

History 497

The Spontaneity Of The Revolution Not So Spontaneous At All

Arguably, the Russian Revolution maybe the most vital event of the twentieth century. "Events of such magnitude have neither a clear beginning or a neat end."# From 1917 to 1918, the tumultuous incidents and implications of the Russian Revolution were understated, due to a perception by virtually all non-Russians who believed that the occurrences were of only local importance. However, the repercussions of the Russian Revolution would be felt in every country for the rest of the century, perhaps indefinitely. The first phase of the Russian Revolution began with violence in 1905. "This was brought under control by a combination of concessions and repression, but violence resumed on an even grander scale after a hiatus of twelve years, in February 1917, culminating in the Bolshevik coup d'etat of October."# During the final phase of World War, Russia transformed its government from a traditional monarchy, to the first Communist state. "It is often said that The February Revolution was spontaneous, and in fact was not organized by any party or any political leader."# Although the February Revolution was spontaneous, the Russian Revolution by no possible means was due to pure chance; it was an accumulation of a flawed government, lingering struggle, and anger to long contained.

The Revolution transpired quickly, yet the causes can be traced nearly a century. In addition to the obstacles faced at the end of the century, a change in government took place. Nicholas II became Tsar in 1894. As Nicholas II witnessed his father's reaction to his grandfather's assassination, he observed the brutal oppression laid upon the Russian people. With devotion to his family, he exhausted the same severe method to subdue resistance from the people. His measures became bolder as the years progressed. As Nicholas II oppressions developed tremendous unrest and strife, he was forced to make concessions after many incidents. The parliament was created, along with Russia's first constitution. With these actions in the monarch's authority, his grip on his subjects became extremely weak. The Tsar's avoidance of direct involvement in the government caused resentment among the Russian people. "He proved to be both narrow-minded and weak, unable to remove reactionary blinders even when circumstances forced him into entirely new situations with great potentialities, and at the same time unable to manage even reaction effectively."#

"Temporary Regulations" were in place to supervise the Russian people. The zemstvo and municipal governments experienced blockades in their jurisdiction. "The limits of zemstvo taxation were strictly fixed and the stockpiling of food for emergency was taken away from zemstvo jurisdiction and transferred to that of the bureaucracy."#

The Russian monarchy prior to the Revolution progressively became weaker, clearly it became aware of its vulnerability. The government, conscious of the ongoing problems faced by the millions of impoverished, tried to ease the people in various ways. "In the late 1800s, the taxation burden for the peasants was reduced."# However, the aid helped very little, if at all. The peasants remained poor, yet they stayed calm and quiet. The political apathy did not inflict anger from the peasants until later years.

Nearing the latter part of the nineteenth century, Russia was still an agricultural country. "The first official census in 1897 showed that five-sixths of Russia's one-hundred-twenty-nine million people were peasants."# The peasants were poverty-stricken due to poor organization and the atrocious monarchy in prior years. As the years passed throughout this century, the position of the peasants worsened. "As peasants tried to rent additional land to cultivate, the competition among them forced up rents to an impossibly high level."#

Despite the fact that Russia's majority was destitute, the government began to intensify its efforts to modernize and industrialize the country. This time became known as the "Witte Period", and the new industrial age emerged. Witte devoted his efforts to the promotion of heavy industry, and the building of railroads. "The Russian Railroad network doubled in mileage between 1895 and 1905, and the additions included the enormous Trans-Siberian line, built between 1891 and 1903."# The new railway system served as a strategic reference to the lines that connected the grain, thus producing areas of the interior with growing ports, such as Riga and Odessa.

The pace at the turn of the century was rapid. Along with the vast expansion of the railway network, coal and iron industries emerged in the Donetz, Dnieper, Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Polish regions. The oil deposits at Baku were exploited and the textile industry grew by a speedy pace. Witte did everything possible to develop heavy industry in Russia. In addition to introducing the gold standard, increasing exports, while curtailing imports, he taxed items used for everyday consumption in order to retrieve funds from the peasants.

The government along with developing its resources, set a goal to equip the country to face competition from the other great powers. Could Russia be a great power? Undoubtedly the country was progressing, yet throughout the duration of the 1800s, failure after failure had amounted. The country had failed in foreign policy all through the nineteenth century; its agriculture was a disaster, and its industry was only recently becoming existent. Great obstacles would be faced, considering the bureaucracy was horrendous, in addition, the economy was weak.

