Modern History Notes – Russia and the Soviet Union 1917 – 1941 (Term 1 2019)

Imperial Russia – ‘Setting the Scene’

- Russia was considered one of the Great Powers of Europe. Russia had been ruled by the Romanov Dynasty with the Tsar holding supreme power. The biggest problem for Tsars as they entered the late 1800s was the lack of economic, industrial and social reform. Russian society was still feudal in nature with majority of Russian’s having status as peasants.
- Unrest and popular agitation led to some political reform. The come the Great War – where Russia fought Germany, Austro-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire on the Eastern Front.
- In 1917 Russian morale collapsed, anger ignited and a Revolution sparked.

Mensheviks

Mensheviks sought a less radical approach. Thought that the revolution would be followed by a long period of cooperation between classes and the slow but inevitable introduction of socialism. They believed in a large party where they would decide together.

Bolsheviks

Bolsheviks sought a far more radical approach. They believed that the initial revolution was to be only the first of others to follow. The first step was to sweep away the autocracy of the Tsar and the nobility. The second was to crush the bourgeois. This was only likely to be created through a violent revolution. A small group of leaders would direct it.

Bolsheviks in 1917

- Revolution that took place in March created a Provisional Government (PG) under the rule of Lvov.
- The Petrograd Soviet were a group of council workers and soldiers. This political party was formed to become the enemy of the middle class, bourgeois PG.
- Lenin, leader of Bolsheviks, wanted to end the war and argued for the immediate seizure of estates and for there to be distribution as soon as possible, enabling soldiers to return home, losing Russian power.
- Bolshevik slogan – “Peace, Bread, Land” – to show respect to the proletariats.
- Kornilov was the army commander in chief. He requested soldiers to march on the Capital. No fighting took place in the defeat of the Kornilov.

Treaty of Brest-Litovsk

The Bolsheviks issued the Decree on Peace, which was to be without invasion or protection. Negotiations began on the 22nd of December between the Bolsheviks and Central Powers. Russia and its political parties split up into three groups:

- Lenin’s – just wanted peace and a revolutionary government that would consolidate power. Believed that if war kept going proletariats and peasant support would be lost.
- The Left Communists – argued in favour of a revolutionary war and their goal was world revolution.
Trotsky — did not want war or peace. Wanted to end fighting but refused to sign a treaty with Germany.

Firstly, Trotsky’s faction was chosen. He announced on the 10th of February that Russia would end the war, but not sign a treaty. On the 18th of February, Germans went deep into Russia. Lenin threatened to resign if a treaty was not signed and on the 3rd of March, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed.

The Treaty imposed the following:

- Russia lost Poland, the Baltic provinces of Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania and Ukraine.
- Cut from the Black Sea.
- South was given to Turkey
- Pay 6 thousand million marks
- Lost 62 million people of their population
- Lost 32% agricultural land, 85% of sugar beet, 54% industrial undertakings and 89% coal mines.

After the Treaty was signed, the British, French and Japanese moved into far eastern territories. By 1921, the Soviet Government had reconquered most of its territories that were taken away from them. Japanese intervention ended in 1922, allowing the reincorporation of far eastern territories.

Bolsheviks gained territory due to:

- Failure of the whites
- Offensives were uncoordinated
- Bolsheviks had major produce of war supplies, many potential conscripts and major rail and transport networks
- Lenin made it seem that only Bolsheviks could remove foreign powers
- Bolsheviks were determined.

**March Revolution in 1917**

The focus of anger turned towards the Tsar Nicholas, as he was commander in chief of Russian forces. Tsar’s involvement in the war had left Tsarina Alexandra in charge of the government and she had fallen under the influence of the ‘Mad Monk’, Rasputin, which discredited the royal family. Manpower shortage as a result of war had seen Russian industry and economy collapse. Anger had grown and led to spontaneous and unplanned revolution.

**Provisional Government**

The March Revolution had seen Tsar Nicholas removed from power. The PG was established to rule Russia, led by Prince Lvov who promised some reform and Kerensky later took leadership. The real problem was that it was unpopular and unsuccessful with the war with Germany and took all the blame.

