

Historical Significance of Russian Revolution

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Abstract

There is no doubt in denying the fact that The Russian Revolution of 1905 occupies a prominent and significant part of the world history in which the events of Bloody Sunday triggered a line of protests. A council of workers called the St. Petersburg Soviet was created in all this chaos, and the beginning of a communist political protest had begun. It is an established fact that World War I prompted a Russian outcry directed at Tsar Nicholas II. It was another major factor contributing to the retaliation of the Russian Communists against their royal opponents. After the entry of the Ottoman Empire on the side of the Central Powers in October 1914, Russia was deprived of a major trade route through the Ottoman Empire, which followed with a minor economic crisis, in which Russia became incapable of providing 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.

Paper

The Russian Revolution of 1917 involved the collapse of an empire under Tsar Nicholas II and the rise of Marxian socialism under Lenin and his Bolsheviks. It sparked the beginning of a new era in Russia that affected the surrounded country.

In the years leading up to the Russian Revolution of 1917, the country had a succession of wars. These were, The Crimean War (1854-56), The Russo-Turkish War (1877-78), The Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), and World War I (1914-18). All of these required a lot from the state, including tax dollars and manpower. Russia suffered defeat in all, except against Turkey. This series of war caused great discontent among the people and caused suffering in the country's economy and government.

Along with these wars, there were three major parties that contributed to the cause of the revolution. First, there were the peasants, who maintained the majority of the population in Russia. They were excessively poor and could barely escape famine from harvest to harvest. The population boom in Russia from 1867-1896 was felt most drastically by the peasants. The increase of 30 million people in less than 30 years was too great that the land to the peasants' disposal did not increase sufficiently. The government tried to help, but war took precedence. Second, there was a rise of the industrial working class. These workers were employed in the mines, factories and workshops of the major cities. They suffered low wages, poor housing and many accidents. Again, the government tried to help by passing factory acts to restrict the amount of hours one could work. However, their efforts were at too small a scale to have any real effect. As a result, there were

many strikes and constant conflicts between the workers and the police. Lastly, the tsar of Russia was the cause of much disapproval. Tsar Nicholas II was much more interested in his family life, than matters of the state. He had an obsession with retaining all his privileges and the belief that he was chosen by God to rule. Also, he didn't understand the forces of industrialization and nationalism that were growing throughout Russia. His disregard for the struggles of the people led them to lose faith in him and the long-standing tradition of autocracy. The people were not content and were ready to revolt. They just needed a good reason and a strong leader.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 was one of the most significant events in the 20th century. It completely changed the government and outlook on life in the very large country of Russia. The events of the revolution were a direct result of the growing conflict in World War I, but the significance of an empire collapsing and a people rising up extends beyond the war effort.

In 1914, Russia entered the war with much vigor. However, their enthusiasm was not enough to sustain them and the army suffered many casualties and loss of artillery supplies. Russia lacked mobilization skills to counter its losses, but more importantly it lacked good leadership. Tsar Nicholas II (r. 1894 – 1917) had complete control over the bureaucracy and the army. He refused to share his power and the masses began to question his leadership. In the summer of 1915, the Duma (parliament), demanded a government with democratic values and which responded to the people's needs. Later that year, however, Nicholas dissolved the Duma and went to the war front. His leaving was detrimental.

The government was taken over by Tsarina Alexandra and her unique counterpart, Rasputin. Alexandra was a very strong-willed woman, who disliked parliaments and supported absolutism. She attempted to rule absolutely in her husband's absence by dismissing and electing officials on a whim. Her favorite official, Rasputin, which means "Degenerate", was a Siberian preacher. He belonged to a sect that mixed sexual orgies with religion and he had mysterious healing powers. As a result of

