



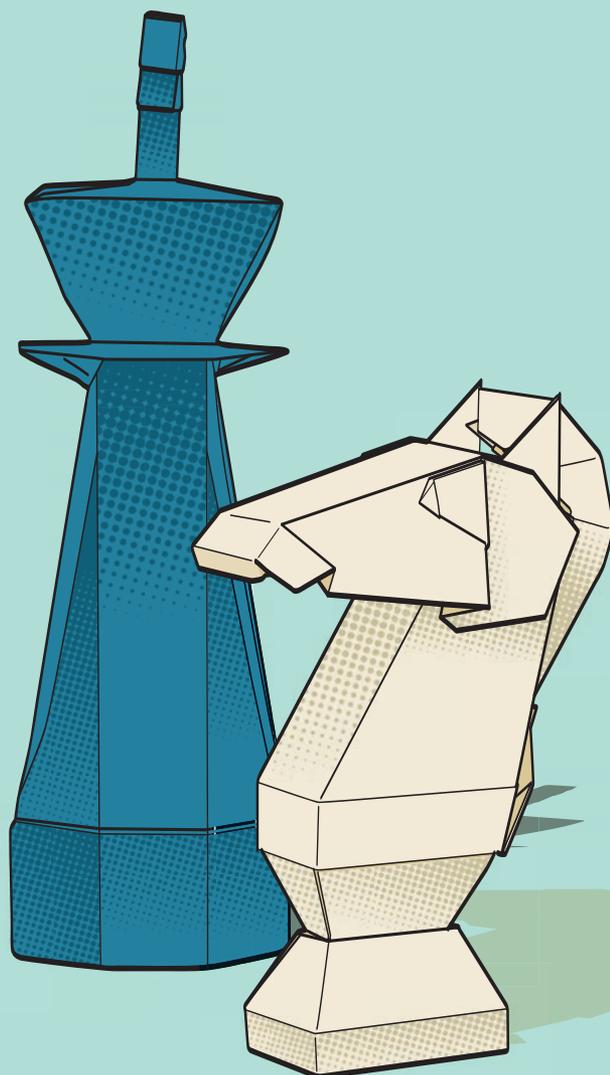
Pearson  
Revise

**Pearson Edexcel GCSE (9–1)**

# History

**Russia and the Soviet Union,  
1917–41**

**Revision Guide and Workbook**



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**Russia and the Soviet Union,  
1917–41****Revision Guide and Workbook**

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# Threats to the tsarist regime

By 1917, peasants, town workers and the urban middle classes were discontented with the way that Russia was governed by the tsarist **regime** (authoritarian rule).



The Romanov family had ruled Russia for 300 years. Tsar Nicholas II was tsar in 1917. He seemed to be in a strong position with a large army, the support of the secret police (Okhrana) and power over the Duma (the Russian parliament). But all was to change.

## The peasants

The peasants lived in poverty with rising population numbers making the poverty worse and famines a frequent threat.

- The peasants believed the answer to their poverty was more land. They wanted the land of the landowner class.
- In 1905, peasant unrest had swept through rural Russia, with peasants burning down landowner houses and taking landowner land. Brutal repression by the army had been used to end the unrest.
- In the First World War, over 15 million peasant men were called up to fight. The horses that peasants relied on for farm work were taken by the army. The army also **requisitioned** (took) peasant crops.

## The town workers

Russia's industrialisation was concentrated in cities, often in huge factories employing thousands of workers.

- Living and working conditions in the cities were terrible: homes were overcrowded and working conditions were unsafe with long hours and harsh factory rules.
- When workers went on strike, factory owners would sack them or call the police or the army to break up the strike by force.
- In 1905, the industrial workers had joined with the middle-class liberals in a general strike that had nearly overthrown the tsar.
- In the First World War, economic problems meant many factories closed. Food prices also rose, making life very hard in the cities.

## Organised opposition

Several different groups in Russia wanted change.

Radicals wanted to overthrow the tsarist regime and the ruling classes.	Liberals wanted more political freedoms to prevent revolution.	Conservatives wanted to defend the interests of the gentry.	Ultra nationalists wanted to protect the Russian Empire.
<p><b>Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs)</b> wanted a new society based on the peasant commune.</p> <p><b>Social Democrats (SDs)</b> were followers of <b>Karl Marx</b>. They were divided into:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the <b>Bolsheviks</b> who believed they could lead the workers in revolution and help create communism on their behalf</li> <li>• the <b>Mensheviks</b> who thought communism in Russia was a long way off because it was not yet industrialised.</li> </ul>			<p><b>Karl Marx</b> was a German writer who died in 1883. He predicted the workers would lead a revolution to create a communist society where everyone was equal.</p>

## Now try this

Explain why liberal parties, which were keen to prevent revolution in Russia, were still a threat to the tsarist regime.

# The First World War

The First World War plunged Russia into chaos. Military defeats undermined trust in the ruling classes, especially when Tsar Nicholas II took charge of the army and navy. Economic, social and political effects increased tensions in the countryside and in the cities.

## Military defeats

Although Russia had the world's largest army in 1914, it was poorly led and badly equipped. The German generals were able to move their well-equipped and well-trained men around on an efficient railway network, then strike at the Russians where they were most vulnerable. By 1917, large areas of the western Russian empire had been lost to Germany.

Things were made worse by disrupted harvests, which reduced food supplies.

## Economic effects of the war

The First World War was extremely expensive for all the major European powers. Russia faced additional economic pressures.

Germany blocked Russia's trade routes, factories were starved of raw materials and economic activity dropped. Taxes had to rise to help pay for the cost of the war.

To raise more money, the government arranged loans from its allies, increasing Russia's national debt.

The government printed more money to pay for the war. Inflation pushed up prices twice as fast as wages.

## Political effects of the war

The **Duma** (Russian parliament) had supported the war at first but, as the crisis deepened, Duma deputies criticised the failures of the tsar's ministers.

In 1915, the Duma requested that the tsar replace his ministers with new ones supported by the Duma.

The tsar refused to share any power with the Duma. In response, the Duma became a centre of opposition to the tsar's government.

## The tsar as commander-in-chief

- In August 1915, the tsar decided to take command of the Russian armed forces as commander-in-chief.
- His ministers warned him that this was a huge risk. The Russian people would blame the tsar directly for any further defeats.
- The tsar left Petrograd in September 1915 to move to army headquarters. He left his German wife, Tsarina Alexandra, as his **regent** – head of state in his absence.
- His actions lost him the respect of the military elite and the nobility – he had no military training and was away at war rather than in the capital.

## Social effects of the war

- The conscription of 15 million peasant men and their horses to fight meant food production dropped. The army also requisitioned peasant crops and horses as well as prioritising the railway for the army. These factors meant there was less food for city populations as well as the countryside, leading to hunger and suffering.
- Possibly as many as 6 million refugees fled German occupation in the west. The government struggled to find them housing and food. Nationalist tensions increased.
- Economic problems meant many factory closures and job losses. Unemployment and food shortages meant growing social unrest.



