in a bold, lowercase sans-serif font. A stylized graphic of intersecting lines forms a starburst or network pattern behind the letter 'o'.

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IT MATTERS BECAUSE

Russia experienced unrest as the war continued on. The Romanov dynasty of Russia ended when Czar Nicholas II stepped down. A provisional, or temporary, government was put in power. V. I. Lenin led a group called the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks overthrew the provisional government and were in control of Russia by 1921.

Background to Revolution

Guiding Question *What factors and events led to the Russian Revolution?*

Russia had been defeated by Japan in 1905, and after that, the Revolution of 1905 occurred in Russia. These events meant that Russia was not prepared for the total war of World War I. Russia also did not have competent military leaders. Czar Nicholas II insisted on taking charge of the armed forces even though he lacked ability and training. This made Russia's situation during World War I even worse.

In addition, Russian industry was unable to make the weapons needed for the army. Many soldiers trained for war using broomsticks, not rifles. Others were sent to the front without rifles, and they were told to pick up a rifle from a dead comrade, or fellow soldier. The Russian army suffered huge losses. Between 1914 and 1916, two million soldiers were killed, and another 4 to 6 million were wounded or captured. The Russian will to fight had disappeared by 1917.

Czar Nicholas II was an autocratic ruler with unlimited power. He relied on the army and bureaucracy to support his regime, or rule. Grigory Rasputin (ra-SPYOO-tuhn) was known to be a mystic. Rasputin began to influence the czar's wife, Alexandra. This caused Nicholas to be further cut off from events. With the czar at the battlefield, it was suggested that Alexandra made all of the important decisions after consulting Rasputin. His influence made him an important power behind the throne.

The leadership at the top faced a series of serious military and economic problems, which it did not handle well. The Russian people grew more and more upset with the czarist regime. Even some conservative aristocrats who supported the monarchy felt the need to do something to save the situation. They assassinated Rasputin in December 1916, but it was too late to save the monarchy.

Working class women helped change Russian history. They led a series of strikes in the capital city of Petrograd (St. Petersburg) at the beginning of March 1917. A few weeks earlier, the government had started rationing the amount of bread that people could have in Petrograd after the price of bread had risen a lot. Many of the women who stood in the lines waiting for bread were also factory workers who worked 12-hour days. They were exhausted, and they were also upset about their half-starving and sick children. The women finally rebelled.

On March 8, about 10,000 women marched through the city of Petrograd. They demanded "Peace and Bread" and "Down with Autocracy." Soon the women were joined by other workers. Together they called for a general strike. The strike shut down all the factories in the city on March 10.

Alexandra wrote about the strike to her husband Nicholas II at the battlefield. She said it was a movement of troublemakers. She also wrote that she thought the strikers would stay at home and not join the crowds if the weather were cold. Nicholas ordered troops to break up the crowds by shooting them if necessary. However, large numbers of the soldiers joined the demonstrators and refused to shoot at the crowds.

The Duma was the legislative body in Russia. The Duma mainly consisted of middle-class representatives. The czar had tried to stop it from meeting, but it met anyway. On March 12, the Duma

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networks

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established a provisional, or temporary, government. It asked the czar to give up his power. Nicholas II no longer had the support of the army or even the aristocrats. He reluctantly agreed and stepped down on March 15. This action ended the 300-year-old Romanov dynasty.

Aleksandr Kerensky (keh•REHN•skee) headed the provisional government. The government decided to continue the war to keep Russia's honor. However, the decision to remain in World War I was a major mistake. It did not satisfy the workers or the peasants who were tired and angry from years of suffering. They wanted an end to the war.

The government also faced a challenge to its authority from the **soviets**. The soviets were councils, or groups, of representatives from the workers and soldiers. The soviet of Petrograd had been formed in March 1917. At the same time, soviets appeared in army units, factory towns, and rural areas. The soviets were largely made up of socialists. They represented the more radical, or extreme, interests of the lower classes. The Bolsheviks were one group that played an important role in the soviets.



Reading Progress Check

Drawing Conclusions What grievances did the Russian people have with the provisional government?

Lenin and the Bolsheviks

Guiding Question *How did Russia move from a czarist regime to a Communist regime?*

The Bolsheviks began as a small group in a Marxist party called the Russian Social Democrats. Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (ool•YAH•nuhf) led the Bolsheviks. He was known to the world as V. I. Lenin. The Bolsheviks under Lenin's direction were dedicated to using violent **revolution**. Lenin believed that violent revolution was the only way to destroy the capitalist system. He said a group of energetic supporters must organize a small group of professional revolutionaries to accomplish the task.

Lenin spent most of his time in other countries between 1900 and 1917. When Russia's provisional government was formed in March 1917, Lenin saw it as an opportunity for the Bolsheviks to take power. German military leaders hoped to create disorder in Russia, and they sent Lenin to Russia in April 1917. Lenin and his associates were sent in a sealed, closed, train. This was done to prevent their ideas from spreading into Germany.

Lenin's arrival in Russia opened a new phase of the Russian Revolution. Lenin thought that the soviets of soldiers, workers, and peasants could help the Bolsheviks obtain power. He believed that the Bolsheviks should work toward gaining control of these groups. Then they should use the soviets to overthrow the provisional government.