The "Great Reforms" earlier in the 1800s, made a division in the economic and social development of Russia. Every social class felt the impact of the reforms and their aftermath. To many, the period preceding the "Great Reforms", was

one of backwardness and stagnation. The reforms led to the rise of a Russian middle class; industrialists, businessmen, and technicians. Toward the end of the century Russia possessed eight basic industrial regions, consisting of metal processing, machine building, and textile industries.

Because Russia industrialized late and rapidly, "the Russians borrowed advanced Western technology wholesale."# For technological reasons, but also because of government policy, Russia acquired huge plants and large-scale industries almost over night. Capitalists began to organize. "A metallurgical syndicate was formed in 1902, a coal syndicate in 1904, and several others in later years."#

In the decades that followed the "Great Reforms", capitalism became prominent in Russia. In the early years of the new century, rapid industrialization occurred, resulting in social changes and tension. "With the growth of capitalism, two social groups transpired, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat."# The middle class began to emerge and finally came into its own, in the years before the revolution. Even though the Russian commercial and industrial bourgeoisie was still relatively underdeveloped, professional people were eager to participate in politics. In the years following the "Great Reforms", amongst other incidents, Liberalism developed among professionals. Furthermore, the rise of the proletariat and emergence of a labor movement proved a radical change in Russian opposition. "And, of course, behind dissatisfied bourgeoisie, critical intellectuals, and bitter workers there spread the human ocean of destitute and desperate peasants-an ocean that had risen in uncounted storms through centuries of Russian history".#

Two important parties around the turn of the century formed. The Social Democratic, or the "SD", and the Socialist Revolutionary "SR". "The Social Democrats were Marxists, and the creation of their party represented a landmark in the development of Marxism in Russia."# The Social Democrats become a recognized party in 1903, and split into two groups. The Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Lenin who like Marx, believed that proletariat would rise, rather than the peasantry, and conquer the capitalist class. Lenin desired a tightly knit organization of professional revolutionaries. The other group, the Mensheviks, preferred a looser association. "The Social Revolutionaries formed their party in 1901 and represented an older populist tradition of Russian radicalism, influenced by Marxism, and held Victor Chernov as their leader."# Marx believed the working class would be the foundation for socialism. As well, a democratic and evenly balanced society. He trusted that this would lead to Communism; an ideal society where everything could be shared and nothing would be exploited, thus, a perfect society for Lenin.

As the twentieth century opened, Russia was in chaos. As a result of overpopulation, existing tension between nobles and peasants intensified significantly. Disturbances consisting of strikes, peasant uprisings and student protest became

more frequent and almost continuous from 1898 onward. The government tried repression and conciliation, however efforts failed. As competition for land increased, peasants resented the continued existence of large estates held by nobles; with the growing weakness of the nobility and the imperial regime, they felt more able to realize their dream of seizing the land for themselves. Amongst many reasons, Revolution of 1905 would take place due to the social transformation that was occurring, along with the growth of opposition to the regime.

Prior to the Revolution, Nicholas II demonstrated episodes of instability. While administering an appalling foreign policy in East Asia, he requested that Russia should have rights to colonial assets." His expansionist policy in Manchuria and North Korea led to war with Japan in 1904. Proving to be the more skillful aggressor, Japan was victorious. Offering partition, which would give the Russians northern Manchuria and the Japanese southern Manchuria and Korea, the Japanese gauged the futility of negotiating, and attacked Port Arthur on February 8, 1904, thus accomplishing the original Pearl Harbor."# Russia's defeat by Japan humiliated the country, in addition, devastated any respect held for the monarchy. Not only did this disaster further the expansion of the opposition movement, Japan proved to be better organized, in effect, more modernized than Russia. Furthermore, Japan allied with Great Britain, as Russia became diplomatically isolated. Russia, unprepared and disorganized continued to exhaust it's army. Japan drained its finances and despite their victories, could not demolish the Russian forces. Arranged by President Theodore Roosevelt, a peace conference resulted in satisfying provisions set by the Russians, as well the Japanese. Along with the Treaty of Portsmouth, the Russian Government ended the war against Japan. As the fighting concluded, chaos would quickly resume.

