# Russian Revolution

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(Redirected from [Russian Revolution of 1917](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Russian_Revolution_of_1917&redirect=no))



See also: [Revolution of 1905](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolution_of_1905)

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| --- | --- |
| **Russian Revolution** | |
| Part of [World War I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I) and the [Revolutions of 1917–23](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolutions_of_1917%E2%80%9323) | |
| Bolshevik forces marching on [Red Square](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Square) | |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | **Date** | 8 March – 8 November 1917 [[O.S.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Style_and_New_Style_dates) 23 February – 26 October] | | **Location** | [Russia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Empire) | | **Result** | Bolshevik victory   * [Abdication](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdication) of [Nicholas II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicholas_II_of_Russia) * [Collapse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/February_Revolution) of the [Imperial Government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Empire) * [Collapse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/October_Revolution) of the [Provisional Government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Provisional_Government) * Creation of the [Russian SFSR](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Soviet_Federative_Socialist_Republic) * Beginning of the [Russian Civil War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Civil_War) | | |
| **Belligerents** | |
| [Imperial Government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Empire) [Provisional Government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Provisional_Government) | [Petrograd Soviet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petrograd_Soviet) [Bolsheviks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bolshevik) [Leftist Socialists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Left_Socialist-Revolutionaries) |
| **Commanders and leaders** | |
| [Nicholas II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicholas_II_of_Russia) [Georgy Lvov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgy_Lvov) [Alexander Kerensky](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Kerensky) | [Vladimir Lenin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Lenin) [Leon Trotsky](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leon_Trotsky) [Lev Kamenev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lev_Kamenev) |
| **Strength** | |
| [Russian Army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperial_Russian_Army) | [Red Guards](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Guards_(Russia)): 200,000 |
| a. Until 15 March 1917. | |

The **Russian Revolution** is the collective term for a series of [revolutions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolution) in [Russia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Empire) in 1917, which dismantled the [Tsarist autocracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tsarist_autocracy) and led to the creation of the [Russian SFSR](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Soviet_Federative_Socialist_Republic). The Emperor was forced to abdicate and the old regime was replaced by a [provisional government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Provisional_government) during the first revolution of February 1917 (March in the [Gregorian calendar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregorian_calendar); the older [Julian calendar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julian_calendar) was in use in Russia at the time). In the second revolution, during October, the Provisional Government was removed and replaced with a [Bolshevik](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bolshevik) ([Communist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communist)) government.

The [February Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/February_Revolution) (March 1917) was a revolution focused around Petrograd (now [Saint Petersburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Petersburg)). In the chaos, members of the Imperial parliament or [Duma](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_Duma_of_the_Russian_Empire) assumed control of the country, forming the [Russian Provisional Government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Provisional_Government,_1917). The army leadership felt they did not have the means to suppress the revolution and [Nicholas II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicholas_II_of_Russia), the last [Emperor of Russia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Russian_rulers), abdicated. The [Soviets](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_(council)) (workers' councils), which were led by more radical socialist factions, initially permitted the Provisional Government to rule, but insisted on a prerogative to influence the government and control various militias. The February Revolution took place in the context of heavy military setbacks during the [First World War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_World_War) (1914–18), which left much of the Russian army in a state of mutiny.

A period of [dual power](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dual_power) ensued, during which the Provisional Government held state power while the national network of Soviets, led by socialists, had the allegiance of the lower classes and the [political left](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_left). During this chaotic period there were frequent mutinies, protests and many strikes. When the Provisional Government chose to continue fighting the war with Germany, the Bolsheviks and other socialist factions campaigned for stopping the conflict. The Bolsheviks turned workers militias under their control into the [Red Guards](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Guards_(Russia)) (later the [Red Army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Army)) over which they exerted substantial control.

In the [October Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/October_Revolution) (November in the Gregorian calendar), the [Bolshevik](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bolshevik) party, led by [Vladimir Lenin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Lenin), and the workers' Soviets, overthrew the Provisional Government in Petrograd. The Bolsheviks appointed themselves as leaders of various government ministries and seized control of the countryside, establishing the [Cheka](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cheka) to quash dissent. To end Russia’s participation in the First World War, the Bolshevik leaders signed the [Treaty of Brest-Litovsk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Brest-Litovsk) with Germany in March 1918.

[Civil war](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Civil_War) erupted between the "Red" (Bolshevik) and "White" (anti-Bolshevik) factions, which was to continue for several years, with the Bolsheviks ultimately victorious. In this way, the Revolution paved the way for [the creation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_on_the_Creation_of_the_USSR) of the [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Union) (USSR) in 1922. While many notable historical events occurred in Moscow and Petrograd, there was also a visible movement in cities throughout the state, among national minorities throughout the empire and in the rural areas, where [peasants](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peasant) took over and redistributed land.

## Background

Main article: [Russian history, 1892–1917](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_history,_1892%E2%80%931917)



Soldiers blocking [Narva Gate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narva_Triumphal_Arch) on [Bloody Sunday](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bloody_Sunday_(1905))

The [Russian Revolution of 1905](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolution_of_1905) was said to be a major factor to the February Revolutions of 1917. The events of [Bloody Sunday](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bloody_Sunday_(1905)) triggered a line of protests. A council of workers called the [St. Petersburg Soviet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Petersburg_Soviet) was created in all this chaos, and the beginning of a [communist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communist) political protest had begun.

[World War I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I) prompted a Russian outcry directed at [Tsar Nicholas II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicholas_II_of_Russia). It was another major factor contributing to the retaliation of the Russian Communists against their royal opponents. After the entry of the [Ottoman Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ottoman_Empire) on the side of the Central Powers in October 1914, Russia was deprived of a major trade route through Ottoman Empire, which followed with a minor economic crisis, in which Russia became incapable of providing [munitions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Munitions) to their army in the years leading to 1917. However, the problems were merely administrative, and not industrial as Germany was producing great amounts of munitions whilst constantly fighting on two major battlefronts.

The war also developed a weariness in the city, owing to a lack of food in response to the disruption of agriculture. Food scarcity had become a considerable problem in Russia, but the cause of this did not lie in any failure of the [harvests](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvests), which had not been significantly altered during war-time. The indirect reason was that the government, in order to finance the war, had been printing off millions of ruble notes, and by 1917 inflation had made prices increase up to four times what they had been in 1914. The [peasantry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peasantry) were consequently faced with the higher cost of purchases, but made no corresponding gain in the sale of their own produce, since this was largely taken by the middlemen on whom they depended. As a result they tended to hoard their grain and to revert to subsistence farming. Thus the cities were constantly short of food. At the same time rising prices led to demands for higher wages in the factories, and in January and February 1916 revolutionary [propaganda](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Propaganda), aided by German funds, led to widespread strikes. The outcome of all this, however, was a growing criticism of the government rather than any war-weariness. The original fever of patriotic excitement, which had caused the name of [St. Petersburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Petersburg) to be changed to the less German sounding "Petrograd," may have subsided a little in the subsequent years, but it had not turned to defeatism and during the initial risings in Petrograd in February 1917, the crowds in the streets clearly objected to the banners proclaiming "down with the war." Heavy losses during the war also strengthened thoughts that Tsar Nicholas II was unfit to rule.