Nicholas II visiting the Russian front during the First World War.

## Now try this

In November 1916, a liberal leader in the Duma made a speech saying, 'We have many reasons for being discontented with this government, but these reasons all boil down to one general one: the incompetence and evil intentions of the present government.' Explain why this was seen as an attack on the tsar and tsarina as well as on the tsar's ministers.

# Triggers for revolt

The February 1917 Revolution occurred because of a mixture of long-term discontent with the government and short-term triggers, such as food shortages and demoralisation of the army.

## Strikes and demonstrations

Food shortages in Petrograd and Moscow increased social tensions; strikes in bakeries added to the food shortage crisis.

### Timeline

**18 February** Strike at the Putilov Steelworks.

**23 February** On International Women's Day, women joined striking workers in anti-government demonstrations; crowds grew ever larger when the government announced bread rationing might have to begin.

**14 February**  
• Demonstration in support of the Duma.

**Late February**  
• Weather became unusually warm, encouraging people to join street protests.

**23-25 February**  
• 250 000 people demonstrated in Petrograd - crowds became too big for police to control.

## Mutiny in the army

### Timeline

**26 February** evening  
Some soldiers were unhappy about what their officers were asking them to do. This mutiny was suppressed.

**28 February** A military report to the tsar declared that Petrograd was out of control.

**26 February** Soldiers were ordered to fire on demonstrators; 40 people were killed.

**27 February** Some regiments refused to obey orders to shoot.

Russia used the older Julian Calendar until February 1918, then switched to the Gregorian Calendar, the calendar most commonly used today. The dates in this guide follow the Julian Calendar until February 1918 and the Gregorian Calendar after that - other sources might give slightly different dates for events before February 1918.

## The tsar's absence

On 22 February, Nicholas left Petrograd for army headquarters 780 km away, totally unaware of the rapidly growing crisis.

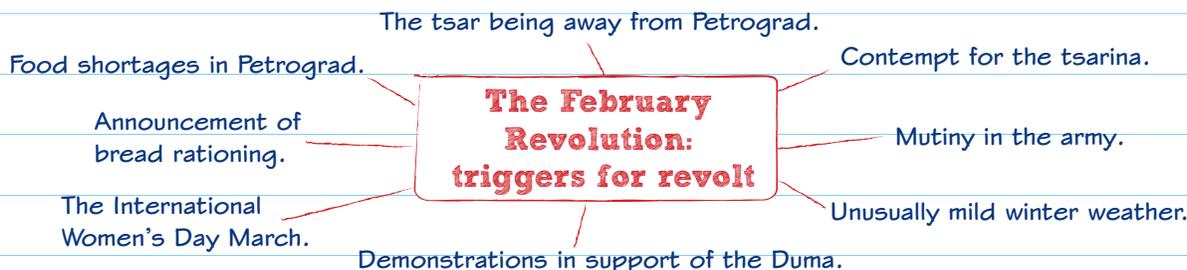
On 25 February, Nicholas sent an order to the police and army in Petrograd to end the unrest immediately.

Nicholas' decision to leave Petrograd and then to order the unrest to be suppressed led directly to his abdication.

## The tsarina's rule

As regent, Tsarina Alexandra was unpopular with the people and with the Duma. She relied on the dubious advice of her friend, the mystical healer Rasputin, on how to govern, rather than the Duma. This infuriated the Duma who felt the tsarina should not be allowed to govern.

For more on the abdication, see page 4.



## Now try this

Look at the spider diagram above. For each trigger: a) describe what happened, and b) explain how it contributed towards the February Revolution.

There is information to help you on this page, but try to answer as many as you can from memory before checking.

# The abdication of the tsar

The February Revolution of 1917 succeeded in forcing the abdication of the tsar. After the abdication, Russia became a republic.

The Duma asked Nicholas to create a new cabinet involving Duma deputies.

This was Nicholas' last chance to save his throne by sharing some of his power but he was not capable of seeing how this could work.

Nicholas refused and ordered the Duma to dissolve. Most government ministers left Petrograd.

The Russian Empire now had no real functioning government.

Half the Duma (the liberals) refused to follow Nicholas' orders and carried on meeting.

This new Duma bloc was called the Duma Committee and went on to set up the Provisional Government.

Army commanders suspected they could no longer rely on their troops to follow their orders.

Suppressing the revolution by force was too risky because of the fear of army mutiny throughout the Russian Empire.

## The abdication

Army Command had two options:

- 1 Use soldiers from outside revolutionary Petrograd to crush the revolution.
- 2 Work with the Duma to find a political (non-violent) solution.

Option 1 did not seem possible because of the army mutiny: other troops might mutiny too.

Option 2 was put into action. Army leaders and Duma leaders met the tsar in Pskov. They suggested that the tsar must voluntarily give up the throne (abdicate) in order to save Russia.

The leaders of the revolutionary parties were mostly living in exile at the time of the February Revolution. Lenin, leader of the Bolsheviks, was in Switzerland. In Petrograd, revolutionaries scrambled to try to take control of this unplanned revolution.

For more on Lenin, see page 8.



Nicholas hands over his written abdication statement in a railway carriage in the city of Pskov on his way back to Petrograd on 2 March. At first, Nicholas hoped his brother, Grand Duke Michael, would take over as tsar, but Michael refused and 300 years of Romanov rule in Russia was over. Russia had become a republic.

## Now try this

On 27 February, Nicholas wrote in his diary, 'Disorders started several days ago in Petrograd; unfortunately even the troops have begun to take part in them. It is sickening to be so far away and to receive fragmentary bad news. I did not spend much time listening to reports. During the day I took a walk ... the weather was sunny.' How useful is this quote in explaining Nicholas' abdication?

# The Provisional Government

You need to know about the establishment of the Provisional Government and its relationship with the Petrograd Soviet, as well as about Kerensky's role as head of the Provisional Government.

## The Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet

- At the same time as some Duma deputies were forming the Duma Committee, revolutionary groups were setting up the Petrograd **Soviet**.
- Across Petrograd, workers, soldiers and sailors elected representatives to the Soviet.
- When the tsar abdicated, 12 members of the Duma Committee formed the Provisional Government.
- The Provisional Government was set up with the approval of the Petrograd Soviet.
- The Petrograd Soviet's executive and the Provisional Government held meetings in the same place.

## The Provisional Government

The Provisional Government was made up of politicians from a mix of parties, but most were either liberals or radical SRs. Its first acts included:

- releasing political and religious prisoners
- promising full democratic freedom
- ending the death penalty
- taking over land belonging to the tsar
- transferring power to **zemstvos**.

The Provisional Government was also determined to continue with the war.

See page 1 for more about the parties involved.

