A History of Unrest

Russia had been an autocratic monarchy since its inception. Since the days of Ivan IV (The Terrible) all power in the country was centered in the Tsar with little room for dissenters to voice their opinions. The power of the Tsar came not only from his political role as Russia’s head of state but also from his religious role as head of the Orthodox Church. In 1613 the House of Romanov replaced the House of Rurik as Russia's royal house. The Romanov dynasty would reign for hundreds of years and would expand the backwater Tsardom of Muscovy into the Russian Empire, one of the world’s great powers.

As enlightenment ideas spread across Europe during the 18th century Western monarchies were forced to liberalize or be overthrown. Russia, however, remained a medieval style monarchy. Early calls for reform came in 1825, when a society of military officers who had seen Western liberal ideas in action during the Russian occupation of Paris, staged what was known the Decembrist Revolt. This revolt was put down, but throughout the 19th century demands for liberal reform continued.

Note on dates: Until 1918, Russia used the Julian Calendar (a.k.a. Old Style,) which had been abandoned in the West in the Sixteenth Century. As a result, all official dates were thirteen days ahead of the Gregorian Calendar (a.k.a. New Style) used in the West. The Russian revolution started on 8 March 1917 (Gregorian) or 23 February (Julian). Thus, the revolution was known as the February revolution in Russia, but it usually is called the March Revolution in the West. In 1918, the Soviet government switched the country to the Gregorian system. In this simulation, Julian dates are used throughout, for consistency with Russian practice at that time.

Start Date: This simulation begins on 5 May 1917 (Julian), following the formation of a coalition between the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet.
The Russian Provisional Government, 1917

When serfdom was finally abolished by Tsar Alexander II in 1861 many were not satisfied with the terms of the emancipation and joined the Narodniks, a socialist populist movement which called for the political awakening of the peasants. Anarchists later assassinated Alexander II in 1881, leading to a major crackdown by the Okhrana, the Tsarist secret police.

The country’s social problems only continued to build under Alexander III and Nicholas II. Newly emancipated peasants earned too little and were not allowed to sell or mortgage their allotted land. Ethnic minorities resented the government because of its "Russification" policies. A nascent industrial working class resented the government for doing too little to protect them, as it banned strikes and labor unions. Then, in late 1904 the Russo-Japanese War broke out in the far east over control of Manchuria and Korea. The Russian Baltic Fleet took months longer than expected to reach the Sea of Japan due to having been denied the use of the Suez Canal by the British. When it finally arrived, the Fleet was swiftly obliterated by the Imperial Japanese Navy in the Battle of Tsushima Strait. This decisive defeat was the spark that would first light the fire of revolution. Massive strikes and revolts paralyzed the country. In the capital, the socialists formed the St. Petersburg Soviet to represent the workers. New reformist parties like the Constitutional Democratic Party (Kadets) and Octobrists sprung up. In the wake of the Revolution of 1905 Tsar Nicholas II instigated another crackdown, executing and exiling thousands of revolutionaries. He did partially cave to the revolutionaries’ demands and granted the people a democratically elected assembly called the Duma. However, the Duma had little real power, and some dissatisfied parties, like the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, boycotted Duma elections.

Pictured: Father Georgy Gapon leads protestors through St. Petersburg in January 1905. These protestors saw the Tsar as their “Little Father” and were hopeful that he would address their concerns. They sang patriotic songs like ‘God Save the Tsar’ as they marched to the Winter Palace. Instead they were fired upon by nervous Imperial troops. This event was known as Bloody Sunday and contributed to the Revolution of 1905.