The [Liberals](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zemstvo) were now better placed to voice their complaints, since they were participating more fully through a variety of voluntary organizations. Local industrial committees proliferated. In July 1915, a Central War Industries Committee was established under the chairmanship of a prominent [Octobrist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/October_Revolution), Guchkov, and including ten workers' representatives. The Petrograd [Mensheviks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menshevik) agreed to join despite the objections of their leaders abroad. All this activity gave renewed encouragement to political ambitions, and, in September 1915, a combination of Octobrists and [Kadets](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitutional_Democratic_Party) in the [Duma](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duma) demanded the forming of a responsible government. The [Tsar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tsar_Nicholas_II) rejected these proposals. He had now taken over the position of commander-in-chief of the armed forces and, during his absence from Petrograd while at his military headquarters at [Mogilev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mogilev), he left most of the day-to-day government in the hands of the Empress. She was intensely unpopular, owing, in part, to her German origin and to the influence that [Rasputin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rasputin), an unsavory monk, exercised over her.

All these factors had given rise to a sharp loss of confidence in the regime by 1916. Early in that year, Guchkov had been taking soundings among senior army officers and members of the Central War Industries Committee about a possible coup to force the abdication of the Tsar. In November, [Pavel Milyukov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pavel_Milyukov) in the Duma openly accused the government of contemplating peace negotiations with Germany. In December, a small group of nobles assassinated [Rasputin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rasputin), and in January 1917 the Tsar's uncle, [Grand Duke Nicholas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Duke_Nicholas), was asked indirectly by [Prince Lvov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgy_Lvov) whether he would be prepared to take over the throne from his nephew, Tsar Nicholas II. None of these incidents were in themselves the immediate cause of the February Revolution, but they do help to explain why the monarchy survived only a few days after it had broken out.



Russian soldiers marching in Petrograd in February 1917

Meanwhile, the [Social Democrat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Democrat) leaders in exile, now mostly in [Switzerland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Switzerland), had been the glum spectators of the collapse of international socialist solidarity. French and German Social Democrats had voted in favor of their respective governments. [Georgi Plekhanov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgi_Plekhanov) in [Paris](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris) had adopted a violently anti-German stand, while [Parvus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parvus) supported the German war effort as the best means of ensuring a revolution in Russia. The Mensheviks largely maintained that Russia had the right to defend herself against Germany, although [Martov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martov) (a prominent Menshevik), now on the left of his group, demanded an end to the war and a settlement on the basis of national self-determination, with no [annexations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annexation) or [indemnities](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indemnity).

It was these views of Martov that predominated in a manifesto drawn up by Leon Trotsky (a major Bolshevik revolutionary) at a conference in [Zimmerwald](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zimmerwald), attended by thirty-five Socialist leaders in September 1915. Inevitably [Vladimir Lenin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Lenin), supported by [Zinoviev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zinoviev) and [Radek](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radek), strongly contested them. Their attitudes became known as the Zimmerwald Left. Lenin rejected both the defense of Russia and the cry for peace. Since the autumn of 1914, he had insisted that "from the standpoint of the working class and of the laboring masses from the lesser evil would be the defeat of the Tsarist Monarchy"; the war must be turned into a civil war of the proletarian soldiers against their own governments, and if a proletarian victory should emerge from this in Russia, then their duty would be to wage a revolutionary war for the liberation of the masses throughout Europe. Thus, Lenin remained the enfant terrible of the [Russian Social Democratic Labor Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Social_Democratic_Labour_Party), although at this point in the war his following in Russia was as few as 10,000 and he must have seemed no more than the leader of an extremist wing of a bankrupt organization. Lenin, however, then executed the protests of Petrograd which set off the 1917 Russian Revolution.

### Economic and social changes

An elementary theory of property, believed by many peasants, was that land should belong to those who work on it. At the same time, peasant life and culture was changing constantly. Change was facilitated by the physical movement of growing numbers of peasant villagers who migrated to and from industrial and urban environments, but also by the introduction of city culture into the village through material goods, the press, and word of mouth.

Workers also had good reasons for discontent: overcrowded housing with often deplorable sanitary conditions, long hours at work (on the eve of the war a 10-hour workday six days a week was the average and many were working 11–12 hours a day by 1916), constant risk of injury and death from very poor safety and sanitary conditions, harsh discipline (not only rules and fines, but foremen’s fists), and inadequate wages (made worse after 1914 by steep war-time increases in the cost of living). At the same time, urban industrial life was full of benefits, though these could be just as dangerous, from the point of view of social and political stability, as the hardships. There were many encouragements to expect more from life. Acquiring new skills gave many workers a sense of self-respect and confidence, heightening expectations and desires. Living in cities, workers encountered material goods such as they had never seen while in the village. Most important, living in cities, they were exposed to new ideas about the social and political order.

The social causes of the Russian Revolution mainly came from centuries of oppression of the lower classes by the Tsarist regime, and Nicholas's failures in World War I. While rural agrarian peasants had been [emancipated](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emancipation_of_the_serfs) from [serfdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serfdom) in 1861, they still resented paying redemption payments to the state, and demanded communal tender of the land they worked. The problem was further compounded by the failure of [Sergei Witte](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergei_Witte)'s land reforms of the early 20th century. Increasing peasant disturbances and sometimes actual revolts occurred, with the goal of securing ownership of the land they worked. Russia consisted mainly of poor farming peasants, with 1.5% of the population owning 25% of the land.

The rapid industrialization of Russia also resulted in urban overcrowding and poor conditions for urban industrial workers (as mentioned above). Between 1890 and 1910, the population of the capital, Saint Petersburg, swelled from 1,033,600 to 1,905,600, with Moscow experiencing similar growth. This created a new 'proletariat' which, due to being crowded together in the cities, was much more likely to protest and go on strike than the peasantry had been in previous times. In one 1904 survey, it was found that an average of sixteen people shared each apartment in Saint Petersburg, with six people per room. There was also no running water, and piles of human waste were a threat to the health of the workers. The poor conditions only aggravated the situation, with the number of strikes and incidents of public disorder rapidly increasing in the years shortly before World War I. Because of late industrialization, Russia's workers were highly concentrated. By 1914 40% of Russian workers were employed in factories of +1,000 workers (32% in 1901). 42% worked in 100–1,000 worker enterprises, 18% in 1–100 worker businesses (in the USA, 1914, the figures were 18, 47 and 35 respectively).

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| --- | --- |
| **Years** | **Average annual strikes** |
| 1862–9 | 6 |
| 1870–84 | 20 |
| 1885–94 | 33 |
| 1895–1905 | 176 |

World War I only added to the chaos. Conscription swept up the unwilling in all parts of Russia. The vast demand for factory production of war supplies and workers caused many more labor riots and strikes. Conscription stripped skilled workers from the cities, who had to be replaced with unskilled peasants, and then, when famine began to hit due to the poor railway system, workers abandoned the cities in droves to look for food. Finally, the soldiers themselves, who suffered from a lack of equipment and protection from the elements, began to turn against the Tsar. This was mainly because, as the war progressed, many of the officers who were loyal to the Tsar were killed, and were replaced by discontented conscripts from the major cities, who had little loyalty to the Tsar.