### Key terms

**Soviet** – a committee of elected members (workers, soldiers and peasants).

**Zemstvos** – local councils.

## The Petrograd Soviet

The Petrograd Soviet agreed to support the Provisional Government if **eight principles** were followed:

- 1 Amnesty for all political prisoners.
- 2 Freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, right to strike.
- 3 No privileges of class, religion or nationality.
- 4 Elections for a Constituent Assembly.
- 5 Elected people's militia to replace all police units.
- 6 Local government to be elected.
- 7 Military units that took part in the revolution to stay together, keep weapons and not be sent to the front.
- 8 Off-duty soldiers to have same rights as citizens.



The Petrograd Soviet had control over communications, over many ordinary soldiers and sailors, and over local efforts to improve food supplies. This caused problems for the Provisional Government.

## Alexander Kerensky

Kerensky was a member of both the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet and liaised between them. When he became leader of the Provisional Government in July 1917, he made some crucial mistakes:

- ☞ He continued to support the war, which angered ordinary soldiers.
- ☞ He acted against the old ruling classes, which lost him support from conservatives.
- ☞ He failed to control the Bolsheviks.



Alexander Kerensky, Russian officer and politician, 1917

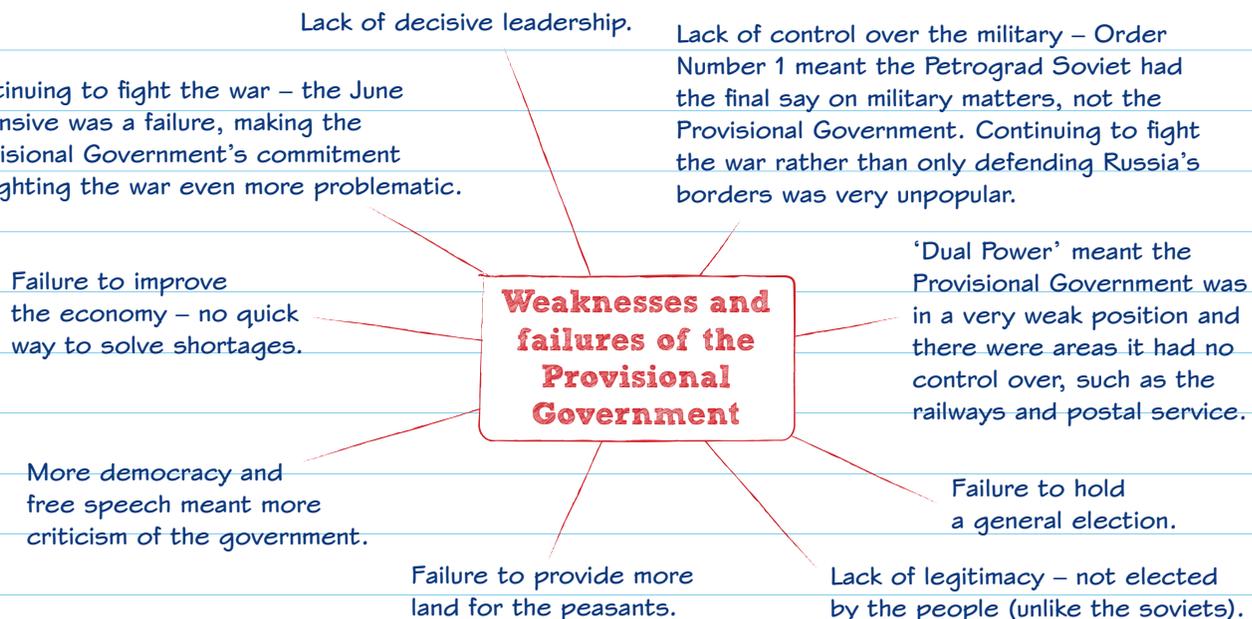
### Now try this

Look back at the reasons for discontent against the tsarist regime (page 1). Which was the main social group that benefited from the formation of the Provisional Government and why?

The main social groups in Russia were the peasants, the workers, the army, conservatives, liberals, radicals, the Church and members of ethnic minorities (non-Russians).

# Weaknesses and failures

The Provisional Government and the network of soviets (headed by the Petrograd Soviet) were both trying to govern Russia: this is known as a time of Dual Power. It was an incredibly difficult time for any government, but Dual Power and the Provisional Government's own weaknesses led to the Provisional Government's collapse in October 1917.



## Kerensky and the June Offensive

Kerensky was War Minister when the Provisional Government decided to attack German and Austrian forces in June 1917. This became known as the June Offensive and was a disaster, with 200 000 Russian casualties and further losses of Russian territory. After the June Offensive, Kerensky took over the leadership of the Provisional Government from Prince Lvov.



A funeral for soldiers killed in the June Offensive, 29 June 1917.

**Source A:** From 'Order Number 1', published by the Petrograd garrison on 1 March 1917 and later by the Petrograd Soviet.

1. In all companies, battalions, regiments ... and on the vessels of the navy, committees of elected representatives from the lower ranks of the above-mentioned military units shall be chosen ...
2. The orders of the military commission of the State Duma shall be executed [carried out] only in such cases as they do not conflict with the orders and resolutions of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies [the Petrograd Soviet].

## Now try this

Study Source A, above. Explain why 'Order Number 1' undermined the authority of the Provisional Government.

# The Kornilov Revolt

By August 1917, the Provisional Government was seriously weakened. Soldiers were angry with the government because of the June Offensive. Workers wanted the Petrograd Soviet to be in charge because they would benefit from that. Peasants wanted a government that gave them land. It was in this time of unrest that General Kornilov attempted to seize power.



Kerensky

I have appointed Kornilov as commander of the army but I am not sure whether I support the army or the soviets. If Kornilov marches on Petrograd I can lead a defence against him and be the saviour of Petrograd.

I am worried about growing unrest in the towns and countryside. I am going to march on Petrograd to restore order.



General Kornilov

## The Kornilov Revolt

- 1 In July 1917, Kerensky made Kornilov head of the army in order to improve army discipline.
- 2 Kornilov and Kerensky agreed that more soldiers were needed in Petrograd.
- 3 However, Kornilov decided that Russia needed military rule. Kerensky saw this as a threat to the Provisional Government.
- 4 Kornilov sent troops to Petrograd on 24 August with orders to shut down the Petrograd Soviet.
- 5 Kerensky allowed the Bolsheviks to arm their supporters to defend Petrograd from Kornilov's troops. These armed supporters were named the Red Guards.
- 6 At the same time, railway workers blocked Kornilov's route to Petrograd and Bolsheviks met the troops and convinced them not to attack. The 'revolt' was over.

The Kornilov Revolt failed because his soldiers were no longer following orders and also because Petrograd workers acted to defend their revolution.

## Significance of the Kornilov Revolt

- ✓ The Kornilov Revolt increased the popularity and influence of the Bolsheviks and weakened the Provisional Government further.
- ✓ Kerensky's plan to act as the saviour of Petrograd backfired. The people saw the Bolshevik Red Guards – not Kerensky – as having defended Petrograd and the revolution.
- ✓ The Bolsheviks had been predicting an attempt at counter-revolution, and the Kornilov Revolt seemed to prove them right.
- ✓ Any trust soldiers had for their officers was lost altogether. The establishment of the Red Guards to defend Petrograd gave the Bolsheviks a military advantage.
- ✓ On 31 August, the Bolsheviks won the most seats in the Petrograd Soviet election.