**The Soviets**

Lower class involvement in the March Revolution embraced in socialist ideals. They also established Soviets committee, which were local organisations of workers who advocated for better conditions
and established local government. Soviets cooperated with the PG – PG ruled Russia and Soviets were in charge of local affairs

**The Dual Authority**

After the March Revolution of 1917, there existed a situation of dual authority. Order 1 was to establish a law that gave the Petrograd Soviet oversight of the PG. This meant that cooperation between the 2 organisations was required. As military disasters mounted and reforms were slow in coming, the Bolsheviks began to exploit the increasing discontent of the populace.

**Provisional Government Successes**

PG introduced some significant policies during its time, including:

- Amnesty for political prisoners
- Recognition of trade unions
- Introduction of 8 hour working days for industrial workers
- Tsarist police replaced with ‘People’s Militia’
- Granting full civil and religious freedoms
- Preparing for assemblies of a constituent assembly

**Return of Lenin**

Lenin was in exile in Switzerland when the March Revolution broke out. He returned to Russia as swiftly as possible – in an armoured train supplied by Germany. Lenin took command of the Bolsheviks and ordered a policy of “no cooperation with the PG.” He called for “All Power to the Soviets.” Bolsheviks won increased support from their slogans as they appealed to soldiers, workers and peasants. The only major voice calling for an immediate end to the war with Germany.

**The Kranstadt Rising**

July 1917 was disastrous for Russian military efforts – some significant defeats were inflicted upon Russian forces by Germany. Sailors of the Kranstadt base revolted and attempted to take over the PG. The coup failed and even though Lenin denied Bolshevik involvement, there was widespread belief that the Rising was Bolshevik instigated.

**The Impact of the Rising**

Lenin was forced to flee into exile again – finding shelter in Finland. It removed him from the later events of the Kornilov Affair and left Trotsky in charge.

**The Kornilov Affair**

Kerensky was desperate to turn Russia’s military problems around and appointed Kornilov commander in chief of the Russian army. Kornilov was experienced hut was also a conservative and loyalist to the old regimes power structure. He gathered an army to “restore order” but there were no forces between Kornilov and Petrograd were sufficient enough to defend the Capital.
The Bolsheviks Save the Day

The Bolsheviks possessed considerable militia and loyalist support. They also had contact amongst the common soldiers. Bolsheviks readied the defences of the capital – appearing to be the ones who saved freedom. There was very little fighting. Bolshevik agents convinced many soldiers to desert.

Impact of the Kornilov Affair

- Kornilov’s attempted coup made the PG appear weak and incompetent due to people changing sides and going to the Bolsheviks due to propaganda. They were also weak, as they could not defend themselves.
- Destroyed Kerensky’s reputation, as he was the one who appointed Kornilov, who attempted to take over the government.
- Bolsheviks were able to capitalise on this action – gaining significant publicity, popularity and respect. This translated into a broadening support for the Bolshevik movement.

The November Revolution

- At the beginning of 1917 there were a few thousand Bolsheviks but by September there 250,000.
- Lenin was hiding in Finland. On the 23rd of October, he came back to Petrograd and went into hiding.
- Trotsky - chairperson of the Petrograd Soviet. He wanted to get as many Bolshevik representatives, allowing the Bolsheviks to be a majority.
- 6th of November - groups of Bolshevik Red Guards were aided by sailors from the Baltic Fleet and moved through the city, taking over main buildings. 2000 soldiers resisted the government.
- 7th of November - Bolsheviks controlled the city except the Winter Palace. Cruiser Aurora fired a blank shell towards the Winter Palace. Women’s Death Battalion were sent home and the PG was arrested. As Bolsheviks gained power, many Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries gave up.

The Impact of Brest Litovsk

- Delivered the promise to make peace with Germany because it was the biggest failure of the PG.
- Treaty was signed from a position of weakness.
- Massive land losses – loss of 62 million people, major impact on economy, industry and agriculture.
- Divided Bolshevik leadership and destroyed alliance with SRs
- Created the civil war
- Pulled Western Allies into Russia

The Civil War

- Bolsheviks gained power through armed revolution
● Lenin allowed elections to proceed but did not recognise the results because the SRs won. Bolsheviks could not be negotiated with.
● Forced of counter revolution, AKA the Whites wanted to push back against the Bolsheviks
● Bolsheviks were called the Red Guards
● Bolsheviks gained superiority in 1920
● Fighting lasted until 1920
● Western powers involvement – British Empire, France, America, and Japanese invasion in east + Polish invasion in west – Leon Trotsky still won because he had control of the Red’s

Bolshevik Betrayal of Ideologies – (Refer to Essay for more info)

War Communism: communism promised equality and an improvement in lifestyle, but this policy did the opposite. Took food from peasants, prioritised the Red Army and workers. Made working days from 8 to 12 hours. Strikes and protesters could be shot. War communism helped the Bolsheviks stay in power but betrayed ideology.