The Petrograd Soviet Assembly meeting in 1917

### Political issues

Many sections of the country had reason to be dissatisfied with the existing autocracy. Nicholas II was a deeply conservative ruler and maintained a strict authoritarian system. Individuals and society in general were expected to show self-restraint, devotion to community, deference to the social hierarchy and a sense of duty to the country. Religious faith helped bind all of these tenets together as a source of comfort and reassurance in the face of difficult conditions and as a means of political authority exercised through the clergy. Perhaps more than any other modern monarch, Nicholas II attached his fate and the future of his dynasty to the notion of the ruler as a saintly and infallible father to his people.

This idealized vision of the Romanov monarchy blinded him to the actual state of his country. With a firm belief that his power to rule was granted by Divine Right, Nicholas assumed that the Russian people were devoted to him with unquestioning loyalty. This ironclad belief rendered Nicholas unwilling to allow the progressive reforms that might have alleviated the suffering of the Russian people. Even after the 1905 revolution spurred the Tsar to decree limited civil rights and democratic representation, he worked to limit even these liberties in order to preserve the ultimate authority of the crown.

Despite constant oppression, the desire of the people for democratic participation in government decisions was strong. Since the [Age of Enlightenment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Age_of_Enlightenment), Russian intellectuals had promoted Enlightenment ideals such as the dignity of the individual and the rectitude of democratic representation. These ideals were championed most vociferously by Russia’s liberals, although populists, Marxists, and anarchists also claimed to support democratic reforms. A growing opposition movement had begun to challenge the Romanov monarchy openly well before the turmoil of World War I.

Dissatisfaction with Russian autocracy culminated in the huge national upheaval that followed the [Bloody Sunday](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bloody_Sunday_(1905)) massacre of January 1905, in which hundreds of unarmed protesters were shot by the Tsar's troops. Workers responded to the massacre with a crippling general strike, forcing Nicholas to put forth the [October Manifesto](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/October_Manifesto), which established a democratically elected parliament (the [State Duma](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duma#State_Duma_in_Imperial_Russia)). The Tsar undermined this promise of reform but a year later with Article 87 of the 1906 [Fundamental State Laws](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Constitution_of_1906), and subsequently dismissed the first two Dumas when they proved uncooperative. Unfulfilled hopes of democracy fueled revolutionary ideas and violent outbursts targeted at the monarchy.

One of the Tsar’s principal rationales for risking war in 1914 was his desire to restore the prestige that Russia had lost amid the debacles of the [Russo-Japanese war](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russo-Japanese_war). Nicholas also sought to foster a greater sense of national unity with a war against a common and ancient enemy. The Russian Empire was an agglomeration of diverse ethnicities that had shown significant signs of disunity in the years before the First World War. Nicholas believed in part that the shared peril and tribulation of a foreign war would mitigate the social unrest over the persistent issues of poverty, inequality, and inhuman working conditions. Instead of restoring Russia's political and military standing, [World War I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I) led to the horrifying slaughter of Russian troops and military defeats that undermined both the monarchy and society in general to the point of collapse.



Tsar Nicholas II among his troops during World War I

## World War I

The outbreak of war in August 1914 initially served to quiet the prevalent social and political protests, focusing hostilities against a common external enemy, but this patriotic unity did not last long. As the war dragged on inconclusively, war-weariness gradually took its toll. More important, though, was a deeper fragility: although many ordinary Russians joined anti-German demonstrations in the first few weeks of the war, the most widespread reaction appears to have been skepticism and fatalism. Hostility toward the Kaiser and the desire to defend their land and their lives did not necessarily translate into enthusiasm for the Tsar or the government.

Russia's first major battle of the war was a disaster: in the 1914 [Battle of Tannenberg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Tannenberg_(1914)), over 30,000 Russian troops were killed or wounded and 90,000 captured, while Germany suffered just 20,000 casualties. However, [Austro-Hungarian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austria-Hungary) forces allied to Germany were driven back deep into the [Galicia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Galicia) region by the end of the year. In the autumn of 1915, Nicholas had taken direct command of the army, personally overseeing Russia's main theatre of war and leaving his ambitious but incapable wife Alexandra in charge of the government. Reports of corruption and incompetence in the Imperial government began to emerge, and the growing influence of [Grigori Rasputin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grigori_Rasputin) in the Imperial family was widely resented. In the eyes of Lynch, a revisionist historian who focuses on the role of the people, Rasputin was a "fatal disease" to the Tsarist regime.

In 1915, things took a critical turn for the worse when Germany shifted its focus of attack to the Eastern front. The superior German army – better led, better trained and better supplied – was terrifyingly effective against the ill-equipped Russian forces, driving the Russians out of Galicia, as well as Russian Poland, during the [Gorlice–Tarnów Offensive](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gorlice%E2%80%93Tarn%C3%B3w_Offensive) campaign. By the end of October 1916, Russia had lost between 1,600,000 and 1,800,000 soldiers, with an additional 2,000,000 prisoners of war and 1,000,000 missing, all making up a total of nearly 5,000,000 men.

These staggering losses played a definite role in the mutinies and revolts that began to occur. In 1916, reports of fraternizing with the enemy started to circulate. Soldiers went hungry, and lacked shoes, munitions, and even weapons. Rampant discontent lowered morale, which was further undermined by a series of military defeats.



Russian troops awaiting German attack in trenches

Casualty rates were the most vivid sign of this disaster. Already, by the end of 1914, only five months into the war, around 390,000 Russian men had lost their lives and nearly 1,000,000 were injured. Far sooner than expected, barely trained recruits had to be called up for active duty, a process repeated throughout the war as staggering losses continued to mount. The officer class also saw remarkable changes, especially within the lower echelons, which were quickly filled with soldiers rising up through the ranks. These men, usually of peasant or working-class backgrounds, were to play a large role in the politicization of the troops in 1917.

The huge losses on the battlefields were not limited to men. The army quickly ran short of rifles and ammunition (as well as uniforms and food), and, by mid-1915, men were being sent to the front bearing no arms. It was hoped that they could equip themselves with the arms that they recovered from fallen soldiers, of both sides, on the battlefields. With good reason, the soldiers did not feel that they were being treated as human beings, or even as valuable soldiers, but rather as raw materials to be squandered for the purposes of the rich and powerful.

By the spring of 1915, the army was in steady retreat, which was not always orderly; desertion, plunder and chaotic flight were not uncommon. By 1916, however, the situation had improved in many respects. Russian troops stopped retreating, and there were even some modest successes in the offensives that were staged that year, albeit at great loss of life. Also, the problem of shortages was largely solved by a major effort to increase domestic production. Nevertheless, by the end of 1916, morale among soldiers was even worse than it had been during the great retreat of 1915. The fortunes of war may have improved, but the fact of the war, still draining away strength and lives from the country and its many individuals and families, remained an oppressive inevitability. The crisis in morale (as was argued by Allan Wildman, a leading historian of the Russian army in war and revolution) "was rooted fundamentally in the feeling of utter despair that the slaughter would ever end and that anything resembling victory could be achieved."

The war devastated not only soldiers. By the end of 1915, there were manifold signs that the economy was breaking down under the heightened strain of wartime demand. The main problems were food shortages and rising prices. Inflation dragged incomes down at an alarmingly rapid rate, and shortages made it difficult to buy even what one could afford. These shortages were a problem especially in the capital, [St. Petersburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Petersburg), where distance from supplies and poor transportation networks made matters particularly bad. Shops closed early or entirely for lack of bread, sugar, meat and other provisions, and lines lengthened massively for what remained. It became increasingly difficult both to afford and actually buy food.