January 22, 1905, came to be identified as "Bloody Sunday". It brought upon the most extreme examples of the Tsar's brutality and weakness. On that day the police and the Cossacks fired at a peaceful demonstration of workers and their families, led by priest George Gapon. "The priest drew up a petition outlining the workers' demands for increased wages, and shorter work days. In addition, an end to the Russo-Japanese War."# The "Assembly of Russian Factory Workers of St. Petersburg", were ruthlessly fired upon by government troops. "Ironically, the demonstrators were there to ask for the Tsar's protection against the arbitrariness of the factory owners and corrupt officials."# Conditions in the factories were terrible, as well, the employees averaged an eleven hour work day. The people wished to peacefully present their grievances to Nicholas II, and demonstrators carried portraits and icons of the Tsar. The massacre only fueled the revolutionary movement. A series of unorganized violent episodes ensued across Russia in the following months.

Industrial workers all across the country went on strike, additionally, in late 1905, the employees of the Russian railway network joined. The entire network halted. Furthermore, The St. Petersburg Soviet was founded by Leon Trotsky (whom in later years would align with Lenin), along with several Mensheviks. Over fifty of these soviets were launched across Russia.

Unable to regain his standing after numerous disasters and scandals, with advisement from prime minister Witte, Nicholas II published the "October Manifesto," which promised the Russian people civil liberties, such as freedom of speech, and association, along with Russia's first national elected representative assembly. Nicholas II gave into political pressure, and created the Duma. Without the approval of the Duma, a law could not go into effect. Parliament was also created, to provide legislative and oversight powers. The government declared fundamental laws that provided Russia's political system. According to the laws, the emperor retained huge powers. "He continued in complete control of the executive, the armed forces, foreign policy-specifically making war and peace-succession to the throne, imperial court, imperial domains, and so forth."# The members of the Duma, the majority of that being Cadets (The party of the professionals desiring a democratic republic administrated by a constitution and an elected parliament), inflicted conflict with the Tsar. Their members were elected indirectly, and on the basis of heavily weighted class representation. The motivation was to establish universal suffrage, and to appear as a parliamentary democracy. Yet, it was nothing of the kind. The Duma lacked control of most arrangements, as the Tsar continued to control decisions regarding ministers, the army, the navy, the diplomatic service, and the expenditure of the court. "The Tsar still had power to approve or veto every legislative act, as well he had the power to govern decrees (ukases) whenever the Duma was not in session."# Within the legislation of the Duma, many categories of citizens were excluded; among them, women, workers in factories with less than fifty employees, migrant workers, and landless peasants. The rest were divided into four electoral colleges according to social status. The colleges consisted of landowners, townsmen, peasants and Cossacks, and workers. The Socialist Revolutionaries and the Social Democrats had largely boycotted the election to the Duma. Trotsky in fact, denounced the entire plan. Those who condemned the plan were arrested. The representation was a failure, as well, the collaboration between the Duma and the government proved impossible. Along with the removal of the first Duma, the Tsar's relationship with his prime minister, Witte, dissolved.

As the first Duma was disbanded, the Second Duma momentarily followed, lasting only a few months. An electoral transformation, provided the government with a co-operative third Duma.

Along with Nicholas II, the new more conservative prime minister, Pyotr Stolypin, unconstitutionally altered the electoral law, which consequently solidified right-wing majority within the Duma. The minister also obtained the right to manipulate electoral districts. The liberal-conservative Octobrists, led by Alexander Guchkov, became the prominent party in the new Duma. The prime minister also had elaborate plans to develop his own legislative program. "His ambitious plans consisted of pacification and reform. Pacification was an all-out struggle against the revolutionaries."# Included in this program, was the newly instituted court system, which arrested and convicted political revolutionaries with ease. Between 1906 to 1909, thousands of convictions and executions took place in Russia, thus giving the title of the hangman's noose, "Stolypin's necktie". Along with his reforms, Stolypin intended to help the peasant society. Stolypin thought of the peasants as conservative people. He planned on bringing them on the side of the government by introducing reforms that would utilize this conservatism. Basically, he wanted to force them to adhere to a bourgeois mentality, by distancing the peasants from their communal duties, and replacing them with individual responsibilities. Stolypin sought to give the peasants legal ownership of their property, and the ability to acquire land.. He thought that the peasants would appreciate the government for refining their standard of living. Stolypin's agrarian reforms were objectives to enhance the radicalism of peasants. Selection of zemstvo, local government councils, was also a given to the peasants by Stolypin. The years of 1907 to 1914, were those of liberated attitudes. Russians were allowed to participate in more political activity, than in any prior time. However, a hurdle was faced; Stolypin had trouble convincing the government that allowing the peasants this aid, was the correct measure to take. He received criticism of his agrarian policy, and was condemned from the far left to the far right of the political spectrum. "Toward the end of the third Duma, relations with the Prime minister had deteriorated markedly, and it became clear that it would not be able to hold together a political alliance between the government and the landowners, officials, and capitalists who supported the Octobrist Party."# Stolypin's desire for land reforms never fully transpired, as he was assassinated by a police agent associated with the Socialist Revolutionary Party. Although the third Duma managed to exist its full five year term, its difficulty to cooperate with the reactionary government was evident.

