

# The Russian Revolution

The Russian Revolution of 1917 was one of the most significant events of the twentieth century that ended centuries of monarchy in Russia and brought forth the first constitutionally communist state in the world.

## Background of the Russian Revolution

The Russia of the 1900s was one of the most economically backwards and least industrialised nations in Europe with a large population of peasants and a growing number of industrial workers.

It was where the last vestiges of feudalism - serfdom - was still in practice. Serfdom was a system where landless peasants were forced to serve the land-owning nobility. Although the practice in most of Europe was ended by the time of the Renaissance in the late 16th century, it was still being carried out in Russia well into the 19th century.

It would not be until 1861 when serfdom would be abolished. The emancipation of serfs would set off a chain of events that would lead to the Russian Revolution in the coming years.

## 1905 Russian Revolution

The Industrial Revolution came to Russia much later compared to the rest of Europe. When it did, it brought with a multitude of political and social changes.

The Industrial Revolution in Russia doubled the population in urban areas such as St Petersburg and Moscow, putting a strain on the infrastructure of the cities and leading to overcrowding and pollution. The result was a new level of destitution of the urban working class.

The population boom did not have the food supply to sustain it in the long run, as decades of economic mismanagement and costly wars led to chronic shortages in the vast country from time to time.

In response to their present conditions the Russian people, composed mainly of workers marched to the winter palace of Tsar Nicholas II on January 22 1905. Although he was not there at the time, he had given orders not to shoot at the unarmed crowd.

However his orders, either due to miscommunication or downright inefficiency on part of the officers, were largely ignored

When the huge crowd of people finally showed up the troops were intimidated by the sheer size of the people present. Upon their refusal of the protestors to disperse when told to, the Russian troops opened fire killing and wounding hundreds of the protesters. This event was known as

the Bloody Sunday massacre and would have grave consequences for the Russian monarchy in the years to come.

The massacre sparked the Russian revolution of 1905, during which angry workers responded with a series of crippling strikes throughout the country. The strikes further threatened to cripple Russia's already fragile economy. Left with no choice, Nicholas II agreed to implement reforms, which would be known as the October manifesto. But kept delaying them in order to not lose his grip on power. To this effect, he dissolved the Russian parliament through which he had promised to implement reforms.

Although nothing significant came out of the 1905 revolution, the events of Bloody Sunday had alienated the Tsar from his people.

## Events of World War I

Russia joined its Serbian, French and British allies in declaring war against the Central Powers of Austria, Germany and Ottoman Turkey on August 1914

Russia had not modernised its army at the pace that Germany had and as a result, the war proved disastrous for Russia. Its casualties were far more than any other nations in the war. Germany had seized key Russian territories which further caused food shortages and disrupting the economy as a result.

Hoping to rally the Russian troops and the people in the wake of the deteriorating condition of the war front, Tsar Nicholas II personally made his way to take command of the army, leaving his wife, Tsarina Alexandra in charge of the government.

Due to her German heritage, the Tsarina was hated by the Russian populace. It did not help matters when she began dismissing elected officials on the alleged advice of the controversial preacher and mystic, Rasputin. His influence and hold over the Russian imperial family were well known at the time.

Rasputin was murdered by nobles resenting his hold over the imperial court on December 30, 1916, but the damage was already done. Most ordinary Russians had lost faith in the Tsarist government. Soon this resentment would turn into a full-blown revolution in the coming years.

## The February Revolution

The February revolution began on March 8, 1917. Because Russia used the Julian Calendar at the time it is known as the February Revolution. The Julian calendar date of the revolution is given as February 23.

Protestors took to the streets of the capital of St. Petersburg angry over chronic food shortages. They were joined by industrial workers and clashed with the police on the streets.

On March 11, the troops garrisoning St. Petersburg were called to quell the protests but despite firing upon them, the uprising was continued unchecked.

The Russian parliament - the Duma - formed a provisional government on March 12. Nicholas II abdicated the throne ending centuries of his family rule in Russia

The new government under Alexander Kerensky established a statuette of rights such as freedom of speech and the rights of unions to organize and strike. Despite this, he continued the war with Germany contrary to the popular opposition against it.

This move worsened Russia's food supply problems. Unrest continued to grow as peasants looted farms and food riots erupted in the cities.

## The October Revolution

On November 6 and 7, 1917 (or October 24 and 25 on the Julian calendar, hence referred to as the October Revolution), communist revolutionaries led by Vladimir Lenin launched a coup against Kerensky's government.

The new government under Lenin was composed of a council of soldiers, peasants and workers. The Bolsheviks and their allies occupied key locations across St. Petersburg and Russia as a whole soon formed a new government with Lenin as its head. Lenin became the dictator of the world's first communist state.

But this was not the end of troubles for the new government

Civil War broke out in Russia in late 1917 where the Red faction, composed mainly of communists and socialists, fought against the White factions, which composed of monarchists, capitalists and democrats.

Nicholas and his entire family were executed on July 16, 1918, by the Bolsheviks.

The war would end in 1923 with Lenin's' red army claiming victory. It would pave the way for the formation of a communist super-state: The Soviet Union. The Soviet Union would become a formidable player during the events of the Cold war in the coming decades

