

# History of the USSR: From Revolution to World War-II

## PYQ 2020

### Q1. Why did the Tsarist autocracy Collapse in February 1917?

**Ans.** The collapse of the Tsarist autocracy in February 1917 can be attributed to a combination of long-term structural weaknesses within the Russian Empire and the immediate impact of World War I. **Several key factors contributed to this collapse:**

#### **Economic and Social Issues:**

- a) Russia was grappling with severe economic and social problems. The majority of the population lived in poverty, while the nobility and the monarchy enjoyed significant privileges.
- b) Industrialization had led to the growth of an urban working class that faced poor working conditions and low wages. Social unrest and strikes were becoming increasingly common.

#### **Ineffectual Leadership:**

- a) Tsar Nicholas II, who assumed the throne in 1894, was an ineffective and autocratic ruler. He resisted calls for political reform and maintained a rigid autocratic system of governance.
- b) His decisions, such as taking personal command of the Russian Army during World War I, were often disastrous and eroded public confidence in his leadership.

#### **World War I:**

- a) Russia's involvement in World War I exacerbated existing problems. The war put immense strain on the Russian economy, leading to shortages of food, fuel, and other essential goods.
- b) The war effort also resulted in significant casualties, and the military faced serious logistical and leadership problems. These failures eroded morale and loyalty among soldiers.

#### **Rasputin's Influence:**

- a) Grigori Rasputin, a mystic and confidant of the royal family, gained considerable influence over Tsarina Alexandra. His involvement in government affairs and perceived corruption fueled public outrage.

#### **Political Opposition:**

- a) Political opposition to the autocracy had been growing. Liberals, socialists, and revolutionary groups were agitating for political change and representation. The Duma (the Russian parliament), while initially weak, was becoming a platform for these demands.

#### **February Revolution (1917):**

- a) The immediate trigger for the collapse of the autocracy was the outbreak of the February Revolution in 1917 (Julian calendar; March in the Gregorian calendar). Widespread protests, strikes, and food riots erupted in Petrograd (St. Petersburg), and soldiers refused to suppress the demonstrations.
- b) As the unrest spread and the military refused to support the Tsar, Nicholas II abdicated the throne on March 2, 1917, ending centuries of Romanov rule.

**In summary**, the collapse of the Tsarist autocracy in February 1917 was the result of a confluence of factors, including economic hardship, ineffective leadership, the strain of World War I, political opposition, and the immediate impact of the February Revolution. These events ultimately led to the end of the Romanov dynasty and the beginning of a period of political turbulence and revolution in Russia.

**Q2. Would there have been a Bolshevik Revolution without Lenin? Discuss the reasons for the overthrow of the provisional Government?**

**Ans.** The question of whether there would have been a Bolshevik Revolution without Lenin is a subject of historical debate. While Vladimir Lenin played a pivotal role in shaping the Bolshevik Party and providing the leadership necessary for the October Revolution, it's important to consider that historical events are influenced by multiple factors and individuals. **Here are some reasons for the overthrow of the Provisional Government and the role of Lenin in the Bolshevik Revolution:**

**Overthrow of the Provisional Government:**

- 1. Continuation of World War I:** The continuation of World War I under the Provisional Government's leadership was deeply unpopular among the Russian population. The war brought severe economic hardships, military defeats, and casualties, which fueled discontent and unrest.
- 2. Social and Economic Issues:** Russia was grappling with severe social and economic problems, including food shortages, inflation, and land seizures by peasants. These issues created widespread discontent and unrest.
- 3. Political Fragmentation:** The Provisional Government was weak and politically fragmented. It lacked strong leadership and struggled to maintain order and make decisive policy decisions. This political vacuum allowed various political groups to vie for power.
- 4. Radicalization of the Masses:** The urban working class and soldiers were radicalized by their experiences during the war and the February Revolution. They were increasingly influenced by socialist and revolutionary ideas.
- 5. Dual Power Structure:** The Provisional Government shared power with the Petrograd Soviet, a revolutionary body that represented the interests of workers and soldiers. This dual power structure created political instability and hindered effective governance.
- 6. Kornilov Affair:** The failed Kornilov Affair in August 1917, in which General Lavr Kornilov attempted to seize power, discredited the Provisional Government further and increased support for radical revolutionary groups.
- 7. October Revolution (Bolshevik Revolution):** The Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, capitalized on the growing dissatisfaction with the Provisional Government. Lenin's leadership and the Bolshevik Party's organization played a crucial role in the success of the October Revolution, which led to the Bolshevik seizure of power on October 25 (Julian calendar) or November 7 (Gregorian calendar), 1917.