The first two Dumas lasted a few months each, in contrast to the third, which served its full term, from 1907 to 1912. By the time of the fourth Duma, it had become certain that Nicholas II was by no means going to accept the ideal of distributing the authority placed upon him by the Revolution in 1905. As World War I approached, Nicholas II saw the Duma as an unnecessary institution. Notions of returning Russia to the political system that existed before 1905, and ending the Duma's authority in making laws were considered. "By refusing to take the fourth Duma seriously, the

government alienated not merely the new upper class of intellectuals and entrepreneurs, along with the more traditional supporters among the landed nobility."# With the war approaching, the regime had little support among Russia. The support of the autocracy would be found only on the far Right of Russian politics; and among anti-Semitic, proto-Fascist organizations. One of those particular groups was the "Union of the Russian People". "This organization blamed all of Russia's problems on socialists, the democratically minded intelligentsia, and the Jews, calling on the population to combat the enemies of the Tsar and Fatherland."# The upper classes were angry at the Tsar for refusing to initiate a Western-style of government, and making the Duma a democratic institution. Nicholas II blindly believed that the peasants, the army, and the nobility would politically support his regime; pathetically, he was unable to realize how isolated his government really was.

The first World War, along with the period of the Dumas from 1906 to 1914, created two schools of thought; an optimistic and pessimistic point of view. The optimists argued that the establishment of the Duma provided representatives of new political parties in the government and administration, as well, it developed political refinement of the various social classes, including the vast peasant community, by introducing them to such procedures as parliamentary elections. The optimists also believed that there were many powerful groups among Russia's elites; bankers, entrepreneurs, landowners, and professionals, that were willing to back a progressing government. They also claimed that the country was on the trail to a secure Western-style government, which was on the verge of capitalism. The optimists believed that without the intervention of the war, "Russia would have followed a peaceful path of democratic capitalist development, and the revolution would have been avoided."# The pessimistic school drew a drastically different conclusion. The pessimists believed the Duma to be a bogus parliament, with an extensive limit of powers, which in turn, represented the interests of only the privileged areas of society. They argued that a violent overthrow of Nicholas II was inevitable. Also expressed was the view that the constitution was a sham, and the turnover of the four Dumas was due to the Tsars desire for a politically obedient legislature. The pessimists believed that the social and economic problems brought upon deep divisions Russia's culture. Millions of impoverished peasants coveted the gentry lifestyle. Urban workers still encountered appalling working conditions and low wages; as well they were becoming more radical and willing to follow the Bolsheviks. Additionally, the upper classes were dissatisfied with the administration that denied them any voice in the government. With the country rupturing, the wealth of the nobility declined, along with its influence. The government's traditional supporters were also vanishing. "Unlike the

optimists who believed that Imperial Russia was ruined by the first World War, the pessimists maintain that the war provided merely the last mighty push to bring the whole rotten structure tumbling down."#

Germany was considered a major threat to the Russian territory. Once Germany established the Triple Alliance in the course of World War I, the feeling was purely reinforced. This military alliance included Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. The Triple Alliance agreed to support one other if attacked by France or Russia. The threat emerged the Triple Entente, including France, Russia, and Great Britain. The Entente meant an effective military and political alliance with France and France.

The minister of the Interior and director of the Police Department, Peter Durnovo submitted a memo to Nicholas II on the dangers of Russia entering the war. This document, written in 1914, foretold the events of the future, if the war went badly. "A social revolution in its most extreme form will be unavoidable in Russia. It will begin with all strata of society blaming the government for the reverses. Duma politicians will take advantage of the government's predicament to incite the masses. The army's loyalty will weaken after the loss in combat of professional officers: their replacements, freshly commissioned civilians, will have neither the authority nor the will to restrain the yearning of the peasants in uniform to head for home to take part in land seizures. In the ensuing turmoil, the opposition parties enjoyed no mass support, will be unable to assert power, and Russia will be thrown into total anarchy, the consequences of which cannot even be foreseen."# One might think Durnovo's estimate was one of forgery, post the Russian Revolution, yet its credentials were impeccable.