rumors of the two being lovers, Rasputin was murdered in December 1916 by three aristocrats. In the cities, food shortages continued to rise and the morale of the people fell. Riots broke out on March 8, 1917 in the city of Petrograd. (The Julian calendar that Russia used at the time was 13 days behind the western, Gregorian, calendar. Therefore, some date the riot on February 24th.) It was started by women demanding more bread, but eventually spread to other industries and throughout the city. Even the soldiers on the front joined in the revolution. The Duma set up a provisional government on March 12, 1917 and a few days later the tsar stepped down. The provisional government established a liberal program of various rights. These included freedom of speech, religion and assembly; equality before the law; and the right of unions to organize and strike. The leaders of this new established government, including Alexander Kerensky, were still opposed to social revolution and saw the continuation of the war effort as a national duty. The government had to compete for power with the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. This group scrupulously watched the provisional government and even made decrees of their own. This led to a collapse of army discipline. Later that year, soldiers began returning home to seize some land for their families. Peasants were looting farms and having food riots because the provisional government had not overcome the problem of food supply. Anarchy was taking the place of liberty and this was the perfect situation for a radical socialist like Vladimir Ilyich Lenin to take control.

Lenin (1870-1924) was a strong supporter of Marxian socialism. He believed that capitalism would only disappear with a revolution and this was only possible under certain conditions. The socialism party was split between Lenin's, Bolsheviks, or "majority group" and the Mensheviks, or "minority group". Lenin's group did not stay the majority, but he kept the name and developed a disciplined, revolutionary group. The Bolsheviks attempted to seize power in July, but failed. Lenin fled from Petrograd and went into hiding in Finland. The party's popularity, however, grew tremendously throughout the summer.

By the autumn of 1917, it was clear that the main social and economical problems that caused the uprising in March still existed. In the second half of September, there was a debate in Petrograd between the Bolsheviks and the other parties (socialists and Mensheviks). The voting figures clearly pointed towards a Bolshevik majority. Leon Trotsky was elected as chairman of the governing body. Trotsky (1879-1940) was a radical Marxist, amazing orator and huge supporter of Lenin. Outside Petrograd, the feelings of the population coincided with the Bolshevik convictions. The people wanted to see the end of Kerensky's government, the end to the war and they wanted new land distribution. Trotsky and Lenin saw the answer to all these desires in a Bolshevik seizure of power.

From Finland, Lenin urged the Bolshevik committee to plan an armed uprising. Many thought it was too premature and reckless. However, after Lenin made a trip to Petrograd incognito and they debated with them for ten hours, the Bolsheviks were convinced. Trotsky masterfully executed the revolution. He formed a military-revolutionary committee to head the arming of workers throughout Petrograd. Factory meetings were held to boost the workers' enthusiasm. Finally, on the night of November 6 (or October 26), the combined forces of the Bolshevik soldiers and workers stormed the city and seized government buildings. They went on to gain the majority in the congress and declared Lenin as their new leader.

Lenin declared an end to the fighting and made armistice proposals. He also decreed the nationalization of land. However, he was far from solving the problem of hunger among the people. Lenin and his Bolsheviks had increased opposition in the next few years. Civil war broke out and external fears persisted. Earlier in the fighting, Tsar Nicholas II and family had been interned in the Ipatiev house, located on the Bolshevik base at Yekaterinburg. In July 1918, the royal family was killed. They were murdered out of fear that if they remained alive they could serve as a focus of the anti-Bolshevism movement. By the end of 1920, when some stability did return, Russia emerged as an entirely different country.

The events of the Russian Revolution that

brought the Soviet Union about had a deep impact on the entire world. It generated a new way of thinking about economy, society and the government. The Bolsheviks set out to cure Russia of all its injustices that arose from social class differences. They succeeded in some ways. Even still, the revolution marked the end of a dynasty that had lasted 300 years and concluded with the seizure of power by a small revolutionary group. The tsar was replaced with a Council of People's Commissars and private ownership was abolished. The Communist movement began to grow worldwide, which frightened the capitalist world. Although the strength of Communism did not last, because it existed at all is proof that the Russian Revolution was a major event of the twentieth century.

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