

6.29 Steps to Revolution in Russia

Background: Karl Marx believed that communist revolutions would occur first in more advanced capitalist economies like Great Britain, France, and Germany because they would have the strongest workers' movements. In 1913, just prior to the outbreak of World War I, only 35% of the German workforce was engaged in agriculture compared to 70% in Russia. The per capita Gross Domestic Product of Russia was only 63% of GDP in France and Germany. The country had already suffered two devastating military defeats, in the Crimean War (1853-1856) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). Marx would have been surprised by events in Russia in October 1917 that brought the Bolsheviks, a self-professed communist party, to power. The Bolsheviks were a vanguard party with small leadership group rather than a mass movement. Marx would not have been the only person to be surprised. American journalist John Reed witnessed the Russian Revolution first hand as a reporter for the socialist publication *The Masses*. He described it as "ten days that shook the world."

Instructions: Select the 3 steps that you consider most important in leading to the 1917 Bolshevik or Communist Revolution in Russia. Use online sources for research and explain the reasons for your choices. Spartacus Educational (<https://spartacus-educational.com/Russian-Revolution.htm>) is highly recommended. In your opinion, why was a communist revolution successful in Russia rather than in one of the countries with a more advanced capitalist economy?

1801-1825. Czar Alexander I experiments with constitutional government in Russia. Forty million serfs are tied to the land and have no political rights.

1812. Napoleon invades Russia but retreats after capturing Moscow.

December, 1825. Revolt by the Russian Army is crushed.

1825-1855. Czar Nicholas I uses secret police force to put down opponents. Students are targets. Forced "Russification" of ethnic minorities.

1853-1856. Crimean War pits Russia against Turkey, Great Britain and France. Russia is defeated.

1855-1881. Czar Alexander II attempts government reforms.

1861. Emancipation of 22 million Russian serfs. They remain poor and have no political rights.

1870s. Radical students organize peasants to support revolution.

1881. Czar Alexander II is assassinated by political radicals. His successors stop political and economic reforms. Jews driven out of Russia by government organized or tolerated anti-Jewish riots known as "pogroms."

1894. France and Russia become military allies against Germany.

1900. Vladimir Lenin, a Marxist revolutionary, goes into exile. Russia is the fourth largest iron producer in the world. Labor unions are illegal but there are many strikes.

February, 1904. War between Russia and Japan. By October, 1904, Russia is defeated.

January 22, 1905. Workers in St. Petersburg parade through streets and petition for rights. Soldiers open fire and kill 1,000 people on Bloody Sunday.

1905. Revolution in Russia. Czar agrees to give some power to the legislature, the Duma.

1906. Czar dismisses the Duma.

1907- France, Britain and Russia expand alliance against Germany.

1911. Chief Minister Stolypin tries to help peasants buy land. He is assassinated.

1914. Assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria starts World War I. Russia sides with Serbia. Germany sides with Austria-Hungary. Other countries choose sides. The Russian army quickly loses 250,000 men.

September 1915-November 1916. Russia legislature (Duma) is suspended again.

December 1916. Rasputin, the czar's chief advisor, is assassinated.

March 8-12, 1917. Revolution begins in St. Petersburg. Duma demands a new government.

March 15, 1917. Czar Nicholas II gives up the throne. He is later captured and executed. A provisional government is established to organize elections to a Constituent Assembly. The provisional government lasted approximately eight months.

April 20, 1917. Lenin returns to Russia from Switzerland with German acquiescence to lead Bolshevik revolution.

July, 1917. Soldiers desert Russian army.

September, 1917. Pro-Bolshevik town councils called Soviets are armed with weapons.

November 6, 1917. Bolsheviks seize power in Russia and declare a "dictatorship of the proletariat" under the direction of the Communist Party.