

History Revolutions: Russia

Teach Yourself Series

Topic 3: Trigger factors that contributed to the revolution

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SAMPLE

Factors that contributed to the Revolution

When investigating why there was a revolution in Russia in October 1917, historians generally identify long term causes, intermediate causes and an immediate cause that triggered the revolution. There is often a list of causes generally agreed to have played their part in creating the revolution; however, historians disagree about the weight that should be given to each factor.

Key terminology

As it appears in Unit 3 and 4

In studying the years leading to the Russian Revolution, you will use these terms. It is important you have a working knowledge of them.

Abdication: the resignation of the monarch from their political leadership.

Absolute monarchy: a political system in which the monarch rules with personal authority

Autocracy: political system ruled by one person, in this instance, by the Tsar.

Bolshevik Party: In 1903 the Russian Social Democratic Party split into two factions, one was the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, the other the Mensheviks. The Bolsheviks believed a 'revolutionary vanguard' should use professional revolutionaries to quickly create a revolution. The Bolshevik Party seized power in October 1917.

Bureaucracy: the civil service or public service, the system of officials and administrators that ensure the government's work is carried out.

Capitalism: an economic system in which private individuals and corporations own the means of production, and use their wealth for the creation of more wealth.

Civil war: a war fought between two or more groups within a country.

Class consciousness: a class (such as workers) becoming aware that they as a group, they are being exploited.

Communism: a system of economic and social organisation in which the means of production - land, factories, industry, transport - is controlled by the community as a whole.

Communist Manifesto: Karl Marx and Frederick Engels produced the book in 1848, in which Marx outlined his theory.

Cossacks: people from the Don region; Cossack regiments of mounted horsemen were used by the Tsar to enforce law and order, often brutally.

Dictatorship of the proletariat: the means of production - factories, farms and transport - would be controlled by the workers rather than the capitalists.

Duma: Russian parliament. The first Duma was established after the 1905 Revolution, but the four Dumas between 1906 and 1917 were generally ineffective, with very limited influence on the Tsar's rule.

Feudalism: the medieval social system whereby the privileged, landowning class controlled the peasants who worked the land.

Gentry: the nobility or privileged class in Russia's old regime.

Haemophilia: hereditary disease in which blood fails to clot.

Kulaks: richer peasants.

Marxism: Karl Marx developed his theory that history passes through a series of stages, from feudalism to capitalism, to socialism and communism.

Menshevik Party: In 1903 the Russian Social Democratic Party split into two factions, the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks. The Mensheviks, led by Martov, favoured a gradual approach to revolution.

Mir: village governments.

New regime: the political, economic and social system established by the revolution.

Okhrana: the Tsar's secret police.

Old regime: the government that existed before the revolution. For Russia, this generally applies to the Tsarist regime, overthrown in the February 1917 Revolution. However, the Provisional Government could also be considered the 'old regime', because it was overthrown in October.

Orthodox Church: For centuries, the official religion of Russia had been Orthodox Christianity. The Church was considered one of the pillars that held up the Tsarist regime, and until 1917 it was integral to many aspects of social life, including education.

Proletariat: industrial workers.

Romanov: the dynasty that ruled Russia from 1613 to 1917.

Serf: a person whose service is attached to the land, and transferred with it.

Socialism: political and economic system in which the society as a whole owns the means of production.

Soviet: democratically formed councils of workers.

Tsar: Absolute and autocratic ruler of Russia.

Tsarevich: the heir to the Russian throne.

Tsarina: The tsar's wife or consort.

Tsarism: the system ruled over by the tsar. The old regime.

Utopia: a perfect society.

War Communism: between 1918 and 1920, the new regime imposed strict control of farms, industry and transport, and used forced requisitioning to supply government needs during the Civil War.

Zemstvos: local councils of elected representatives of peasants and landowners.

Review Questions

1. From the list of terms, decide whether the word relates to politics, economics, social, culture or ideology and place the words in the appropriate column. Some words may fit into more than one column.

Political	Economic	Social	Cultural	Ideology

Long term causes of the Russian Revolution

As it appears in Unit 3 and 4

Cause 1

The Tsarist system.

At the start of the 20th century, Tsarist Russia was the last of the great European autocracies. By then, most European powers had some form of democratic government and constitutional limits on royal power. The Tsars of Russia, however, had maintained their autocratic system and tried to stop opposition. It was essentially a police state, under constant surveillance from the Okhrana, with strict censorship. In the 19th century, education was not promoted because an educated populace was seen as a challenge to the Tsarist authority.

Cause 2

Backward economy

Russia's economy was still close to a feudal system. Serfdom was abolished in 1861, but many parts of Russia continued to have subsistence farming. Eighty percent of the population were peasants and there were great inequalities in the distribution of wealth. Peasants and many urban workers lived and worked in appalling conditions. Farming methods were like those used by people in the Middle Ages, with inefficient strip farming still operating in many parts of Russia. Average harvest returns per acre in Russia in c. 1900 were approximately one-third what they were in Germany at that time.

A well-known photograph taken in the early 1900s shows approximately 18 women, yoked, hauling a barge on the Sura River. It tells us so much about the primitive economy and backward social attitudes that women were treated in this way.

Some in the state security actively discouraged industrialisation because it would make security more difficult. Most taxation revenue came from the peasants, who paid land tax and taxes on necessities.

