

## The Russian (Bolshevik) Revolution

**Directions:** Read the information below and use it to fill out the cause and effect chart on the following page.

The Russian Revolution took place in 1917, during the final phase of World War I. It removed Russia from the war and brought about the transformation of the Russian Empire into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), replacing Russia's traditional monarchy with the world's first Communist state. The revolution happened in stages through two separate coups, one in February and one in October. The new government, led by Vladimir Lenin, would solidify its power only after three years of civil war, which ended in 1920.

Although the events of the Russian Revolution happened abruptly, the causes may be traced back nearly a century. Prior to the revolution, the Russian monarchy had become progressively weaker and increasingly aware of its own vulnerability (and therefore more reactionary). Nicholas II—the tsar who led Russia in the years leading up to the revolution—had personally witnessed revolutionary terrorists assassinate his grandfather and, subsequently, his own father respond to the assassination through brutal oppression of the Russian people. When Nicholas II himself became tsar in 1894, he used similarly severe measures to subdue resistance movements, which were becoming bolder and more widespread every year. As Nicholas's newly imposed oppressions in turn incited still more unrest, he was forced to make concessions after each incident: it was in this manner that Russia's first constitution was created, as was its first parliament. These concessions continued gradually until Nicholas II's grip on power became very tenuous.

As Nicholas II grew weaker, Vladimir Lenin rose to prominence as the most powerful figure in Russia. Although this famous leader of the October Revolution was not even in Russia for the February Revolution—he had lived in self-imposed exile in Europe since 1900 and returned to Russia only in April 1917—he nonetheless exerted tremendous influence. Whatever history's judgment of him, few other Russian revolutionaries possessed Lenin's decisiveness and strength of vision for Russia's future. Born in 1870 in the provincial town of Simbirsk as Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov, the young Lenin was profoundly affected by his older brother Alexander's 1887 execution for being involved in a plot to assassinate the tsar. As a young adult, Vladimir joined the resistance movement himself and took the pseudonym Lenin but swore that he would never engage in the sort of "adventurism" that had ended his brother's life. Nevertheless, his actions would one day become very adventurous indeed.

The revolution that Lenin led marked one of the most radical turning points in Russia's 1,300-year history: it affected economics, social structure, culture, international relations, industrial development, and most any other benchmark by which one might measure a revolution. Although the new government would prove to be at least as repressive as the one it replaced, the country's new rulers were drawn largely from the intellectual and working classes rather than from the aristocracy—which meant a considerable change in direction for Russia. The revolution opened the door for Russia to fully enter the industrial age. Prior to 1917, Russia was a mostly agrarian nation that had dabbled in industrial development only to a limited degree. By 1917, Russia's European neighbors had embraced industrialization for more than half a century, making technological advancements such as widespread electrification, which Russia had yet to achieve. After the revolution, new urban-industrial regions appeared quickly in Russia and became increasingly important to the country's development. The population was drawn to the cities in huge numbers. Education also took a major upswing, and illiteracy was almost entirely eradicated.

The Russian Revolution also had considerable international consequences. Lenin's government immediately pulled Russia out of World War I, changing the balance of forces for the remaining participants. During the ensuing civil war in Russia, several nations, including the United States, sent troops to Russia in hopes of keeping the chaos from spreading beyond Russia's boundaries. Over the next several decades, the Soviet Union actively sponsored and assisted Communist movements and revolutions around the world in an effort to broaden its sphere of influence. The country also played a fundamental role in the defeat of Nazi Germany during World War II.

Threatened by the possibility of revolutions in their own lands, the governments of many Western nations viewed Communism as a spreading threat and moved to isolate the Soviet Union as much as possible. Following World War II and the advent of the nuclear age, a confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States took center stage. As this Cold War got under way, the two countries emerged as superpowers with much of the rest of the world falling in behind one or the other. A protracted nuclear arms race between the United States and Soviet Union would last until the USSR finally collapsed in 1991.

Causes of the Russian Revolution

Effects of the Russian Revolution

## Economic Systems and Government

**Traditional:** In a traditional economy the basic economic questions (What should be produced? How should it be produced? Who gets what is produced?) are answered by doing what has traditionally been done in the past. An example would be the Native Americans when the Europeans first arrived.

**Command:** In a command economy the basic economic questions are answered by government leaders.

### Types of Command Economies:

**Socialism:** is a socio-economic system in which the three basic economic questions are subject to control by the community for the purposes of increasing social and economic equality and cooperation amongst all citizens. This control is exercised directly by workers or on behalf of the people by the government. As an economic system, socialism is often characterized by state or community ownership of the means of production.