New Economic Policy (NEP): rejected communist ideology. Reinstated paper money, allowed private ownership, peasants could sell excess prude privately. Betrayal of communist beliefs because it introduced capitalist ideals, but communism called for government ownership.

Red Terror: communist ideology called for a Utopia and promised equality. Terror executed, arrested and sent people to concentration camps. Many people opposed them including tsarists, liberals and people from the clergy. Known as the CHEKA. Murdered people to remain in power. CHEKA became more widespread and systematic than the Tsarist system. Stalin later made CHEKA bigger than Lenin did.

Peace with Germany: communist ideology called for a revolutionary war against imperialistic powers but Bolsheviks signed the Treaty of Brest Litovsk even though it gave away 62 million people of Russian population. Compromised ideologies in order to stay in power.

A Transition of Power

● Lenin suffered his first stroke in 199 and had 3 in total.
● He was stuck to a chair and could not speak
● However, he still had power and remained in authority
● Some began to position themselves as future successors. Day to day running of the party fell to two people:

Leon Trotsky: obvious successor to Lenin. Intellectual writer and orator. Led the Party in the absence of Lenin and he was his “right hand man.” He was the main person responsible for giving Bolsheviks a victory. Many Bolsheviks were jealous of his success and did not trust him because he was a Menshevik previously.

Joseph Stalin: he was General Secretary of the Bolshevik Party. He was capable of organising and getting tasks completed. He allowed people to have jobs and people owed him for the positions he gave them.

Lenin was concerned about Stalin because he tried to take a lot of power and his personality was not suited for the position. Lenin described him as “too rude” and wanted him to be removed from General Secretary.
Stalin Takes Power

- Stalin told Trotsky the wrong date of Lenin’s funeral. Trotsky was absent while Stalin made himself visible.
- Stalin convinced the Party to set aside Lenin’s will because Lenin critiqued him.
- Trotsky was not popular – by rejecting him people thought their own chances were increased.
- People underestimated Stalin because of his peasant background. He lacked manners and education of other prominent Bolshevik leaders.
- Stalin manipulated historical events.
- Stalin presented himself as a centralist – someone who worked with both sides of the Party. Promoted the idea of “socialism in one country.” This appealed to most Bolsheviks because they could focus on Russia.
- Stalin became leader but lacked the appeal and “leadership” that Lenin had, but he had plans to make himself a Supreme Leader.

How Did Stalin Attack the Left and Right?

Left:

- In 1926, Stalin sided with a leader of the right. He did not support the left wing and its 3 prominent leaders.
- Zinoviev, Kamenev and Trotsky – he wanted to proclaim power for himself – Stalin consolidated power.
- Stalin accused the leaders of factionalism. Zinoviev and Kamenev were readmitted into the Bolshevik Party, but not Trotsky because he did not acknowledge his ‘faults.’ He was later arrested and sent into exile in January 1928.

Right:

- He began to argue with the right wing.
- Leaders of the right wing – Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky – supposedly had made errors with agricultural policy.
- Stalin pushed forward the collectivisation of agriculture and the rapid development of heavy industry.
- April 1929 – the right wing was defeated and Bukharin was dismissed from the Politburo.

How Did Stalin Gain Power?

- Attacking the left and right side
- Stalin was General Secretary – he gave many people employment. His administrative power turned into the political power

Collectivisation

- Stalin thought it was necessary to rapidly reform the Soviet economy, society and industry.
- Stalin believed that Russia must transform or it would not survive.
- Russia faced the aggression of a capitalist power. Russia could not effectively compete with a superior industrial power
Industrial growth could not happen without agricultural reform – Stalin forced collectivisation upon the agricultural sector.

- He eradicated the kulak class and eliminated successful private farms.
- Planned to establish collective farms – small scale peasant farmers combined into a larger collective.
- Enabled the government to more efficiently provide modern mechanisation.
- State owned collectives.
- Farmers received wages.
- Increased government control over agriculture, rural regions and peasant classes.