Not surprisingly, strikes increased steadily from the middle of 1915, and so did crime; but, for the most part, people suffered and endured, scouring the city for food. Working class women in St. Petersburg reportedly spent about forty hours a week in food lines, begging, turning to prostitution or crime, tearing down wooden fences to keep stoves heated for warmth, grumbling about the rich, and wondering when and how this would all come to an end.

Government officials responsible for public order worried about how long people's patience would last. A report by the St. Petersburg branch of the security police, the [Okhrana](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Okhrana), in October 1916, warned bluntly of "the possibility in the near future of riots by the lower classes of the empire enraged by the burdens of daily existence."

Nicholas was blamed for all of these crises, and what little support he had left began to crumble. As discontent grew, the [State Duma](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_Duma) issued a warning to Nicholas in November 1916. It stated that, inevitably, a terrible disaster would grip the country unless a constitutional form of government was put in place. In typical fashion, however, Nicholas ignored them, and Russia's Tsarist regime collapsed a few months later during the February Revolution of 1917. One year later, the Tsar and his entire family were executed. Ultimately, Nicholas's inept handling of his country and the war destroyed the Tsar and ended up costing him both his reign and his life.

## February Revolution

Main article: [February Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/February_Revolution)



Revolutionaries protesting on February 1917



Meeting Germans in No Man's Land



Meeting before the Russian wire entanglements

At the beginning of February, [Petrograd](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petrograd) workers began several [strikes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strike_action) and [demonstrations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demonstration_(people)). On 7 March [[O.S.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Style_and_New_Style_dates) 22 February], workers at [Putilov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Putilov_plant), Petrograd's largest industrial plant, announced a strike.

The next day, a series of meetings and rallies were held for [International Women's Day](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Women%27s_Day), which gradually turned into economic and political gatherings. Demonstrations were organized to demand [bread](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bread), and these were supported by the industrial working force who considered them a reason for continuing the strikes. The women workers marched to nearby factories bringing out over 50,000 workers on strike. By 10 March [[O.S.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Style_and_New_Style_dates) 25 February], virtually every industrial enterprise in Petrograd had been shut down, together with many commercial and service enterprises. Students, white-collar workers and teachers joined the workers in the streets and at public meetings.

To quell the riots, the Tsar looked to the army. At least 180,000 troops were available in the capital, but most were either untrained or injured. Historian [Ian Beckett](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ian_Beckett&action=edit&redlink=1) suggests around 12,000 could be regarded as reliable, but even these proved reluctant to move in on the crowd, since it included so many women. It was for this reason that when, on 11 March [[O.S.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Style_and_New_Style_dates) 26 February], the Tsar ordered the army to suppress the rioting by force, troops began to mutiny. Although few actively joined the rioting, many officers were either shot or went into hiding; the ability of the garrison to hold back the protests was all but nullified, symbols of the Tsarist regime were rapidly torn down around the city, and governmental authority in the capital collapsed – not helped by the fact that Nicholas had prorogued the Duma that morning, leaving it with no legal authority to act. The response of the Duma, urged on by the liberal bloc, was to establish a Temporary Committee to restore law and order; meanwhile, the socialist parties establish the Petrograd Soviet to represent workers and soldiers. The remaining loyal units switched allegiance the next day.

The Tsar took a train back towards Petrograd, which was stopped on 14 March [[O.S.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Style_and_New_Style_dates) 1 March], by a group of disloyal troops. When the Tsar finally reached his destination, the Army Chiefs and his remaining ministers (those who had not filed under pretense of a power-cut) suggested in unison that he abdicate the throne. He did so on 15 March [[O.S.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Style_and_New_Style_dates) 2 March], on behalf of himself, and then, having taken advice, on behalf of his son, the [Tsarevich](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexei_Nikolaevich,_Tsarevich_of_Russia). Nicholas nominated his brother, the [Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovich](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Duke_Michael_Alexandrovich_of_Russia), to succeed him. But the Grand Duke realized that he would have little support as ruler, so he declined the crown on 16 March [[O.S.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Style_and_New_Style_dates) 3 March], stating that he would take it only if that was the consensus of democratic action. Six days later, Nicholas, no longer Tsar and addressed with contempt by the sentries as "Nicholas Romanov", was reunited with his family at the [Alexander Palace](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Palace) at [Tsarskoye Selo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tsarskoye_Selo). He was placed under [house arrest](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_arrest) with his family by the Provisional Government.

The immediate effect of the February Revolution was a widespread atmosphere of elation and excitement in Petrograd. On 16 March [[O.S.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Style_and_New_Style_dates) 3 March], a [provisional government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Provisional_Government) was announced. The center-left was well represented, and the government was initially chaired by a liberal aristocrat, [Prince Georgy Yevgenievich Lvov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgy_Lvov), a member of the [Constitutional Democratic party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitutional_Democratic_party) (KD). The socialists had formed their rival body, the [Petrograd Soviet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petrograd_Soviet) (or workers' council) four days earlier. The Petrograd Soviet and the Provisional Government competed for power over Russia.

## Between February and throughout October: "Dual Power" (*dvoevlastie*)

The effective power of the Provisional Government was challenged by the authority of an institution that claimed to represent the will of workers and soldiers and could, in fact, mobilize and control these groups during the early months of the revolution – the Petrograd Soviet [Council] of Workers' Deputies. The model for the soviet were workers' councils that had been established in scores of Russian cities during the 1905 revolution. In February 1917, striking workers elected deputies to represent them and socialist activists began organizing a citywide council to unite these deputies with representatives of the socialist parties. On 27 February, socialist Duma deputies, mainly [Mensheviks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menshevik) and Socialist Revolutionaries, took the lead in organizing a citywide council. The Petrograd Soviet met in the [Tauride Palace](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tauride_Palace), the same building where the new government was taking shape.

The leaders of the Petrograd Soviet believed that they represented particular classes of the population, not the whole nation. They also believed Russia was not ready for socialism. So they saw their role as limited to pressuring hesitant "bourgeoisie" to rule and to introduce extensive democratic reforms in Russia (the replacement of the monarchy by a republic, guaranteed civil rights, a democratic police and army, abolition of religious and ethnic discrimination, preparation of elections to a constituent assembly, and so on). They met in the same building as the emerging Provisional Government not to compete with the Duma Committee for state power but to best exert pressure on the new government, to act, in other words, as a popular democratic lobby.

The relationship between these two major powers was complex from the beginning and would shape the politics of 1917. The representatives of the Provisional Government agreed to "take into account the opinions of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies", though they were also determined to prevent "interference in the actions of the government", which would create "an unacceptable situation of dual power." In fact, this was precisely what was being created, though this "dual power" (dvoevlastie) was the result less of the actions or attitudes of the leaders of these two institutions than of actions outside their control, especially the ongoing social movement taking place on the streets of Russia’s cities, in factories and shops, in barracks and in the trenches, and in the villages.



The 2nd Moscow Women Death Battalion protecting the Winter Palace as the last guards of the stronghold.