## Now try this

Suggest **one** reason why Kornilov decided to order an attack on Petrograd.

# Lenin's return

The Germans arranged for the Bolshevik leader, Lenin, to travel back through wartime Europe in a sealed train from his exile in Switzerland. They hoped that he would help knock Russia out of the war and give them one fewer enemy to fight. Lenin's return in April 1917 meant big changes for the Bolshevik Party.



This painting depicts Lenin's return to Petrograd in 1917 from his exile in Switzerland.

## The 'April Theses'

In April 1917, Lenin set out a manifesto of how the working class should take control of Russia in a second revolution. His demands included:

- 1 End the war: a capitalist and imperialist conflict that threatened the revolution.
- 2 Transfer all power to the soviets: at every level of government, local to national. The Provisional Government should not be supported.
- 3 Take land from the rich landlords and give it to the peasants through agricultural soviets.

## Growth of support for the Bolsheviks

The Bolsheviks were a small party in April 1917. Support for the Bolsheviks grew because:

- Lenin's April Theses meant the Bolsheviks had a clear and powerful message for workers, peasants and soldiers
- Bolshevik newspapers in most Russian cities constantly criticised the failures of the Provisional Government
- the Germans secretly sent money to the Bolsheviks to fund their campaigning.

## Powerful messages

Lenin promoted simple but powerful new slogans for the Bolshevik Party.

**ALL POWER TO THE SOVIETS!**

Lenin said the power to govern Russia should all go to soviets – workers' soviets to run factories, agricultural soviets to run rural districts, regional soviets and city soviets, with congresses of soviets making decisions at national level.

**PEACE, LAND AND BREAD**

This slogan promised that if the Bolsheviks had control of Russia, they would end Russia's involvement in the war, give land to the peasants and end the food shortages in the cities.

## The July Days

- Riots and demonstrations against the Provisional Government (3 July and 7 July 1917) turned into an uprising: the July Days.
- The uprising came about because of food shortages, and the failure of the June Offensive. The Bolsheviks did not start it.
- Lenin believed the time could be right to overthrow the Provisional Government. Bolsheviks joined the demonstrations.
- The Petrograd Soviet did not support the July Days. Its Menshevik members did not trust the Bolsheviks.
- The Soviet agreed to help the Provisional Government. Troops were moved into Petrograd and put down the uprising.
- Many Bolsheviks were arrested as they were blamed for starting the revolt. Lenin escaped, fleeing back to Finland in disguise.

## Reactions to Lenin's return

Lenin's April Theses were a shock to the Bolshevik Party. Lenin had to work hard to persuade colleagues that Russia was ready for a second revolution. But his forceful personality and command of Marxist theory won the day.

## Now try this

Explain what 'All power to the soviets!' meant.

# The Bolsheviks seize power

In October 1917, Lenin decided this was the Bolsheviks' chance to seize power.

## 1 Lenin's decision to seize power

The Kornilov Revolt in August 1917 increased Bolshevik support in Petrograd and humiliated the Provisional Government. By October 1917, the Bolsheviks had 340 000 members, 60 000 in Petrograd including 40 000 armed Red Guards. Despite the failure of the July Days, Lenin felt sure the time was right to overthrow the Provisional Government. On 10 October, Lenin secretly returned to Petrograd. In a long and stormy meeting with senior Bolsheviks, Lenin managed to convince his colleagues to support a new attempt to seize power.

## 2 The Military Revolutionary Committee

- Rumours spread that the Bolsheviks were planning an armed takeover.
- Kerensky tried to send Bolshevik-influenced army units out of Petrograd.
- Trotsky, as leader of the Petrograd Soviet, convinced the Soviet to set up a Military Revolutionary Committee (the MRC) to bring together all the Soviet-supporting soldiers in Petrograd.
- By 21 October, most of Petrograd's regiments had promised loyalty to the MRC.

## 3 Kerensky tries to stop the Bolsheviks

On 24 October, Kerensky ordered a crack-down on the Bolsheviks:

- closing Bolshevik newspapers
- blocking river crossings between the city centre and working class districts
- calling for the arrest of the MRC.

Trotsky, as head of the Petrograd Soviet, used the MRC to take control of:

- road and canal bridges
- army headquarters
- telegraph offices.

Kerensky travelled around Petrograd in a car, looking for any soldiers who would defend the Provisional Government from the Bolsheviks.

## 4 The Bolsheviks seize control

- On the night of 24–25 October, Red Guards seized more key areas of the city.
- There was almost no opposition. On the night of 25–26 October, Bolshevik soldiers climbed through the windows of the Winter Palace and arrested the remaining members of the Provisional Government.
- Many socialists left the Soviet in protest at the Bolsheviks' actions. On 26 October, Lenin formed a Bolshevik government called the Council of People's Commissars.

The official Soviet view was that the October Revolution was a popular uprising led by Lenin. In fact, very few people in Petrograd were even aware that the Bolsheviks had seized power.

Lenin was single-minded with a clear plan of attack.

Lenin made sure the Bolsheviks were in charge and not any other revolutionary group.

### Why was the October Revolution successful?

Kerensky didn't take the Bolshevik threat seriously after the July Days.

Kerensky didn't disband the Red Guards after the Kornilov affair.

The Provisional Government had become very unpopular and no one stood up to defend it.

Trotsky was an amazing planner who formed Red Guards into an effective fighting force.

### Now try this

Answer this question using the arguments on this page and your own knowledge:

Was the unpopularity of the Provisional Government the most important reason for the October 1917 Revolution?

Remember that whatever conclusion you come to, you need to be able to explain how and why you have come to the conclusion. It may be helpful to draw a flowchart or spider diagram to organise your thoughts.

# Early decrees and execution of the tsar

The Bolsheviks passed decrees at the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets in November 1917 to live up to their promises. However, when the Bolsheviks lost the elections to the Constituent Assembly, they used force to hold on to power and to shut down any opposition.

## 1 Decree on Peace (8 November 1917)

- All countries should seek peace.
- Peace to be achieved without annexations (land seized) or indemnities (large fines).

## 2 Decree on Land (8 November 1917)

- Land taken from wealthy landowners now belonged to the peasants.
- In December, Church land was nationalised, too.

### The early decrees

## 3 Decrees on workers' rights (November–December 1917)

- **Decree on Work** – 8-hour day.
- **Decree of Unemployment** – unemployment insurance for those unable to work.
- **Decree on Workers' Control** – workers' committees now ran their own factories.

## 4 Decree on Nationalities (November 1917)

- All different peoples of the old Russian Empire could have their own governments.
- However, these governments remained under Bolshevik control.