"The Russian people entered the war in a patriotic Euphoria, which showed that, despite everything, traditions of loyalty to the Tsar had survived among many sections of the population."# A few weeks after the declaration of war in 1914, the Russian government responded to the enthusiasm by renaming the country's capital from the German sounding St. Petersburg, to Petrograd. However, with Russia's impending military defeats, the Euphoria diminished.

In the midst of entering World War I, Nicholas II became involved in a scandal. Rasputin, a self-proclaimed monk, gained political guidance over the Tsar. His wife, Alexandra, had been consulting with Rasputin in attempt to receive help for her hemophiliac son. Speculations spread that Rasputin had placed the royal family under a spell with his magical powers. Russian's were skeptical of Rasputin's influence over the Tsar, especially at such a critical time.

One of the most pertinent causes of the Russian Revolution would be the collapse of Russia's unstable political and economic structure during the war. Russia entered the war, primarily because of moral and economic commitments to the allied forces. To fulfill its pledge to defend France and England, the country risked its own destruction. However

this sacrifice, earned Russia no gratitude, for when Russia was subsequently found defenseless to the Germans, and fell victim to extremists who supported and financed them, the Allies failed to come to the country's assistance. Not only did the war amount to a string of humiliating defeats, it produced inflation, plummeted the country into a food and fuel shortage, and ultimately exterminated five million Russian soldiers and civilians. It became increasingly evident that the country's economic, social, and political systems, as well its armed forces, were failing the ultimate test of war.

The unprepared military, devastating economic effects, and the demoralizing psychological effects proved that the a victorious triumph was impossible from the autocratic regime. As well, Alexander assumed command at the front, leaving his wife regent of Petrograd. Public criticism focused on Alexandra, who adhered to Rasputin's political influence. In an effort to save Nicholas II from ruin, Russian aristocrats and close links to the royal family had Rasputin killed. However it was too late. Russia had enough. Within a few months, the country would be without a monarch for the first time.

With the War approaching an end, violent strikes and protests occurred frequently. On February 23, 1917, a fairly large group of working-class women, collected in Petrograd to celebrate Women's Day. "The peaceful protest called for bread and peace, proclaiming that their children were starving."# The next morning thousands of male workers joined by striking and requesting an end to the war. The demonstrations became larger, and the police were unable to control the crowds. When the Tsar heard news of the pending protests, he requested military action. Many soldiers became empathetic to the protesters, in addition joined them against the police. The regime fell into utter chaos.

The February Revolution emerged, dominated by the Menshevik Party, began in Petrograd, and spread throughout Russia. The Tsarist regime had become so ostracized, nowhere did it face much opposition. Hunger, military defeat, governmental chaos, and administrative confusion all welcomed a coup d'etat.

"By 1917, everyone- officers, merchants, ladies,- talked openly of the absolute necessity of doing away with the emperor and empress."# Forced by the Duma, the Tsar abdicated, and was instructed to leave power to his son. However, he abdicated to his brother, who in turn, abdicated himself. The party leaders of the Duma formed a provisional government, until later that same year, a future government could be decided.

The February Revolution was a spontaneous event; though, after years of oppression and resentment, it was only in due time that something of this magnitude would take place. At its conclusion, several political parties competed for power, but in a peaceful manner. The two major groups disagreed completely about the direction that Russia should take. Nevertheless, the provisional government and the Petrograd Soviet managed work together. However, in April of

1917, the situation would immediately change with the arrival of Lenin... Bibliography Chubarov, Alexander. *The Fragile Empire*. New York, NY: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1999. Crozier, Brian. *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire*. Rocklin, CA: Prima Publishing, 1999. Figes, Orlando. *A People's Tragedy*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1996. Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *The Russian Revolution*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1982. Holquist, Peter. *Making War, Forging Revolution*. London, England: Harvard University Press, 2002. Katkov, George. *The February Revolution*. New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishers, 1967. King, David. *Trotsky*. New York, NY: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1986. Kochan, Lional. *The Russian Revolution*. New York, NY: G.P Putnam's Sons, 1971. Liebman, Marcel. *The Russian Revolution*. New York, NY: Random House, 1970. Pipes, Richard. *The Russian Revolution*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1990. Riasanovsky, Nicholas V. *A History of Russia*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1984.