The modern socialist movement largely originated in the late-19th century by workers who were dismayed by their poor treatment by big business. In this period, the term *socialism* was first used in connection with European social critics who criticized capitalism and private property. For **Karl Marx**, who helped establish and define the modern socialist movement, socialism would be the socioeconomic system that arises after the proletarian (workers) revolution, in which the means of production are owned collectively. This society would then progress into communism

### Socialism

Main Idea:

Positive Aspects

Negative Aspects

**Communism**, a theory and system of social and political organization that was a major force in world politics for much of the 20th century. As a political movement, communism sought to overthrow **capitalism** through a workers' revolution and establish a system in which property is owned by the community as a whole rather than by individuals. In theory, communism would create a classless society of abundance and freedom, in which all people enjoy equal social and economic status. In practice, communist regimes have taken the form of coercive, authoritarian governments that cared little for the plight of the working class and sought above all else to preserve their own hold on power.

The idea of a society based on common ownership of property and wealth stretches far back in Western thought. In its modern form, communism grew out of the socialist movement of 19th-century Europe (see **Socialism**). At that time, Europe was undergoing rapid industrialization and social change. As the **Industrial Revolution** advanced, socialist critics blamed capitalism for creating a new class of poor, urban factory workers who labored under harsh conditions, and for widening the gulf between rich and poor. Foremost among these critics were the German philosopher Karl Marx and his associate Friedrich Engels. Like other socialists, they sought an end to capitalism and the exploitation of workers. But whereas some reformers favored peaceful, longer-term social transformation, Marx and Engels believed that violent revolution was all but inevitable; in fact, they thought it was predicted by the scientific laws of history. They called their theory "scientific socialism," or

Communism. In the last half of the 19th century the terms *socialism* and *communism* were often used interchangeably. However, Marx and Engels came to see socialism as merely an intermediate stage of society in which most industry and property were owned in common but some class differences remained. They reserved the term *communism* for a final stage of society in which class differences had disappeared, people lived in harmony, and government was no longer needed.

The meaning of the word *communism* shifted after 1917, when Vladimir Lenin and his Bolshevik Party seized power in Russia. The Bolsheviks changed their name to the Communist Party and installed a repressive, single-party regime devoted to the implementation of socialist policies. The Communists formed the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR, or Soviet Union) from the former Russian Empire and tried to spark a worldwide revolution to overthrow capitalism. Lenin's successor, Joseph Stalin, turned the Soviet Union into a dictatorship based on total state control of the economy and the suppression of any form of opposition. As a result of Lenin's and Stalin's policies, many people came to associate the term *communism* with undemocratic or totalitarian governments that claimed allegiance to Marxist-Leninist ideals. The term *Marxism-Leninism* refers to Marx's theories as amended and put into practice by Lenin.

<b>Communism</b>
Main Idea:
Positive Aspects
Negative Aspects

**Market Economy:** in a market economy people are free to produce whatever they wish and to buy whatever they can afford. The decisions of producers and consumers determine the answers to the three basic economic questions.

**Capitalism,** The term *capitalism* was first introduced in the mid-19th century by Karl Marx, the founder of communism. **Free enterprise and market system** are terms also frequently employed to describe modern non-Communist economies.

The individual who comes closest to being the originator of contemporary capitalism is the Scottish philosopher **Adam Smith**. In his classic *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), Smith sought to show how it was possible to pursue private gain in ways that would further not just the interests of the individual but those of society as a whole. Society's interests are met by maximum production of the things that people want. In a now famous phrase, Smith said that the combination of self-interest, private property, and competition among sellers in markets will lead producers **"as by an invisible hand"** to an end that they did not intend, namely, the well-being of society.

Throughout its history, but especially during its ascendancy in the 19th century, capitalism has had certain key characteristics. First, basic production facilities—land and capital—are privately owned. Capital in this sense means the buildings, machines, and other equipment used to produce goods and services that are ultimately consumed. Second, economic activity is organized and coordinated through the interaction of buyers and sellers (or producers) in markets. Third, owners of land and capital as well as the workers they employ are free to pursue their own self-interests in seeking maximum gain from the use of their resources and labor in production. Consumers are free to spend their incomes in ways that they believe will yield the greatest satisfaction. This principle, called consumer sovereignty, reflects the idea that under capitalism producers will be forced by competition to use their resources in ways that will best satisfy the wants of consumers. Self-interest and the pursuit of gain lead them to do this. Fourth, under this system a minimum of government supervision is required; if competition is present, economic activity will be self-regulating. Government will be necessary only to protect society from foreign attack, uphold the rights of private property, and guarantee contracts.

<b>Capitalism</b>
Main Idea:
Positive Aspects
Negative Aspects