## The abolition of the Constituent Assembly

- Lenin had promised to hold a general election for the Constituent Assembly: however, the SRs won with 53 per cent of the vote. The Bolsheviks got only 24 per cent.
- The Bolsheviks then declared that a return to parliamentary democracy was a backwards step when Russia already had soviets.
- The first meeting of the Constituent Assembly after the election was on 5 January 1918. It refused to pass the Bolsheviks' key decrees or to accept the principle of all power to the soviets.
- After one day, Lenin ordered the Red Guards to shut it down. It never reopened.
- Soon after, all political parties apart from the Bolsheviks were banned.

## The Cheka

- On 7 December 1917, Lenin set up the Cheka – the Extraordinary Commission to Combat Counter-Revolution, Sabotage and Speculation.
- Lenin said that the revolution was under threat from the class enemies of the workers and peasants – the *burzhui* or bourgeoisie. The *burzhui* were people who had been middle class or upper class before the October Revolution.
- Bolshevik supporters often attacked anyone they suspected of being a *burzhui*. It was easy to denounce people to the Cheka as being *burzhui*: they would be arrested and their houses and property could then be taken by poor people.
- The Cheka became the main way in which the Bolsheviks used terror to consolidate their hold over Russia and the countries of the old empire.

## The execution of the tsar and his family

- The former tsar, Nicholas, and his family were kept as prisoners by the Bolsheviks. In 1918 they were held in Yekaterinburg.
- Nicholas and the royal family were a potential threat to Bolshevik power. Monarchists could use them to rally support for a counter-revolution.
- On 17 July 1918, as anti-Bolshevik forces were closing in on Yekaterinburg, the Bolsheviks executed Nicholas, his wife and children, as well as four servants.



Tsar Nicholas II in March 1917: the tsar and his family were held captive in Yekaterinburg in the Ural mountains. Nicholas, Alexandra, their five children and four servants were all shot.

### Now try this

Explain why Lenin abolished the Constituent Assembly.

# The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk

One of the Bolsheviks' promises to the people was to take Russia out of the First World War. This was achieved with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on 3 March 1918.

## The need for peace with Germany

- 1 Many Bolshevik supporters were soldiers and sailors who were desperate for an end to the war and a 'breathing space' as Lenin had promised.
- 2 Lenin said, 'We must make sure of throttling the bourgeoisie and for this we need both hands free.' Ending the war would mean the Bolsheviks could concentrate all their forces on wiping out political opponents within Russia.
- 3 Lenin and Trotsky were certain that there would soon be a revolution in Europe and any treaty they signed with Germany would no longer have any effect.

## Significance of the treaty

In exchange for peace, Russia lost a huge area of its former western territories: Ukraine and the Baltic provinces, Finland and parts of Poland. It also lost Georgia (Stalin's homeland).

This meant the loss of:

- 74 per cent of Russia's coalmines and iron ore
- 50 per cent of its industry
- 26 per cent of its railways
- 27 per cent of its farmland
- 26 per cent of its population: 62 million people.

Russia also had to pay the Germans 300 million gold roubles.



## The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk

- Lenin gave Trotsky the responsibility of negotiating a treaty with the Germans. None of the other allies came to the conference.
- Trotsky demanded a peace treaty with no losses to Russia. The Germans ended the ceasefire and advanced into Russia. It seemed possible that they would capture Petrograd.
- The Russians could do nothing to stop the German advance. Lenin demanded that Trotsky get a peace deal at any price.
- The treaty was signed on 3 March 1918.

There were different views about peace with Germany: the Left SRs wanted to continue the war; Lenin wanted to accept the German terms and peace; Trotsky wanted something in between. Lenin won.

## Reactions to the treaty

- 👍 Soldiers were pleased that the war had ended, and Russians (and the Bolsheviks) were relieved that the threat of German invasion was over.
- 👍 The Bolsheviks believed that German workers would be disgusted by the harsh terms of the treaty. This would then be another reason for German workers to rise up in revolution, like the Russian workers.
- 👎 The Left SRs walked out of the government in protest at the treaty and they even assassinated the German ambassador, hoping to re-spark the war.
- 👎 Nationalists and conservatives were horrified at the losses to Russia and its empire. It became vitally important for many Russians to fight to stop the Bolsheviks, so that Russia could be saved from humiliation and destruction. They began to form into armies, the 'White armies', to fight the Bolsheviks, the 'Red Army'.

Revise the White and Red Armies on page 12.

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was a major cause of the Civil War.

## Now try this

Explain how the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was linked to the Bolsheviks' hopes for more revolutions in industrialised countries like Germany.

# The Civil War

The Bolsheviks formed the Red Army and were opposed by the Whites, an alliance of anti-Bolshevik groups. The experience of civil war transformed the Bolsheviks' attitude to ruling Russia.

## Reasons for the Civil War

- The huge territorial losses from the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk appalled many Russians.
- Nationalists and conservatives had everything to lose from the Bolsheviks' plans for a workers' and peasants' Russia.
- Former moderates, Mensheviks and some SRs opposed the Bolshevik dictatorship – they had wanted the Constituent Assembly.
- The Bolsheviks also made enemies of the 'Czech Legion', 40 000 Czech troops who took control of the Trans-Siberian Railway.
- Nationalities within the old Russian Empire wanted to break away from Russian control.
- Monarchists wanted to reinstate the tsar.

## Effects of the Civil War on the Bolsheviks

- **Terror tactics to ensure control.** Once they had captured an enemy area, the Cheka, the Bolshevik political police, hunted down any suspected opponents and executed them.
- **Harsh discipline to ensure obedience.** Red Army deserters were shot. If a Red Army unit retreated, one man in every ten would be executed.
- **Ideological victory.** Winning the Civil War against so many opponents strengthened the Bolsheviks' belief in their revolution.
- **Centralised control.** The war strengthened the Bolsheviks' belief in highly organised control from the centre.
- **Russia under threat.** The involvement of former allies like France and Britain made the Bolsheviks fear foreign invasion.

## Key events of the Civil War



## Now try this

Another reason for opposition to the Bolsheviks was that Lenin increasingly ignored the soviets and ruled through Sovnarkom, the Council of People's Commissars. Which groups within Russia would have been in opposition to the Bolsheviks because of this?

# The Bolshevik victory

The reasons for the Bolshevik victory in the Civil War included the strength of the Bolsheviks, the role of Trotsky, lack of foreign intervention and the weaknesses of the Whites.

War Communism: introduced by Lenin to tackle the economic crisis.

The Red Army – conscription built the army up to a powerful fighting force of over 5 million soldiers.

Trotsky led the Red Army and reintroduced discipline, making it an effective and unified fighting force.

Control of central Russia – this meant shorter distances to supply their armies.

## Bolshevik strengths in the Civil War

Effective propaganda: a constant message that only the Bolsheviks would look after ordinary Russians.

Central Russia also contained most of Russia's population – who could be conscripted into the Red Army.

Control of most of Russia's industries (for weapons) and railways.