**Industry in the Soviet Union – Stalin’s 5 Year Plan**

- Rapid and massive industrial development.
- Stalin believed that the USSR must either industrialise or perish.
- Began through collectivisation of farms.
- Russia had large land and untapped resources.
- Size was an advantage but also a disadvantage – long distances meant that construction of transport links and infrastructure was time consuming and expensive.
- 5 year plan – state controlled everything and overseeing construction and production with strict discipline. Also adopted slave labour.

**Transformation of Society**

- Removal of political rivals – destruction of left and right wings – left Stalin in supreme authority.
- Red Terror supported Stalin in making unprecedented changes to society.
- 5 year plan reshaped agriculture and industry.
- Red Terror ensured obedience out of fear.
- Collectivisation placed peasants and rural regions under governmental control.
- Staling bought mass social changes in:
  - gender role change
  - religious reform and eradication
  - labour reform
- These reforms radically altered the society in Russia. It was supported by mass propaganda and construction of the cult of personality.

**Gender Role Change**

- Stalin needed to make use of female labour due to manpower shortages in industrial growth.
- Women entered the workforce in large numbers – they opened crèches (babysitting) in factories.
- Women were exposed to the brutality of Russia and the controlled factories.

**Role of Women under Stalinism**

- The role of women had changed drastically under the communist leadership of the Bolsheviks.
- January 1918 – women given civil, legal and electoral equality.
Marriage equality was introduced and divorce was permitted. 
Abortion legalised. 
Women had “wider educational opportunities” and could gain more employment. 
They could be in war as “combatants.” 
74000 people were females that were part of the civil war. 
1920 – Bolshevik Women’s Section – formally known as the Zhenotdel. 
Birth rates fell steadily. 
Adolescents were incarcerated – lack of parental guidance – resulted in homelessness.

Religious Reform and Eradication
- Stalin broke church power – worked to eradicate religion. 
- Religion was a potential threat to communist power and Stalin moved against religions of Russia – Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Buddhist. 
- Religious leaders were arrested and their assets were taken. 
- Children were educated by state-controlled doctrine and terror was used to enforce this.

Labour Reform
- Labour came under the control of the state. 
- The state controlled the people’s prosperity and ensured obedience.

Education under Stalinism
- During the 1920s, there was a “cultural revolution” in Russia. 
- Young people were encouraged to verbally attack the bourgeois for their values. 
- Young people had been indoctrinated by the members of the Bolshevik party. 
- Stalin decided to end the “cultural revolution” and wanted a disciplined population that was well educated. 
- Stalin called for the reprinting of some texts and the dismissal of others. He also removed some events from history and placed emphasis on others.

The Purges and the Great Terror
- The foundation of Stalin’s power was built upon Terror. 
- Liberal application of force and fear was what kept the masses under control. 
- CHEKA was enlarged and became the NKVD. 
- The Gulag or concentration camp system was massively expanded. 
- People were brutalised and used as slave labour. 
- Mass deportations – type of “cultural engineering.” – Ethnic groups removed from their homeland and disperse throughout Russia. 
- Break down of cultural division and reduce the chances of regional revolts. 
- Purges of political leaders – resulted in Show Trials – where victims would confess their “crimes” after torture and threat.
Soviet Foreign Policy

- November 1917 – Bolshevik survival was unlikely
- Primary aim of the foreign policy was survival
- Aims and principles that based the conduct of foreign affairs – open diplomacy, self-determination, disarmament, peace of nations – all contradicted each other
- Interactions between foreign powers and changing attitudes depending upon changing circumstances
- Early soviet ideology was revolutionary – wanted promotion and support of communist uprisings and revolutions around the world
- Early years of the Bolshevik rule were focused on short term survival
- Capitalists did not want to accept communism
- Capitalism came in two forms – fascism and democracy
- ‘Socialism in one country’ – acceptable alternative promoted under Stalin. Build Russia’s strength and power. Wanted to focus on themselves
- Stalin abandoned the idea of a revolution, so Russia had to accept and interact with the international community
- 1\textsuperscript{st} foreign policy act of the Bolsheviks (October 1927 – March 1929) – decree on peace (released day after Bolshevik coup) – publicized the tsarist secret treaties
- Soviet Union signed a treaty with Germany – The Treaty of Rapallo
- This treaty set up German-Soviet Training bases in the fields of aerial, armoured and chemical warfare