A series of political crises – see the chronology below – in the relationship between population and government and between the Provisional Government and the soviets (which developed into a nationwide movement with a national leadership, The All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets (VTsIK)) undermined the authority of the Provisional Government but also of the moderate socialist leaders of the Soviet. Although the Soviet leadership initially refused to participate in the "bourgeois" Provisional Government, [Alexander Kerensky](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Kerensky), a young and popular lawyer and a member of the [Socialist Revolutionary Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist-Revolutionaries) (SRP), agreed to join the new cabinet, and became an increasingly central figure in the government, eventually taking leadership of the Provisional Government. As minister of war and later Prime Minister, Kerensky promoted freedom of speech, released thousands of political prisoners, did his very best to continue the war effort and even organized another offensive (which, however, was no more successful than its predecessors). Nevertheless, Kerensky still faced several great challenges, highlighted by the soldiers, urban workers and peasants, who claimed that they had gained nothing by the revolution:

* Other political groups were trying to undermine him.
* Heavy military losses were being suffered on the front.
* The soldiers were dissatisfied and demoralized and had started to defect. (On arrival back in Russia, these soldiers were either imprisoned or sent straight back into the front.)
* There was enormous discontent with Russia's involvement in the war, and many were calling for an end to it.
* There were great shortages of food and supplies, which was difficult to remedy because of the wartime economic conditions.

The political group that proved most troublesome for Kerensky, and would eventually overthrow him, was the Bolshevik Party, led by [Vladimir Lenin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Lenin). Lenin had been living in exile in neutral Switzerland and, due to democratization of politics after the February Revolution, which legalized formerly banned political parties, he perceived the opportunity for his Marxist revolution. Although return to Russia had become a possibility, the war made it logistically difficult. Eventually, German officials arranged for Lenin to pass through their territory, hoping that his activities would weaken Russia or even – if the Bolsheviks came to power – lead to Russia's withdrawal from the war. Lenin and his associates, however, had to agree to travel to Russia in a sealed train: Germany would not take the chance that he would foment revolution in Germany. After passing through the front, he arrived in Petrograd in April 1917.



Street demonstration on [Nevsky Prospekt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nevsky_Prospekt) in [Petrograd](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Petersburg) just after troops of the Provisional Government opened fire in the July Days

With Lenin's arrival, the popularity of the [Bolsheviks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bolsheviks) increased steadily. Over the course of the spring, public dissatisfaction with the Provisional Government and the war, in particular among workers, soldiers and peasants, pushed these groups to radical parties. Despite growing support for the Bolsheviks, buoyed by maxims that called most famously for "all power to the Soviets," the party held very little real power in the moderate-dominated Petrograd Soviet. In fact, historians such as Sheila Fitzpatrick have asserted that Lenin's exhortations for the Soviet Council to take power were intended to arouse indignation both with the Provisional Government, whose policies were viewed as conservative, and the Soviet itself, which was viewed as subservient to the conservative government. By some historians' accounts, Lenin and his followers were unprepared for how their groundswell of support, especially among influential worker and soldier groups, would translate into real power in the summer of 1917.



Soviets attacking the Czar's police in the early days of the March Revolution

On 18 June, the Provisional Government launched an attack against Germany that failed miserably. Soon after, the government ordered soldiers to go to the front, reneging on a promise. The soldiers refused to follow the new orders. The arrival of radical [Kronstadt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kronstadt) sailors – who had tried and executed many officers, including one admiral – further fueled the growing revolutionary atmosphere. The sailors and soldiers, along with Petrograd workers, took to the streets in violent protest, calling for "all power to the Soviets." The revolt, however, was disowned by Lenin and the Bolshevik leaders and dissipated within a few days. In the aftermath, Lenin fled to [Finland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Finland) under threat of arrest while [Trotsky](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trotsky), among other prominent Bolsheviks, was arrested. The [July Days](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/July_Days) confirmed the popularity of the anti-war, radical Bolsheviks, but their unpreparedness at the moment of revolt was an embarrassing gaffe that lost them support among their main constituent groups: soldiers and workers.

The Bolshevik failure in the July Days proved temporary. The Bolsheviks had undergone a spectacular growth in membership. Whereas, in February 1917, the Bolsheviks were limited to only 24,000 members, by September 1917 there were 200,000 members of the Bolshevik faction. Previously, the Bolsheviks had been in the minority in the two leading cities of Russia—St. Petersburg and Moscow behind the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries, by September the Bolsheviks were in the majority in both cities. Furthermore, the Bolshevik-controlled Moscow Regional Bureau of the Party also controlled the Party organizations of the thirteen (13) provinces around Moscow. These thirteen provinces held 37% of Russia's population and 20% of the membership of the Bolshevik faction.

In August, poor or misleading communication led General [Lavr Kornilov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lavr_Kornilov), the recently appointed Supreme Commander of Russian military forces, to believe that the Petrograd government had already been captured by radicals, or was in serious danger thereof. In response, he ordered troops to Petrograd to pacify the city. To secure his position, Kerensky had to ask for Bolshevik assistance. He also sought help from the Petrograd Soviet, which called upon armed Red Guards to "defend the revolution". The [Kornilov Affair](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kornilov_Affair) failed largely due to the efforts of the Bolsheviks, whose influence over railroad and telegraph workers proved vital in stopping the movement of troops. With his coup failing, Kornilov surrendered and was relieved of his position. The Bolsheviks' role in stopping the attempted coup further strengthened their position.

In early September, the Petrograd Soviet freed all jailed Bolsheviks and Trotsky became chairman of the Petrograd Soviet. Growing numbers of socialists and lower-class Russians viewed the government less and less as a force in support of their needs and interests. The Bolsheviks benefited as the only major organized opposition party that had refused to compromise with the Provisional Government, and they benefited from growing frustration and even disgust with other parties, such as the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries, who stubbornly refused to break with the idea of national unity across all classes.

In Finland, Lenin had worked on his book [*State and Revolution*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_and_Revolution) and continued to lead his party, writing newspaper articles and policy decrees. By October, he returned to Petrograd (St. Petersburg), aware that the increasingly radical city presented him no legal danger and a second opportunity for revolution. Recognizing the strength of the Bolsheviks, Lenin began pressing for the immediate overthrow of the Kerensky government by the Bolsheviks. Lenin was of the opinion that taking power should occur in both St. Petersburg and Moscow simultaneously, parenthetically stating that it made no difference which city rose up first, but expressing his opinion that Moscow may well rise up first. The Bolshevik Central Committee drafted a resolution, calling for the dissolution of the Provisional Government in favor of the Petrograd Soviet. The resolution was passed 10–2 ([Lev Kamenev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lev_Kamenev) and [Grigory Zinoviev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grigory_Zinoviev) prominently dissenting) and the [October Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/October_Revolution) began.