Tactical alliances that meant not having to fight everyone at once.

For more on War Communism, see page 16.

## The role of Trotsky in the Civil War

Trotsky, appointed Commissar for War in 1918, was more influential than Lenin in winning the Civil War.

- Trotsky organised the mobilisation of the Red Army into a huge fighting force.
- He realised the Red Army needed experienced ex-tsarist officers and kept their families hostage to ensure loyalty.
- Trotsky's **commissars** (political officers) kept strict discipline in the army and also spread Bolshevik propaganda.
- He encouraged soldiers to learn to read and write and taught them about the aims of the Bolsheviks.
- Trotsky introduced a Socialist Military Oath for all Red Army soldiers to swear. This was to encourage loyalty to the Bolsheviks.

## Foreign intervention

- British, French, Japanese and US soldiers were all sent to help the Whites, and also to defend allied weapons dumps which had originally been sent to help Russia by its First World War allies.
- The foreign interventions helped the Whites for a while, and made them seem stronger than they really were.
- Bolsheviks used foreign intervention as propaganda: they urged that Russians should help the Reds prevent the foreign invasions.



US soldiers parading in Vladivostok, Russia, 1918.

Geographically very spread out – supplying White armies was difficult.

Foreign intervention to aid the Whites was a propaganda gift to the Reds.

Far fewer Whites than Reds: maximum 250 000 soldiers.

The Whites did not have large populations to conscript soldiers from; many troops would fight only for their own area.

## White weakness in the Civil War

There was no single White leader: instead the leaders competed with each other.

The Whites did not control many industrial areas so supplying armies was more difficult.

Whites were not popular with workers and peasants.

The Whites did not share the same aims: monarchists, liberals and left wingers all disagreed about how they would run Russia.

## Now try this

Explain why commissars were important in the Bolshevik victory in the Civil War.

# The Red Terror and the Cheka

The Red Terror was a period of executions and arrests between September 1918 and February 1919. Lenin established this in order to get rid of anyone suspected of opposing the Bolsheviks. Ever since taking power, the Bolsheviks had steadily removed individual freedom in Russia. The Bolshevik state quickly became a dictatorship.

## Timeline

### The growth of the Bolshevik dictatorship

- October 1917**  
Bolsheviks gained power.
- December 1917**  
Liberal leaders arrested; non-Bolshevik newspapers banned. The Cheka established.
- February 1918**  
'The Socialist Fatherland is in Danger' decree (allowed forced labour and execution for those who resisted).
- August 1918**  
Fanya Kaplan tried to assassinate Lenin: he survived being shot.
- 1921**  
All other political parties banned.
- 1922**  
Show trial of leading SRs – carried out as an example to others. SRs deported.
- November 1917**  
Revolutionary Tribunals introduced, replacing courts and lawyers.
- January 1918**  
Constituent Assembly shut down.
- June 1918**  
SRs and Mensheviks were arrested.
- September 1918**  
Start of the Red Terror.
- March 1921**  
The Kronstadt Mutiny

### The role of the Cheka

The Cheka grew rapidly during the Civil War: by 1919 it had 100 000 employees. The Cheka had enormous power: after 1918 the Cheka could arrest, imprison, torture or execute anyone they suspected. It is possible that as many as 12 000 people were executed by the Cheka between 1918 and 1920.

### The Red Terror

- Lenin introduced the Terror after surviving an assassination attempt by an SR, Fanya Kaplan.
- The Bolsheviks called on all workers to report anyone who made any remarks against the soviets and their government. These 'class enemies' often went to prison camps.
- The Red Terror grew rapidly in the Civil War. As the Reds won back areas from White control, the Cheka was sent into the area to arrest anyone suspected of supporting the Whites or helping them in any way. Many were executed.
- The Terror was also used in the Red Army. The Cheka shot any deserters they recaptured.
- The Red Terror lasted from September 1918 to February 1919, but in fact its methods never went away under the Bolshevik dictatorship.

### The Kronstadt Mutiny

- The Kronstadt naval base guarded Petrograd. Its sailors fought in the February Revolution, the July Days and the October Revolution.
- It was a shock to senior Bolsheviks, therefore, when the Kronstadt sailors rebelled against the Soviet government on 28 February 1921.
- Like many former Bolsheviks, the sailors were sick of War Communism, the way the Bolsheviks requisitioned food, the Red Terror and the lack of political freedom.
- Trotsky sent 50 000 Red Army soldiers to take back the base.
- There was fierce fighting and it took until 17 March for the sailors to be defeated: 500 were executed by the Cheka.
- The Kronstadt Mutiny did undermine the Bolsheviks' claim to be acting for the working classes and peasants. There were more protests against Bolshevik dictatorship and calls for 'soviets without Bolsheviks'.

### Now try this

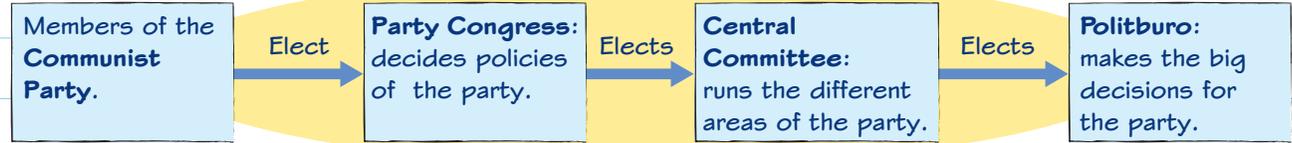
For more on War Communism, see page 16.

Explain how the Cheka helped the Bolsheviks keep hold of power in Russia.

# Bolshevik centralisation

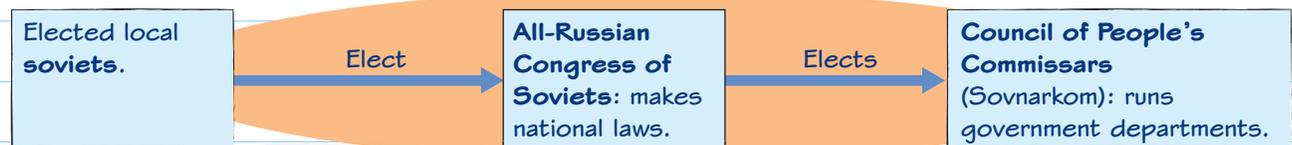
The Communist Party, as the Bolsheviks called themselves from 1918, believed that the state should control the economy, society and culture of the Soviet Union from the centre.

## The Communist Party



Only Communist Party members can stand in elections

## The Soviet government



The Soviet government and the Communist Party worked in parallel to rule the Soviet Union but in reality it was the Communist Party that determined what the Soviet government did.

## All power to the soviets?

The All-Russian Congress of Soviets became a 'rubber stamp': it simply agreed whatever the government told it to. This made the Soviet Union a centralised dictatorship. In 1919, the Communist Party elected a five-man Politburo; the five members were Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin.

This became a central committee that decided party policy. Their decisions determined what happened in the Soviet Union. Ultimately, the soviets had no power at all.

