

The Russian Revolution, the Short Version

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Word Count **671**



Vladimir Lenin speaking to a crowd. From the book "Through the Russian Revolution," by Albert Rhys Williams.

In 1917, two revolutions swept through Russia. For hundreds of years, the country had been ruled by emperors, called czars or tsars. The revolutions ended their rule and led to the beginning of the Soviet Union.

In March 1917, there was a lot of anger among the Russian people. There was not enough food, so many Russians were going hungry. Eventually, Czar Nicholas II (1868-1918) was forced to step down. Just months later, the new government that was put in place after the revolution was overthrown as well. A political party called the Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924), suddenly came to power.

Russian Revolution: background

By 1917, most Russians had lost faith in Czar Nicholas II. People didn't trust the government, and Russia's factories and farming were not making enough. Sometimes, the Duma tried to stand up to Nicholas. The Duma was another branch of the Russian government. It is like Congress in the U.S. However, Nicholas continually sent the members of the Duma home. He wouldn't accept limits on his power.

The main cause of the first revolution was Russia's involvement in World War I (1914-18). The Russian army was no match for Germany's. More Russians were killed or wounded in the war than the soldiers of any nation in any other war. Russia also spent a huge amount of money in the war. After years of fighting, people started to come together to demand a new government.

February Revolution: 1917

The February Revolution actually began on March 8, 1917. Back then, Russia used a different calendar, so for them it was February 23. Demonstrators demanding bread took to the streets in the Russian capital of Petrograd (now called St. Petersburg). They were supported by huge crowds of factory workers who had walked off their jobs. The protesters clashed with police but refused to leave the streets.

On March 10, the strike spread. Workers flooded the streets. Angry crowds of people destroyed police stations. Meanwhile, several factories elected leaders to workers' committees. These leaders served in a group called the Petrograd Soviet.

On March 11, soldiers were called out to put down the protest. Some shot and killed demonstrators. The protesters kept coming. That day, Nicholas again sent the members of the Duma home.

On March 12, the revolution triumphed. Many soldiers in the Petrograd army switched to the side of the demonstrators. The soldiers then formed committees that elected leaders to the Petrograd Soviet, along with leaders from the factories.

The czar's government was forced out of power, and the Duma formed a government to run the country instead. It competed with the Petrograd Soviet for control of the revolution. On March 14, the Petrograd Soviet issued Order No. 1, which instructed Russian soldiers and sailors not to obey any other orders that went against the Soviet. The next day, March 15, Czar Nicholas II gave up the throne in favor of his brother Michael (1878-1918). Michael refused to accept the crown, bringing an end to the rule of the czars.

Bolshevik Revolution: 1917

After the February Revolution, power was shared between the government and the Petrograd Soviet. Then another revolution hit Russia. Revolutionaries led by Bolshevik Party leader Vladimir Lenin launched a takeover of the government. They took over government buildings in Petrograd, and soon formed a new government. Almost no one was hurt in the takeover. The new government was led by Lenin.

Lenin became the leader of a completely new kind of Russian government. He made peace with Germany, took over factories and gave land to the people. Beginning in 1918, though, he had to fight a devastating civil war against anti-Bolshevik White Army forces. In 1920, the anti-Bolsheviks were defeated, and in 1922, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was established. Lenin made the USSR a communist country, where

people were supposed to share things equally. No one was supposed to have more or less than another. The goal of communism is an equal society, but the USSR was unable to achieve that.

Quiz

- 1 Which of the following are two MAIN ideas from the article?
- (A) Czar Nicholas II was a bad leader because he did not listen to the people; Vladimir Lenin was better because he cared about equality.
 - (B) The first Russian revolution overthrew the rule of the czars; The second was when the Bolsheviks took over and set up a communist government.
 - (C) World War I caused the first Russian revolution; Lenin would later fix Russia's relationship with Germany.
 - (D) Czar Nicholas II tried to hand over power to his brother, but his brother refused; Vladimir Lenin made many changes to government and society in Russia.
- 2 Which detail BEST reflects the main goal of the Bolsheviks?
- (A) The Bolsheviks wanted to set up a government where everyone shared everything.
 - (B) The Bolsheviks wanted to create peace between Russia and Germany.
 - (C) The Bolsheviks wanted to eliminate the previous history of the Russian people.
 - (D) The Bolsheviks wanted Vladimir Lenin to be in power forever.
- 3 According to the article, how did the Bolsheviks first come to power?
- (A) They took over the anti-Bolsheviks after a civil war.
 - (B) They took over the Duma that had been in charge for a long time.
 - (C) They took over the temporary government soon after the first revolution.
 - (D) They took power away from Czar Nicholas II.
- 4 Which section of the article explains HOW a communist society works?
- (A) Introduction [paragraphs 1-2]
 - (B) "Russian Revolution: background"
 - (C) "February Revolution: 1917"
 - (D) "Bolshevik Revolution: 1917"

Answer Key

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