**The Role of Lenin:**

- 1. Bolshevik Leadership:** Lenin was the driving force behind the Bolshevik Party and its ideological foundation. His leadership provided the Bolsheviks with a clear and cohesive revolutionary program.

2. **Decisive Action:** Lenin's return to Petrograd in April 1917 marked a turning point. He advocated for the Bolsheviks to seize power and played a key role in planning and executing the October Revolution.
3. **Propaganda and Mobilization:** Lenin's skill in propaganda and agitation helped rally support for the Bolshevik cause. His slogans, such as "Peace, Land, and Bread," resonated with the masses.
4. **Political Strategy:** Lenin's strategic decisions, including the decision to overthrow the Provisional Government and the use of the Red Guard, were instrumental in the success of the Bolshevik Revolution.

**In conclusion**, while Lenin's leadership was instrumental in the Bolshevik Revolution's success, it's difficult to say definitively whether there would have been a Bolshevik Revolution without him. The conditions of World War I, social and economic turmoil, political fragmentation, and the radicalization of the masses created a volatile environment in which a revolutionary upheaval was likely. Lenin's leadership and the Bolshevik Party's organization provided the necessary catalyst to seize power and establish a new government. The Bolshevik Revolution marked a pivotal moment in Russian and world history, leading to the establishment of a communist regime and shaping the course of the 20th century.

### **Q3. Discuss the features of War Communism. Why were the policies of this period abandoned?**

**Ans.** War Communism was a set of economic and political policies implemented by the Bolshevik government in Soviet Russia during the Russian Civil War (1917-1923). These policies were characterized by a focus on centralization, state control of the economy, and the prioritization of war efforts over civilian needs. **Here are the key features of War Communism and the reasons for its abandonment:**

#### **Features of War Communism:**

1. **Nationalization and Centralization:** The Bolshevik government nationalized industry, banks, and transportation, placing them under state control. Centralization was a core principle, with decisions made by government authorities in Moscow.
2. **Food Requisitioning:** The government seized grain and other foodstuffs from peasants, often forcibly, to feed the Red Army and urban population. This led to widespread food shortages in rural areas.
3. **Worker Control:** In factories and enterprises, workers were encouraged to take control, but under the overall direction of the state. Factory committees were established to oversee production.
4. **End of Private Trade:** Private trade was banned, and a barter system was introduced. Money lost its value, and goods were exchanged directly.
5. **Labor Conscription:** Labor was conscripted to ensure that the workforce met the needs of the war effort. Workers were mobilized into labor armies.
6. **Monetary Policies:** The government printed money at an alarming rate, leading to hyperinflation and the collapse of the currency's value.
7. **Political Repression:** The period saw increased political repression, including the Red Terror, where suspected counter-revolutionaries were arrested, executed, or imprisoned.

#### **Reasons for Abandonment:**

**War Communism was an extreme response to the exigencies of the Russian Civil War and had several critical flaws that led to its abandonment:**

- 1. Economic Disintegration:** The policies of War Communism led to the economic collapse of Russia. The seizure of grain from peasants resulted in a sharp drop in agricultural production, and food shortages were rampant.
- 2. Resistance from the Peasantry:** Peasants, who comprised the majority of the population, resisted the forced requisitioning of their grain and other products. This led to violent confrontations and a breakdown in rural order.
- 3. Industrial Output Decline:** Despite worker control, industrial output declined dramatically due to a lack of incentives, food shortages, and inadequate supplies. Factories and infrastructure deteriorated.
- 4. Famine and Social Unrest:** A devastating famine in 1921, exacerbated by food requisitioning and economic disruption, resulted in widespread suffering and death. Social unrest and peasant uprisings grew.
- 5. Political Opposition:** The policies of War Communism faced opposition within the Bolshevik Party itself, with figures like Lenin advocating for a shift toward the New Economic Policy (NEP) to stabilize the economy.

**Transition to the New Economic Policy (NEP):**

In response to the dire economic and social conditions, the Bolshevik government under Lenin introduced the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1921. The NEP was a partial retreat from War Communism and reintroduced elements of market capitalism. It allowed peasants to sell their surplus produce on the open market, allowed private trade, and encouraged small-scale private enterprise. The NEP contributed to a gradual economic recovery and helped stabilize the country.

**In conclusion,** War Communism was a set of policies implemented during the Russian Civil War to support the Bolsheviks' war effort. However, its extreme measures led to economic collapse, famine, social unrest, and political opposition. The policies were abandoned in favor of the NEP, which allowed for a more market-oriented approach and contributed to the stabilization of Soviet Russia's economy.