The Communist Party was the only political party. There was no political choice. The only candidates at elections were Communist Party candidates.

## Setting up of the USSR



The USSR was initially made up of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR), the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR), the Belorussian SSR and the Transcaucasian SFSR. The communist parties that ran the other republics all followed the orders of the All-Union Communist Party (of Bolsheviks) – the new name for the Communist Party from 1925 – led from Moscow. The parliament met infrequently, had very little power and all decisions were controlled by the party.

In 1924, the lands of the old Russian Empire were reorganised into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

## Now try this

Write a short paragraph to summarise Lenin's role in bringing about centralisation.

# War Communism

War Communism was introduced in 1918. It put the Russian economy under government control. Lenin believed this was necessary if the Bolsheviks were to win the Civil War.

## Features of War Communism

War Communism meant that everything in the economy was geared to meeting the needs of the military first.

- Peasants were not allowed to sell their crops. The Cheka requisitioned their crops for a fixed low price, and left the peasants a small amount for their own needs.
- Industries were nationalised and given production targets by the government.
- People's rights and freedoms were restricted: strikes were banned and any suspected political opposition was dealt with by the Cheka (the Red Terror).
- Money was abolished and people were paid in kind (paid in goods and services rather than in cash). Labour was also conscripted: the government forced people to work.

As a result, peasants tried to hide their grain. Peasants suspected of hoarding grain were shot.

Industrial production was targeted at meeting military needs. Production for consumers was not a priority.

Opposition continued and increased, for example, the Kronstadt Mutiny.

Transport problems meant industries did not get the raw materials they needed.

Workers started to leave the cities – either going into the Red Army or returning to villages to find food.

The collapse in industrial production meant there was nothing for the peasants to buy. Peasants stopped growing crops to sell to the cities.

The Bolsheviks needed control over industry to supply the Red Army with weapons and resources.

### REASONS FOR WAR COMMUNISM

The Bolsheviks needed control over food supply in order to feed soldiers and workers.

After the October Revolution, banks stopped lending money to the government or industries.

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk meant the loss of 40% of Russia's industries.

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk meant the loss of major food production regions.

The Whites controlled some key agricultural regions.

## Consequences of War Communism

- In 1920, farm production had fallen to 37 per cent of 1913 levels.
- The numbers of people working in factories fell by half, and production halved, too.
- Food shortages turned into famine. People were dying from starvation: in some areas people resorted to cannibalism.
- Industries were producing almost no consumer goods, increasing hardships in the cities.
- A black market developed: an illegal way of finding the consumer products and food that people needed, for high prices.
- In areas that the Reds did not control, and where money continued to be used, prices rose.

War Communism, an economic disaster and deeply unpopular, had to be abandoned.

## Political crisis

- Factory workers organised protests and strikes over their falling living standards and lack of food. The Kronstadt Mutiny was linked to strikes in Petrograd: strikers had come to the naval base to ask for help.
- Communist Party members protested at the way they were excluded from decisions.
- There was a peasant uprising in Tambov Province.

War Communism was unpopular, but the Communist Party was able to blame a lot on the Whites and their occupation of farming and oil regions.

## Now try this

The Bolsheviks promised peace, land and bread before the October Revolution. What happened to these promises under War Communism?

# New Economic Policy (NEP)

War Communism may have helped win the Civil War, but protests against it threatened to overthrow the Communist Party's control of Russia and the other republics of the USSR. By 1921 the Soviet Union was in crisis. Lenin's response was the New Economic Policy (NEP).



This poster reads, 'From NEP Russia will come Socialist Russia'.

## Reasons for NEP

The main reasons for the implementation of NEP in 1921 were:

- 1 the disastrous economic consequences of War Communism
- 2 the political opposition caused by War Communism.

Lenin recognised that the drive to socialism had been too fast and too rigorous.

## Features of NEP

War Communism had introduced socialist features to the USSR. NEP reversed these:

- The free market was reintroduced. Now peasants could sell their produce and decide what price to sell it at.
- The state stopped requisitioning grain and other crops from the peasants: now peasants paid tax on what they sold.
- Money was reintroduced; workers were paid wages again.
- The state kept control of big factories, but small businesses and farms could be privately owned and run to make a profit.
- Foreign experts were brought in to improve how factories were run. These experts were paid more than ordinary workers.

## Economic effects of NEP

- 1 Agricultural production increased as peasants began to produce more. Grain production in 1921 was 37 million tonnes. By 1923 it was 56 million tonnes (although it had been 80 million tonnes in 1913).
- 2 Industrial growth increased, but more slowly. The shortage of industrial products kept them expensive while food became cheaper. This was called the 'scissors crisis'. It meant peasants stopped producing so much food, leading to fears of more famine. The government cut prices for industrial products.
- 3 Some traders (NEP-men, NEP-women) made profits from the shortages of food and manufactured goods. Wealthier peasants also did well as they had the most surplus produce to sell. But this led to inequality within the USSR, which was not socialist.

## Reactions to NEP

### FOR

NEP was popular with peasants and traders. Although wealthier peasants did best from NEP, all peasants preferred the freedom to sell what they wanted rather than see the state requisition almost everything they produced.

### AGAINST

Many Communist Party members did not like NEP as it was a backwards step that seemed to bring capitalism back to the USSR. It also gave the peasants what they wanted at the expense of the workers.

## Now try this

Explain the key differences between War Communism and NEP.

Look at page 16 for information on War Communism.

# Social changes

Social changes in the period 1918–24 included the impact of Bolshevik policies on women, on education and on culture.

## Timeline

### The impact of Bolshevik policies on women

**1917**

Women declared equal to men. 'Post-card divorces' made divorce easier. Non-religious marriage introduced.

**1919**

**Zhenotdel**, a women's organisation, was set up to increase freedom, equality and influence of women.

**1920**

Abortion made legal. Women's literacy increased with Civil War literacy campaigns.

The Bolsheviks wanted to liberate women from oppression by men. 'Post-card divorces' cost 3 roubles and the other partner was informed by post.

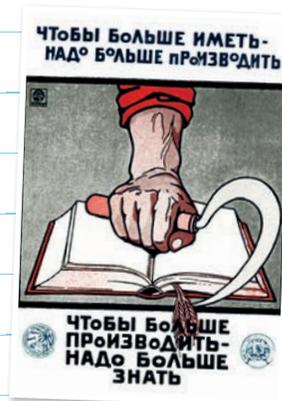
The leader of Zhenotdel was Alexandra Kollontai. Kollontai's influence was limited because she opposed Lenin by demanding more democracy in the Communist Party. Kollontai became the first woman ambassador; however, very few other women were promoted to top government positions.

In spite of these improvements in women's rights under NEP, the number of crèches declined, as did factory work for women, and women were still expected to do all the domestic work, even if they had a job as well.