## October Revolution

Main article: [October Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/October_Revolution)



[Vladimir Lenin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Lenin), leader of the [Bolsheviks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bolshevik), speaking at a meeting in [Sverdlov Square](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sverdlov_Square) in [Moscow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moscow), with [Leon Trotsky](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leon_Trotsky) and [Lev Kamenev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lev_Kamenev) adjacent to the right of the podium

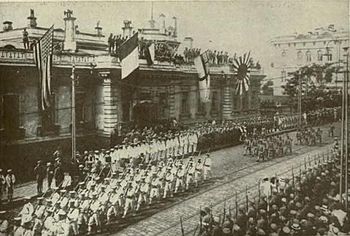
The October Revolution was led by [Vladimir Lenin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Lenin) and was based upon Lenin's writing on the ideas of [Karl Marx](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Marx), a political ideology often known as [Marxism-Leninism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxism-Leninism). It marked the beginning of the spread of [communism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communism) in the 20th century. It was far less sporadic than the revolution of February and came about as the result of deliberate planning and coordinated activity to that end.

Though Lenin was the leader of the Bolshevik Party, it has been argued that since Lenin was not present during the actual takeover of the Winter Palace, it was really [Trotsky's](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leon_Trotsky) organization and direction that led the revolution, merely spurred by the motivation Lenin instigated within his party. Critics on the Right have long argued that the financial and logistical assistance of German intelligence via their key agent, [Alexander Parvus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Parvus) was a key component as well, though historians are divided, since there is little evidence supporting that claim.

On 7 November 1917, [Bolshevik](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bolshevik) leader [Vladimir Lenin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Lenin) led his leftist revolutionaries in a revolt against the ineffective Provisional Government (Russia was still using the [Julian Calendar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julian_Calendar) at the time, so period references show a 25 October date). The October revolution ended the phase of the revolution instigated in February, replacing Russia's short-lived provisional parliamentary government with government by [soviets](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_(council)), local councils elected by bodies of workers and peasants. Liberal and monarchist forces, loosely organized into the [White Army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_Army), immediately went to war against the Bolsheviks' [Red Army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Army), in a series of battles that would become known as the Russian Civil War.

Soviet membership was initially freely elected, but many members of the [Socialist-Revolutionary Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist-Revolutionary_Party), anarchists, and other leftists created opposition to the Bolsheviks through the soviets themselves. When it became clear that the Bolsheviks had little support outside of the industrialized areas of Saint Petersburg and Moscow, they simply barred non-Bolsheviks from membership in the soviets. Not surprisingly, this caused mass domestic tension with many individuals who called for another series of political reform, revolting, and calling for "a third Russian revolution," a movement that received a significant amount of support. The most notable instances of this anti-Bolshevik mentality were expressed in the [Tambov rebellion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tambov_rebellion), 1919–1921, and the [Kronstadt rebellion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kronstadt_rebellion) in March 1921. These movements, which made a wide range of demands and lacked effective coordination, were eventually defeated along with the White Army during the [Civil War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Civil_War).

## Civil war



American, British, and Japanese Troops parade through Vladivostok in armed support to the White Army

Main articles: [Russian Civil War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Civil_War) and [Allied intervention in the Russian Civil War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allied_intervention_in_the_Russian_Civil_War)

The Russian Civil War, which broke out in 1918 shortly after the revolution, brought death and suffering to millions of people regardless of their political orientation. The war was fought mainly between the [Red Army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Army) ("Reds"), consisting of the uprising majority led by the Bolshevik minority, and the ["Whites"](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_Movement) – army officers and Cossacks, the "bourgeoisie", and political groups ranging from the far Right to the Socialist Revolutionaries who opposed the drastic restructuring championed by the Bolsheviks following the collapse of the Provisional Government to the soviets (under clear Bolshevik dominance). The Whites had backing from nations such as Great Britain, France, USA and Japan, while the Reds possessed internal support which proved to be much more effective. Though the Allied nations, using external interference, provided substantial military aid to the loosely knit anti-Bolshevik forces, they were ultimately defeated.

The Bolsheviks firstly assumed power in Petrograd, expanding their rule outwards, eventually reaching the Easterly Siberian Russian coast 4 years after the war in [Vladivostok](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladivostok), an occupation that is believed to have ended all significant military campaigns in the nation. Less than one year later, the last area controlled by the White Army, the [Ayano-Maysky District](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ayano-Maysky_District), directly to the north of the [Krai](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krai) containing Vladivostok, was given up when General [Anatoly Pepelyayev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anatoly_Pepelyayev) capitulated in 1923.

Several revolts were initiated against the Bolsheviks and their army near the end of the war, notably the Kronstadt Rebellion. This was a naval mutiny engineered by Soviet Baltic sailors, former Red Army soldiers, and the people of Kronstadt. This armed uprising was fought against the antagonizing Bolshevik economic policies that farmers were subjected to, including seizures of grain crops by the Communists. This all amounted to large-scale discontent. When delegates representing the Kronstadt sailors arrived at Petrograd for negotiations, they raised 15 demands primarily pertaining to the Russian right to freedom The Government firmly denounced the rebellions and labelled the requests as a reminder of the Social Revolutionaries, a political party that was popular among Soviets before Lenin, but refused to cooperate with the Bolshevik Army. The Government then responded with an armed suppression of these revolts and suffered 10 thousand casualties before entering the city of Kronstadt. This ended the rebellions fairly quickly, causing many of the rebels to flee to political exile.

During the Civil War, [Nestor Makhno](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nestor_Makhno) led a Ukrainian [anarchist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anarchist) movement, the [Black Army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Army) allied to the Bolsheviks thrice, one of the powers ending the alliance each time. However, a Bolshevik force under [Mikhail Frunze](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail_Frunze) destroyed the [Makhnovist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Makhnovist) movement, when the Makhnovists refused to merge into the [Red Army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Army). In addition, the so-called "[Green Army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_armies)" (peasants defending their property against the opposing forces) played a secondary role in the war, mainly in the Ukraine.

## Death of the imperial family

Main article: [Shooting of the Romanov family](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shooting_of_the_Romanov_family)

In early March, the Provisional Government placed Nicholas and his family under house arrest in the [Alexander Palace](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Palace) at [Tsarskoe Selo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tsarskoe_Selo), 15 miles (24 km) south of Petrograd. In August 1917 the [Kerensky](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Kerensky) government evacuated the Romanovs to [Tobolsk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tobolsk) in the [Urals](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urals), allegedly to protect them from the rising tide of revolution during the [Red Terror](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Terror). After the Bolsheviks came to power in October 1917, the conditions of their imprisonment grew stricter and talk of putting Nicholas on trial increased. As the counter revolutionary White movement gathered force, leading to full-scale civil war by the summer, the Romanovs were moved during April and May 1918 to [Yekaterinburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yekaterinburg), a militant Bolshevik stronghold.

During the early morning of 16 July, at approximately 01:30, Nicholas, Alexandra, their children, their physician, and several servants were taken into the basement and killed. According to Edvard Radzinsky and Dmitrii Volkogonov, the order came directly from Vladimir Lenin and Yakov Sverdlov in Moscow. That the order came from the top has long been believed, although there is a lack of hard evidence. It has been argued that the execution may have been carried out on the initiative of local Bolshevik officials, or that it was an option approved in Moscow should White troops approach Yekaterinburg. Radzinsky noted that Lenin's bodyguard personally delivered the telegram ordering the execution and that he was ordered to destroy the evidence.