**Q4. Discuss the process of Collectivization in the Soviet Union? What were its economic and Political consequences?**

**Ans.** Collectivization in the Soviet Union was a radical agricultural policy implemented by Joseph Stalin in the late 1920s and early 1930s. It aimed to transform Soviet agriculture from a system of individual small farms (known as "peasant farming" or "kulaks") into large collective farms owned and managed by the state. The process of collectivization had significant economic and political consequences, some of which were highly detrimental.

**Process of Collectivization:**

- 1. Decree on Land:** The process of collectivization began in 1929 with the issuance of the Decree on Land, which mandated the seizure of land from the kulaks and their forced incorporation into collective farms.

2. **Creation of Collective Farms:** Collective farms, known as "kolkhozy," were established. These were typically organized on a regional or village basis and were intended to pool resources, labor, and land.
3. **Resistance from Peasants:** Many peasants resisted collectivization, viewing it as a threat to their property and livelihoods. The government responded with brutal measures, including confiscation of grain, livestock, and property, and the exile or execution of those deemed "kulaks" or "enemies of the state."
4. **Famine:** The process of collectivization, combined with the forced grain requisitioning (known as "dekulakization"), contributed to the Soviet Famine of 1932-1933, which resulted in the deaths of millions of peasants.
5. **Mechanization:** Collectivization also led to some modernization and mechanization of agriculture, as the state introduced tractors and other machinery to collective farms.

#### **Economic Consequences:**

1. **Agricultural Disruption:** The forcible collectivization disrupted agricultural production. Many peasants resisted by reducing their output or engaging in passive resistance.
2. **Famine:** The forced requisitioning of grain and other foodstuffs contributed to widespread famine, particularly in Ukraine and the Volga region, resulting in millions of deaths.
3. **Economic Losses:** The policies of collectivization and forced grain requisitioning led to significant economic losses, including a decline in agricultural output and productivity.

#### **Political Consequences:**

1. **Consolidation of State Control:** Collectivization allowed the Soviet state to consolidate control over agriculture and eliminate private landownership. It also served to weaken the influence of the peasantry as a class.
2. **Resistance and Repression:** The policy sparked significant resistance among peasants, leading to widespread repression, mass arrests, and executions. Many intellectuals, clergy, and political dissidents were also targeted.
3. **Social Engineering:** Collectivization was part of Stalin's broader program of social engineering, aimed at reshaping society according to Marxist-Leninist principles and eliminating perceived class enemies.
4. **Shift in Agriculture:** The process of collectivization transformed the agricultural landscape, replacing individual farming with collective farming as the dominant mode of agricultural production.

**In summary**, the process of collectivization in the Soviet Union had far-reaching economic and political consequences. It disrupted agricultural production, led to famine and economic losses, and resulted in significant resistance and repression. Collectivization also served Stalin's broader political goals of consolidating state control, eliminating perceived class enemies, and reshaping society according to communist principles. The policy left a lasting legacy in Soviet agriculture and contributed to a shift in the social and economic structure of the Soviet Union.

**Q5. What were the reasons for the Great Purge of 1937-38? What was the impact of this purge on party, army and nationalities?**

**Ans.** The Great Purge of 1937-1938, also known as the Great Terror, was a campaign of political repression and mass killings orchestrated by Joseph Stalin and the Soviet government. It targeted perceived enemies of the state within the Communist Party, the Red Army, and various nationalities in the Soviet Union. The reasons for the Great Purge were multifaceted and driven by Stalin's consolidation of power, paranoia, and the desire to eliminate potential rivals. **Here are the key reasons and the impact of the purge on different sectors:**

#### **Reasons for the Great Purge:**

- 1. Consolidation of Power:** Stalin sought to eliminate any potential threats to his authority within the Communist Party. He saw rivals within the party, particularly those associated with the Old Bolsheviks and the Left Opposition, as potential challengers.
- 2. Paranoia and Insecurity:** Stalin's paranoia and fear of conspiracies played a significant role. He believed that external and internal enemies were plotting to overthrow him and the Soviet government.
- 3. Ideological Purity:** Stalin aimed to maintain ideological purity within the party by removing individuals who were perceived as deviationists or potential counter-revolutionaries.
- 4. Scapegoating:** The Soviet government often blamed scapegoats for economic and political failures. The purge allowed Stalin to shift blame for problems onto alleged enemies.
- 5. The NKVD:** The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD), led by figures like Lavrentiy Beria, played a central role in carrying out the purges. It had broad powers to arrest, interrogate, and execute perceived enemies of the state.