At the same time, the Bolsheviks' program reflected the unhappiness of the people. The Bolsheviks promised an end to the war. They promised to give all land to the peasants and to transfer the ownership of factories and industries from capitalists to committees of workers. They also promised to

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transfer government power from the provisional government to the soviets. Three simple slogans, or sayings, summed up the Bolshevik program: “Peace, Land, Bread,” “Worker Control of Production,” and “All Power to the Soviets.”



Reading Progress Check

Inferring Why did German military leaders return Lenin to Russia?

The Bolsheviks Seize Power

Guiding Question *How did Russia move from a czarist regime to a Communist regime?*

Bolsheviks made up a slight majority in the Petrograd and Moscow soviets by the end of October 1917. The number of party members had grown from 50,000 to 240,000. The Bolsheviks were in a position to claim power in the name of the soviets. Leon Trotsky was head of the Petrograd soviet. The Winter Palace there was the seat of the provisional government, and Bolshevik forces seized it during the night of November 6. The provisional government quickly collapsed with little bloodshed. This overthrow happened at the same time as a meeting of the all-Russian Congress of Soviets was taking place. Representatives of local soviets from around the country were at the meeting. Lenin gave the power of the provisional government to the Congress of Soviets. In fact, however, the real power passed to a council headed by Lenin.

The Bolsheviks soon renamed themselves the Communists. The Communists still had a long way to go to gain firm control of Russia. Lenin had promised peace, but he realized that peace was hard to achieve. It would mean the humiliating loss of much Russian territory. However, there was no real choice.

On March 3, 1918, Lenin signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany. He gave up eastern Poland, Ukraine, Finland, and the Baltic provinces. To his critics, Lenin argued that it made no difference. The spread of the socialist revolution throughout Europe would make the treaty largely unimportant. He believed there would be a totally new economic and political system in the future. In any case, he had promised peace to the Russian people. However, peace did not come as a result of the treaty. The country soon sank into civil war, a war between people of the same country.



Reading Progress Check

Making Generalizations Why might the promises of the Bolsheviks have been appealing to the Russian people?

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Civil War in Russia

Guiding Question *What forces opposed the Communist government?*

Many people were against the new Bolshevik, or Communist, government. These people included groups loyal to the czar and also liberal, anti-Leninist socialists. These groups were supported by the Allies. The Allies were very concerned about the Communist takeover of Russia. The Allies sent troops to various parts of Russia because they hoped to bring Russia back into the war. The Allied forces themselves, however, rarely fought on Russian soil. Instead, they gave material **aid** to anti-Communist forces in Russia.

Between 1918 and 1921, the Red, or Communist, Army fought on many fronts against many different opponents. The first serious threat to the Communists came from Siberia. A White, or anti-Communist, force there attacked and almost reached the Volga River before being stopped. Attacks also came from the Ukrainians and from the Baltic regions. In mid-1919, White forces moved quickly through the Ukraine and advanced almost to Moscow before they were pushed back.

By 1920, the major White forces, however, had been defeated, and the Ukraine also been retaken by the Communists. The Communist regime regained control over the independent nationalist governments in Georgia, Russian Armenia, and Azerbaijan (a-zuhr-by-JAHN) the next year.

The czar and his family were more victims of the civil war. The czar had **abdicated** in March 1917. Then he, his wife, and their five children were held as prisoners. In April 1918, the royal family was moved to Yekaterinburg. This was a mining town in the Urals, a mountain range in Russia. Members of the local soviet murdered the czar and his family and burned their bodies in a nearby mine on the night of July 16.



Reading Progress Check

Contrasting How were the White forces and the anti-Leninist socialists different?

Triumph of the Communists

Guiding Question *What factors helped the Communists win the Russian civil war?*

How had Lenin and the Communists triumphed, or won, in the civil war? One reason was that the Red Army was a well-disciplined, well-trained fighting force. This was largely because of Leon Trotsky's organizational talent. Trotsky was commissar, or head, of the department of war. He brought back the draft and insisted on rigid, or strict, discipline. Soldiers who deserted or refused to obey orders were executed immediately.

The disunity of the anti-Communist forces also weakened their efforts. Political differences created distrust among the Whites. Some Whites wanted to bring back the czarist regime, but others wanted a more liberal and democratic program. As a result, the Whites did not have a common goal.

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The Communists had a strong sense of purpose. Communists were inspired by their vision of a new socialist order. They had both enthusiasm and strong beliefs. Also, a policy of **war communism** was used to ensure regular supplies for the Red Army. War communism meant the government had a great deal of control over many areas of the economy. The government controlled the banks and most industries, and it seized grain from peasants. It also created a central state administration run by the Communists.

Another instrument of control was Communist revolutionary terror. A new Red secret police called the Cheka was formed. The Cheka began a Red Terror. The goal was to destroy all those who opposed the new regime. The Red Terror added a real element of fear to the Communist regime.

Finally, foreign armies were fighting in Russia. Their presence helped the Communists appeal to the powerful force of Russian patriotism. At one point, over 100,000 foreign troops (mostly Japanese, British, American, and French) were in Russia to support anti-Communist forces. Their presence made it easy for the Communist government to call on patriotic Russians to fight foreign attempts to control the country.

By 1921, the Communists were in total command of Russia. The Communist regime had transformed, or changed, Russia into a centralized state controlled by a single party. The state was also largely hostile, or unfriendly, to the Allied Powers. This was because the Allies had tried to help the Communists' enemies in the civil war.



Reading Progress Check

Identifying Central Issues What was war communism, and why was it important?