## The Russian revolution and the world

Main article: [Revolutions of 1917–23](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolutions_of_1917%E2%80%9323)

[Leon Trotsky](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leon_Trotsky) said that the goal of [socialism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialism) in Russia would not be realized without the success of the [world revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_revolution). Indeed, a [revolutionary wave](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolutionary_wave) caused by the Russian Revolution lasted until 1923. Despite initial hopes for success in the [German Revolution of 1918–1919](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Revolution_of_1918%E2%80%931919), in the short-lived [Hungarian Soviet Republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungarian_Soviet_Republic) and others like it, no other [Marxist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxist) movement at the time succeeded in keeping power in its hands.

This issue is subject to conflicting views on the communist history by various Marxist groups and parties. [Joseph Stalin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Stalin) later rejected this idea, stating that [socialism was possible in one country](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialism_in_one_country).

The confusion regarding Stalin's position on the issue stems from the fact that he, after Lenin's death in 1924, successfully used Lenin's argument – the argument that socialism's success needs the workers of other countries in order to happen – to defeat his competitors within the party by accusing them of betraying Lenin and, therefore, the ideals of the October Revolution.

## Chronologies

### Chronology of events leading to the Revolution of 1917

*Dates are correct for the* [*Julian calendar*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julian_calendar)*, which was used in Russia until 1918. It was twelve days behind the* [*Gregorian calendar*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregorian_calendar) *during the 19th century and thirteen days behind it during the 20th century.*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Date(s)** | | **Event(s)** |
| 1855 | | Start of reign of [Tsar Alexander II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_II_of_Russia). |
| 1861 | | [Emancipation of the serfs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emancipation_of_the_serfs). |
| 1874–81 | | Growing anti-government terrorist movement and government reaction. |
| 1881 | | Alexander II assassinated by revolutionaries; succeeded by [Alexander III](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_III_of_Russia). |
| 1883 | | First Russian [Marxist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxism) group formed. |
| 1894 | | Start of reign of [Nicholas II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicholas_II_of_Russia). |
| 1898 | | First Congress of [Russian Social Democratic Labor Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Social_Democratic_Labour_Party) (RSDLP). |
| 1900 | | Foundation of [Socialist Revolutionary Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist_Revolutionary_Party) (SR). |
| 1903 | | Second Congress of Russian Social Democratic Labor Party. Beginning of split between [Bolsheviks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bolshevik) and [Mensheviks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menshevik). |
| 1904–5 | | [Russo-Japanese War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russo-Japanese_War); Russia loses war. |
| 1905 | | [Russian Revolution of 1905](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Revolution_of_1905). |
| 1905 | January | [Bloody Sunday](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bloody_Sunday_1905) in [Saint Petersburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Petersburg). |
| 1905 | June | [Battleship *Potemkin* uprising](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_battleship_Potemkin) at [Odessa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odessa) on the [Black Sea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Sea) (see movie [*The Battleship Potemkin*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Battleship_Potemkin)). |
| 1905 | October | General strike, [Saint Petersburg Soviet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Petersburg_Soviet) formed; [October Manifesto](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/October_Manifesto): Imperial agreement on elections to the State [Duma](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duma). |
| 1906 | | First State [Duma](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duma). Prime Minister: [Petr Stolypin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petr_Stolypin). Agrarian reforms begin. |
| 1907 | February–June | Second State Duma |
| 1907 | | Third State Duma, until 1912. |
| 1911 | | Stolypin assassinated. |
| 1912 | | Fourth State Duma, until 1917. [Bolshevik](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bolshevik)/[Menshevik](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menshevik) split final. |
| 1914 | | Germany declares war on Russia. |
| 1914 | 30 July | The All Russian Zemstvo Union for the Relief of Sick and Wounded Soldiers is created with Lvov as president. |
| 1914 | August–November | Russia suffers heavy defeats and a large shortage of supplies, including food and munitions, but holds onto Austrian Galicia. |
| 1914 | 3 August | Germany declares war on Russia, causing a brief sense of patriotic union amongst the Russian nation and a downturn in striking. |
| 1914 | 18 August | St. Petersburg is renamed Petrograd as 'Germanic' names are changed to sound more Russian, and hence more patriotic. |
| 1914 | 5 November | Bolshevik members of the Duma are arrested; they are later tried and exiled to Siberia. |
| 1915 | | Serious defeats, Nicholas II declares himself Commander in Chief. |
| 1915 | 19 February | Great Britain and France accept Russia's claims to Istanbul and other Turkish lands. |
| 1915 | 5 June | Strikers shot at in Kostromá; casualties. |
| 1915 | 9 July | [The Great Retreat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Great_Retreat) begins, as Russian forces pull back out of Galicia and Russian Poland into Russia proper. |
| 1915 | 9 August | The Duma's bourgeois parties form the 'Progressive bloc' to push for better government and reform; includes the Kadets, Octobrist groups and Nationalists. |
| 1915 | 10 August | Strikers shot at in Ivánovo-Voznesénsk; casualties. |
| 1915 | 17–19 August | Strikers in Petrograd protest at the deaths in Ivánovo-Voznesénsk. |
| 1915 | 23 August | Reacting to war failures and a hostile Duma, the Tsar takes over as Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, prorogues the Duma and moves to military headquarters at Mogilev. Central government begins to seize up. |
| 1916 | | Food and fuel shortages and high prices. [Progressive Bloc](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Progressive_Bloc_(Russia)) formed. |
| 1916 | January–December | Despite successes in the Brusilov offensive, the Russian war effort is still characterized by shortages, poor command, death and desertion. Away from the front, the conflict causes starvation, inflation and a torrent of refugees. Both soldiers and civilians blame the incompetence of the Tsar and his government. |
| 1916 | 6 February | Duma reconvened. |
| 1916 | 29 February | After a month of strikes at the Putílov Factory, the government conscripts the workers and takes charge of production. Protest strikes follow. |
| 1916 | 20 June | Duma prorogued. |
| 1916 | October | Troops from 181st Regiment help striking Russkii Renault workers fight against the Police. |
| 1916 | 1 November | Miliukov gives his 'Is this stupidity or treason?' speech in reconvened Duma. |
| 1916 | 29 December | [Rasputin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rasputin) is killed by Prince Yusupov. |
| 1916 | 30 December | The Tsar is warned that his army will not support him against a revolution. |
| 1917 | | Strikes, mutinies, street demonstrations lead to the fall of autocracy. |