#### **Impact of the Great Purge:**

##### **Party:**

- The Communist Party was severely purged, resulting in the removal of thousands of party members, including prominent leaders like Leon Trotsky and Nikolai Bukharin.
- The party was left in a state of fear and submission, with members afraid to voice dissent or question the leadership.

##### **Army:**

- The Red Army was heavily impacted, with many high-ranking officers purged. This weakened the military's leadership and preparedness.
- The purges left the Soviet military ill-prepared for the early stages of World War II, contributing to the initial setbacks against Nazi Germany in 1941.

##### **Nationalities:**

- Ethnic and national groups within the Soviet Union were targeted, particularly during the Yezhovshchina (1937-1938), a period of mass repression within the Great Purge.
- Ethnic minorities, such as Poles, Ukrainians, and others, faced mass deportations, executions, and repression.

##### **Intellectuals and Artists:**

- Intellectuals, artists, and writers who were perceived as politically suspect or uncooperative were also targeted.
- This had a chilling effect on creative and intellectual freedom in the Soviet Union.

##### **Society:**

- The Great Purge created a climate of fear and mistrust in Soviet society. People were afraid to speak openly or associate with those who might be targeted.
- It left a deep scar on the collective memory of the Soviet people, with many families affected by arrests and executions.

**In conclusion**, the Great Purge of 1937-1938 was a brutal and far-reaching campaign that had profound and lasting effects on the Soviet Union. It eliminated perceived enemies, weakened the party, military, and society, and created an atmosphere of fear and conformity. The purges left a legacy of trauma and repression that continued to shape Soviet society throughout Stalin's rule and beyond.

#### **Q6. What were the objectives of Soviet Foreign Policy during the 1920s and 1930s?**

**Ans.** Soviet foreign policy during the 1920s and 1930s was shaped by a combination of ideological, security, and geopolitical objectives. These decades were marked by the consolidation of Bolshevik power after the Russian Revolution and the establishment of the Soviet state. **The objectives of Soviet foreign policy during this period can be summarized as follows:**

##### **1. Survival and Consolidation of the Soviet Regime:**

The primary objective of Soviet foreign policy in the early years of the Soviet Union was the survival and consolidation of the communist regime. The Bolshevik government faced internal and external threats to its existence, and it sought international recognition and support to secure its position.

##### **2. Spread of Communism:**

The Soviet leadership under Vladimir Lenin and later Joseph Stalin was committed to the global spread of communism. They believed in the eventual worldwide victory of the proletariat and saw the Soviet Union as a base for promoting revolution in other countries. To this end, the Comintern (Communist International) was established to coordinate and support communist parties and movements around the world.

##### **3. Security and Defending the Socialist Homeland:**

The Soviet Union had a history of foreign invasions, including during the Russian Civil War (1917-1923). Ensuring the security and defense of the Soviet homeland was a paramount objective. The Red Army was strengthened to deter potential aggressors.

##### **4. Economic and Technological Development:**

The Soviet leadership sought access to Western technology and industrial expertise to help modernize the country's economy and infrastructure. This led to efforts to establish economic relations and trade agreements with Western countries.

##### **5. Diplomatic Recognition and Normalization of Relations:**

One of the key foreign policy objectives was to gain diplomatic recognition and normalize relations with Western powers, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom. The Soviet government engaged in diplomatic initiatives, including the Genoa Conference of 1922 and the Treaty of Rapallo with Germany in 1922, to achieve this goal.

##### **6. Geopolitical Expansion and Security Buffer:**

The Soviet leadership sought to create a security buffer around the Soviet Union to protect against future invasions. This led to the establishment of Soviet-friendly governments in neighboring countries, particularly in Eastern Europe.

**7. Safeguarding of the Communist Regime:**

Internally, the Soviet leadership was concerned about the possibility of counter-revolution or sabotage by perceived enemies. They used the security apparatus to monitor and suppress perceived threats both at home and abroad.

**8. Realpolitik and Pragmatism:**

While the Soviet leadership was ideologically driven, they also pursued pragmatic foreign policies when necessary. This included seeking diplomatic recognition from capitalist countries and making diplomatic compromises, such as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact with Nazi Germany in 1939.

**9. Participation in International Organizations:**

The Soviet Union joined international organizations such as the League of Nations (despite its initial suspicion of it) to engage in diplomatic dialogue and further its interests on the international stage.

**In summary,** Soviet foreign policy during the 1920s and 1930s was shaped by a complex interplay of ideological, security, and geopolitical considerations. While the promotion of global communism was a central objective, the Soviet government also engaged in pragmatic diplomacy to secure its position, seek recognition, and ensure the survival and consolidation of the communist regime in a hostile international environment.