Intermediate causes of the Russian Revolution

As it appears in Unit 3 and 4

Cause 3

Rapid industrialisation

It may appear paradoxical that a backward agrarian economy and rapid industrialisation can both be causes of the Russian Revolution. Rapid change of any kind often causes people to feel anxious and unsettled, and there is usually a period of adjustment from stability to change in which living conditions may actually become worse. This happened in Russia when it began to industrialise rapidly from 1890. Some peasants moved from remote villages to towns and cities; these were rapidly expanding and usually had few facilities to cope with population influx. People lost their traditional village support. Photographs taken in urban workers accommodation in c. 1900 show overcrowded rooms and crowded soup kitchens for unemployed workers.

From 1890, Russia's economy grew rapidly, especially in those industries that were important measures of industrialisation, such as coal production, iron and steel. Despite the rapid growth, however, by 1910 Russia was still far behind industrialised countries such as United Kingdom, USA and Germany. For example, in 1913, coal production in the United Kingdom was ten-times that in Russia; USA's coal production at this time was almost 190 times that of Russia!

Solutions to Review Questions

1.

Political	Economic	Social	Cultural	Ideology
<i>abdication</i> <i>absolute monarchy</i> <i>autocracy</i> <i>Bolshevik Party</i> <i>bureaucracy</i> <i>Cossacks</i> <i>Dictatorship of the Proletariat</i> <i>Duma</i> <i>Marxism</i> <i>Menshevik Party</i> <i>mir</i> <i>new regime</i> <i>Romanov</i> <i>soviet</i> <i>tsar</i> <i>tsaravich</i> <i>tsarina</i> <i>zemstvos</i>	<i>capitalism</i> <i>communism</i> <i>Communist Manifesto</i> <i>socialism</i> <i>War Communism</i>	<i>civil war</i> <i>class consciousness</i> <i>feudalism</i> <i>gentry</i> <i>haemophilia</i> <i>kulaks</i> <i>serf</i>	<i>Orthodox Church</i>	<i>communism</i> <i>Marxism</i> <i>socialism</i> <i>utopia</i>

2.

Long term causes	Intermediate causes	Trigger - immediate causes
1. Tsarist system - hundreds of years	3. Rapid industrialisation - from 1890	5. World War One 1914-1917
2. Backward economy - 19th and early 20th century	4. Tsar Nicholas II - 1894-1917	6. Bolshevik leadership during 1917

3. *Your sentence could include any two of: most farming was subsistence; feudal system of strip farming still in operation; average harvest returns per acre one-third those of Germany at that time; women still used as virtual beasts of burden.*
4. *War was a crucial factor in the February 1917 Revolution as Russia suffered numerous war losses and food shortages. The Tsar refused to listen to his advisors and reform the system. The Tsar appointed himself Minister for War, and in his absence, it appeared the country was being run by the German-born Tsarina and her advisor, Rasputin. The economic, political and social chaos produced by the war led to the collapse of Tsarism.*
War played a part in the October 1917 Revolution. The Provisional Government continued to fight the war, and the same kinds of losses and shortages began to occur as had prior to February. Lenin and the Bolsheviks built on this hatred of war to gain support for the Bolsheviks, which encouraged their seizure of power in October 1917.
- 5.
- a. *Buchanan tells us that Tsar Nicholas allowed the bureaucracy to disregard the promises he had made in the October Manifesto 1905, and he did not have the capability of dealing with the injustices and scandals in his administration.*
 - b. *Buchanan states that the 'ruling bureaucracy' did not put into place the reforms Nicholas had set out in the October Manifesto 1905.*
 - c. *Buchanan saw the causes of the February Revolution as:*
 1. *The regime itself*
 2. *A weak Tsar*
 3. *Corrupt and scandal-ridden Church*
 4. *World War*
- 6.
- a. *Petrograd residents had many daily hardships, such as heavy and continual rain, very cold weather, bombing raids by Zeppelins, electricity for only a few hours every night, few candles or kerosene for lamps, robberies, food shortages.*
 - b. *Two pieces of evidence suggest that the people of Petrograd did not equally share the hardships of war. They are: while many people went without electricity and lighting, others attended theatres and the ballet; while many had food shortages, some ladies continued with elaborate afternoon teas.*
 - c. *The differences in values of the urban poor, a member of the Imperial School of Pages and a member of the minor bureaucratic set: the poor had to 'fight' to preserve what little they had, as in establishing armed guards in apartments to keep out robbers; the student of the Imperial School of Pages still clung to his belief in the Tsar, still honouring the 'empty Imperial box' at the theatre; the members of the minor bureaucracy continued to place importance on afternoon tea and thought it important to have servants when there were extreme shortages of staple foods for others.*
 - d. *Petrograd residents might have responded differently to Lenin's slogan 'Peace, Land, Bread' depending on their place in the social hierarchy. Poor urban workers and their families would have found Lenin's 'Bread' very appealing, as they often went without basic food. They probably also blamed the war for those shortages, so the promise of 'Peace' would have appealed also. Although war made it more difficult for members of 'minor bureaucracy' to obtain their food, they seemed to be able to do so, therefore they might not have been so interested in Lenin's promise of 'Peace' and 'Bread.'*