### Expanded chronology of events during the Revolution of 1917

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| [**Gregorian Date**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregorian_Date) | [**Julian Date**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julian_Date) | **Event** |
|  | January | Strikes and unrest in [Petrograd](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petrograd). |
|  | February | [February Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/February_Revolution). |
| 8 March | 23 February | International Women's Day: strikes and demonstrations in Petrograd, growing over the next few days. |
| 11 March | 26 February | 50 demonstrators killed in [Znamenskaya Square](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Znamenskaya_Square) Tsar Nicholas II prorogues the State Duma and orders commander of Petrograd military district to suppress disorders with force. |
| 12 March | 27 February | \* Troops refuse to fire on demonstrators, deserters. Prisons, courts, and police bombs attacked and looted by angry crowds.   * [Okhrana](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Okhrana) buildings set on fire. Garrison joins revolutionaries. * [Petrograd](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petrograd) Soviet formed. * Formation of Provisional Committee of the Duma by liberals from Constitutional Democratic Party (Kadets). |
| 14 March | 1 March | Order No.1 of the Petrograd Soviet. |
| 15 March | 2 March | [Nicholas II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicholas_II_of_Russia) abdicates. [Provisional Government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Provisional_Government,_1917) formed under Prime Minister [Prince Lvov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prince_Georgy_Yevgenyevich_Lvov). |
| 16 April | 3 April | Return of [Vladimir Lenin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Lenin) to Russia. He publishes his [April Theses](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lenin%27s_April_Theses). |
| 3–4 May | 20–21 April | "April Days": mass demonstrations by workers, soldiers, and others in the streets of Petrograd and Moscow triggered by the publication of the Foreign Minister [Pavel Miliukov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pavel_Miliukov)'s [note](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miliukov_note) to the allies, which was interpreted as affirming commitment to the war policies of the old government. First Provisional Government falls. |
| 18 May | 5 May | First Coalition Government forms when socialists, representatives of the Soviet leadership, agree to enter the cabinet of the Provisional Government. [Alexander Kerensky](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Kerensky), the only socialist already in the government, made minister of war and navy. |
| 16 June | 3 June | First All-Russian Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies opens in Petrograd. Closed on 24 June. Elects Central Executive Committee of Soviets (VTsIK), headed by Mensheviks and SRs. |
| 23 June | 10 June | Planned Bolshevik demonstration in Petrograd banned by the Soviet. |
| 29 June | 16 June | Kerensky orders offensive against Austro-Hungarian forces. Initial success only. |
| 1 July | 18 June | Official Soviet demonstration in Petrograd for unity is unexpectedly dominated by Bolshevik slogans: "Down with the Ten Capitalist Ministers", "All Power to the Soviets". |
| 15 July | 2 July | Russian offensive ends. [Trotsky](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leon_Trotsky) joins Bolsheviks. |
| 16–17 July | 3–4 July | The "[July Days](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/July_Days)"; mass armed demonstrations in Petrograd, encouraged by the Bolsheviks, demanding "All Power to the Soviets". |
| 19 July | 6 July | German and [Austro-Hungarian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austria-Hungary) counter-attack. Russians retreat in panic, sacking the town of [Tarnopol](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tarnopol). Arrest of Bolshevik leaders ordered. |
| 20 July | 7 July | Lvov resigns and asks Kerensky to become Prime Minister and form a new government. Established 25 July. |
| 4 August | 22 July | Trotsky and Lunacharskii arrested. |
| 8 September | 26 August | Second coalition government ends. |
| 8–12 September | 26–30 August | "Kornilov mutiny". Begins when the commander-in-chief of the Russian army, General Lavr Kornilov, demands (or is believed by Kerensky to demand) that the government give him all civil and military authority and moves troops against Petrograd. |
| 13 September | 31 August | Majority of deputies of the Petrograd Soviet approve a Bolshevik resolution for an all-socialist government excluding the bourgeoisie. |
| 14 September | 1 September | Russia declared a republic. |
| 17 September | 4 September | Trotsky and others freed. |
| 18 September | 5 September | Bolshevik resolution on the government wins majority vote in Moscow Soviet. |
| 2 October | 19 September | Moscow Soviet elects executive committee and new presidium, with Bolshevik majorities, and the Bolshevik [Viktor Nogin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viktor_Nogin) as chairman. |
| 8 October | 25 September | Third coalition government formed. Bolshevik majority in [Petrograd Soviet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petrograd_Soviet) elects Bolshevik Presidium and Trotsky as chairman. |
| 23 October | 10 October | Bolshevik Central Committee meeting approves armed uprising. |
| 24 October | 11 October | Congress of Soviets of the Northern Region, until 13 October. |
| 2 November | 20 October | First meeting of the [Military Revolutionary Committee](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_Revolutionary_Committee) of the [Petrograd Soviet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petrograd_Soviet). |
| 7 November | 25 October | [October Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/October_Revolution) is launched as MRC directs armed workers and soldiers to capture key buildings in Petrograd. [Winter Palace](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winter_Palace) attacked at 9:40pm and captured at 2am. Kerensky flees Petrograd. Opening of the [2nd All-Russian Congress of Soviets](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=2nd_All-Russian_Congress_of_Soviets&action=edit&redlink=1). |
| 8 November | 26 October | Second Congress of Soviets: Mensheviks and right SR delegates walk out in protest against the previous day's events. Congress approves transfer of state authority into its own hands and local power into the hands of local soviets of workers', soldiers', and peasants' deputies, abolishes capital punishment, issues [Decree on Peace](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decree_on_Peace) and [Decree on Land](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decree_on_Land), and approves the formation of an all-Bolshevik government, the [Council of People's Commissars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council_of_People%27s_Commissars) (Sovnarkom), with Lenin as chairman. |

## Cultural portrayal

The Russian Revolution has been portrayed in several [films](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Film).

* *Arsenal* ' [(IMDB profile)](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0019649/). Written and directed by [Aleksandr Dovzhenko](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aleksandr_Dovzhenko).
* *Konets Sankt-Peterburga* AKA *The End of Saint Petersburg* [(IMDB profile)](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0018066/).
* *Lenin v 1918 godu* ***AKA*** *Lenin in 1918* [(IMDB profile)](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0031564/). Directed by Mikhail Romm and E. Aron (co-director).
* [*October: Ten Days That Shook the World*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/October:_Ten_Days_That_Shook_the_World) [(IMDB profile)](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0018217/). Directed by [Sergei Eisenstein](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergei_Eisenstein) and [Grigori Aleksandrov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grigori_Aleksandrov). Runtimes: Sweden:104 min, USA:95 min. Country: Soviet Union. Black and White. Silent. 1927.
* [*The End of Saint Petersburg*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_End_of_Saint_Petersburg), directed by [Vsevolod Pudovkin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vsevolod_Pudovkin), [USSR](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USSR), 1927.
* [*Reds*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reds_(film)) [(IMDB profile)](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0082979/). Directed by [Warren Beatty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warren_Beatty), 1981. It is based on the book [Ten Days that Shook the World](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ten_Days_that_Shook_the_World).
* [*Anastasia*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anastasia_(1997_film)) [(IMDB profile)](http://imdb.com/title/tt0118617/), an American animated feature, directed by [Don Bluth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Don_Bluth) and [Gary Goldman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gary_Goldman), 1997.
* [*Doctor Zhivago*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doctor_Zhivago_(1965_film)), an drama-romance-war film directed by [David Lean](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Lean), 1965, filmed in Europe with a largely European cast, loosely based on the famous novel of the same name by [Boris Pasternak](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boris_Pasternak).
* [*The White Guard*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_White_Guard), [Mikhail Bulgakov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail_Bulgakov), 1926. Partially autobiographical novel, portraying the life of one family torn apart by uncertainty of the Civil War times. Also, *Dni Turbinykh* [(IMDB profile)](http://imdb.com/title/tt0167123/), 1976 – film based on the novel.

## See also

* [Arthur Ransome](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Ransome)
* [February Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/February_Revolution)
* [October Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/October_Revolution)
* [Jacob Schiff](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob_Schiff)
* [John Reed (journalist)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Reed_(journalist))
  + [Ten Days that Shook the World](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ten_Days_that_Shook_the_World)
* [Red Terror](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Terror)
* [White Terror (Russia)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_Terror_(Russia))

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