## Communist education policies, 1921–24

- ✔ Co-education (girls and boys taught together) was introduced, as a way of reducing discrimination against women.
- ✔ There was a major literacy drive in the Red Army.
- ✔ Peasants were encouraged to learn to read and write.
- ✔ By 1926, about 58 per cent of the population was literate, a big increase from before the revolution.

Although literacy rates did increase, it was difficult for the Communist Party to make as much progress as it wanted, because economic problems limited investment.



This poster from 1920 says, 'In order to have more it is necessary to produce more. In order to produce more, it is necessary to know more.'

## Communist cultural policies

The Communist Party understood the power of propaganda in convincing people to support their revolution. Agitprop was the Agitation and Propaganda Section of the Central Committee Secretariat of the Communist Party: the party's propaganda wing. It used art, literature, film and music to promote communist ideas and portray the USSR's communist future.

## Controlling communist art

The 1920s were a time of great artistic freedom as artists with new ideas (known as *avant-garde*) experimented with different ways to represent communism. However, the Communist Party needed artists to help spread propaganda. Artists were increasingly censored by the state department Glavlit, which ensured that books, pictures, film, music, dance and other art forms all showed communism in an accessible and very positive way, called 'socialist realism'.

## Now try this

Why was the Communist Party interested in making workers and peasants literate?

# Stalin leads the USSR

After Lenin's death in 1924, there was a struggle for power among the senior communists to become leader of the Soviet Union. Just before he died, Lenin had written a 'testament' criticising all the other senior communists, but each of the main rivals had different strengths and weaknesses.

## Stalin



**Ideology:** Believed in 'Socialism in One Country': that the USSR could become a socialist state on its own.

- 👍 Position as General Secretary: power to appoint supporters to key party jobs.
- 👍 Appearance of moderation: no extreme views, always respectful to rivals. Kept private opinions to himself.
- 👎 Lenin's testament criticised his rudeness and lust for power.
- 👎 Seen as boring, unlike many key rivals.

## Trotsky



**Ideology:** Believed in 'Permanent Revolution': that communism needed revolutions to spread from country to country. Believed in rapid industrialisation rather than NEP.

- 👍 Brilliant speaker.
- 👍 Lenin's close comrade through the revolution and Civil War.
- 👍 His organisation and leadership key to Red victory in Civil War.
- 👎 Arrogant and bossy.
- 👎 Menshevik until 1917, unlike the others, who were longstanding Bolsheviks.
- 👎 Lack of supporters outside the military.

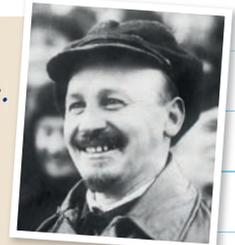
## Zinoviev and Kamenev

- 👍 Worked closely together, strengthened them both.
- 👍 Zinoviev was party boss in Petrograd, Kamenev in Moscow.
- 👍 Worked closely with Stalin to run the party and weaken Trotsky after Lenin's death.
- 👎 The only two senior Bolsheviks to oppose Lenin's plan to seize power in October 1917.
- 👎 Power was limited to Petrograd and Moscow, while Stalin controlled the party.



## Bukharin

- 👍 Very popular within the party.
- 👍 Excellent writer and theorist: editor of *Pravda* (party newspaper).
- 👎 Argued strongly against Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which was later used against him.
- 👎 The main supporter of NEP, which many Bolsheviks viewed as capitalist.



## Key steps to Stalin as leader

Stalin made sure that he took the lead role at Lenin's funeral, which Trotsky was too ill to attend.

Stalin then worked with Kamenev and Zinoviev (with Bukharin's support) to undermine Trotsky. But when Kamenev and Zinoviev then opposed Bukharin, Stalin criticised them for trying to split the party.

Economic difficulties in 1927–28 put pressure on NEP, which Bukharin supported. Stalin switched to arguing for rapid industrialisation and the collectivisation of agriculture. Stalin won the party's support and Bukharin lost his influence.

## Now try this

Explain how Stalin used his position as General Secretary of the Communist Party to get rid of his rivals for power.

# The purges

The purges were a continuation of Bolshevik use of violence to eliminate opposition, but under Stalin there was a change in the scale of purges: both the reasons for them and their consequences.

## Timeline

### The purges

#### 1933

18% of party members expelled as unsuitable or disloyal.

#### 1936

First show trials: 16 senior party members, including Zinoviev and Kamenev.

#### 1938

Last great show trial; Bukharin shot. Purge spreads to NKVD.

#### 1931

Ex-Mensheviks shot as 'wreckers'.

#### 1934

Kirov murdered.

#### 1937

Show trial of 17 more senior party members:  
• all were found guilty.  
• NKVD (secret police) begin mass arrests.  
• Purge of the military.

#### 1941

The purges had sent  
• around 8 million people to labour camps.

## Kirov's assassination

Stalin's policies in farming and industry caused big problems in the Soviet Union. By the 1930s, the party started to criticise Stalin. Even Kirov, one of his closest allies, called for a policy change. Stalin suspected Kirov wanted to take the leadership from him. Kirov was assassinated in December 1934. Stalin claimed that a huge conspiracy, led by Trotsky, was responsible. After Kirov's death, Stalin purged the party of potential rivals. These purges spread to the whole of Soviet society.

### Economic problems

Accidents and economic under-performance blamed on imaginary 'wreckers'.

### Stalin's fear of Kirov

Kirov became very popular. Did Stalin order Kirov's assassination, and then use it to remove rivals?

## Reasons for the purges

### Stalin's paranoia

Stalin had made it to the top, but then became paranoid about any possible rivals to power.

### Following Lenin's example

The Red Terror during the Civil War was a precedent for the purges.

### Attack on the party and government

After the purges linked to Kirov, arrests focused on party members and government staff accused of not following orders.

### Forced confessions

Those arrested were beaten until they confessed to any crime they had been accused of. But many never knew why they had been arrested.

### Mass terror (Yezhov)

The NKVD had targets for the arrests. They forced those arrested to name others. Under Yezhov's leadership of the NKVD (1937–38), no one was safe.

## Nature of the purges

### Use of Gulags

The Gulag was the state system of labour camps. By 1941 there were 8 million in the camps, with perhaps a further million in prisons.

## Consequences of the purges

- 1 Stalin dominant:** Stalin's purges terrified everyone else into obedience. No one dared to question his leadership.
- 2 'Old Leninists' destroyed:** the Bolsheviks who had built the Communist Party with Lenin were dead. No one now could challenge Stalin. New party members all owed their position to Stalin.
- 3 Chaos in government and the economy:** the loss of so many experienced managers, administrators and specialists left the government and industry with a serious shortage of skills.
- 4 Weakened armed forces:** there was no evidence of any military plot against Stalin, but the purge of the military killed off most of Stalin's experienced officers. Soldiers arrested by the NKVD often accused their officers in turn. This loss of military leadership and experience seriously weakened the armed forces and was to prove a significant setback when Germany invaded Russia in 1941.

## Now try this

Write a paragraph explaining the key effects of the purges on Soviet society.