The Great War

Long standing military tensions and nationalist rivalries between the great European empires boiled over when on 15 July 1914 (Julian) Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated by a Serbian terrorist. Austria-Hungary used the incident as a justification to invade and establish control over Serbia. Tsar Nicholas II made the decision to mobilize the military in support of the Serbs, whom many Russians regarded as brothers considering their
shared Slavic, Orthodox Christian, heritage. The Tsar hoped to weaken the already declining Austro-Hungarian Empire and expand Russia’s influence in the Balkans. This began a chain of events which, through a web of treaties and opposing interests, pulled almost all of Europe into the Great War (World War I). On one side were the forces of the Entente (originally Triple Entente), which included the Russian Empire, United Kingdom, France, Italy, Belgium, Greece, and others. Opposing them were the Central Powers of the German Empire, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria.

Like in the rest of Europe, support for the war was initially high in Russia. Patriotic and anti-German sentiments were high and the capital of St. Petersburg was renamed to the more Russian sounding Petrograd. People believed it would be won in a matter of months and most reformist political parties banded together to support the war effort. Early on the Russian army performed well, winning quick victories over Austria-Hungary in Galicia. Illusions of an easy victory were shattered in August and September of 1914 when the entire Russian first Army was wiped out in the Battle of Tannenberg and the second Army took heavy casualties at the Battle of Masurian Lake. In the summer of 1915, the Germans conducted a major offensive in which they captured Poland and the Baltics, pushing the front onto Russian soil. As the Russian economy faltered, shortages of food and supplies occurred both on the front and at home, turning public opinion against the war. Many in the Duma lost faith in the government’s ability to conduct the war. In August 1915, the Kadets, Progressivists and Octobrists formed the Progressive Bloc, denouncing the Tsar’s government as incompetent and calling for a government of “popular confidence.”

Over the following months anti-Tsarist feelings would be exacerbated by Tsar Nicholas’ decision to leave Petrograd in order to assume direct control of the war effort as Supreme Commander of the Army. In his absence, his wife, Tsarina Alexandra, was left with greater control over government affairs in Petrograd. Alexandra’s German heritage and questionable relationship with the notoriously promiscuous faith healer Grigory Rasputin made her extremely unpopular with the Russian populous. Alexandra even appointed several of Rasputin’s allies to the cabinet at his request, leading many...
to believe that Rasputin was controlling the Tsar’s government through his wife. Although Rasputin was soon murdered by patriotic nobles, the Imperial family’s relationship with him was considered a national embarrassment and had tarnished the image of the monarchy for many. During this time a series of scandals had also undermined the authority of the Russian Orthodox Church. Meanwhile the Tsar’s role on the frontline was largely ceremonial. He did little more than inspect troops and attend dinners at Stavka (high command) headquarters while his generals dictated military strategy. This did not lead to a substantial increase in morale across the Imperial Army.

It seemed in the summer of 1916 that the war was turning in Russia’s favor with the initial success of the Brusilov Offensive. General Alexei Brusilov used innovative tactics involving shortened, precise, preliminary bombardments to breakthrough Austro-Hungarian lines. The Russians reached as far west as the Carpathian Mountains, nearly causing the total collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Army. Emboldened by this Russian success, Romania joined the war on the side of the Allies. However, before long German troops transferred from the Western Front arrived to reinforce the Austrians, and the Brusilov Offensive bogged down. By the end of 1916 the Central Powers had not only recaptured much of the territory lost in the offensive but had invaded and occupied most of Romania. While the offensive was hailed by many as Russia’s greatest feat of the war, it had cost between 500,000 and 1,000,000 men and had not helped remedy the economic situation on the home front, where constant shortages were leading to strikes and protests across the country.

The February Revolution and the Provisional Government

Opposition to the monarchy and the war came to a head on 23 February 1917 when a women’s protest against food rationing escalated into worker’s riots and full-scale revolution. Police and soldiers were ordered to control the riots but soon joined the revolutionaries. This was the February Revolution. Having lost the confidence of his people, on 3 March the Tsar was forced to abdicate the throne, ending over 300 years of Romanov rule. On 2 March the Provisional Government was formed with Prince Gregory Lvov as its head. The public announcement of its formation was made a day later.

The announcement stated the Provisional Government would pursue the following agenda:
- Full and immediate amnesty on all issues political and religious, including: terrorist acts, military uprisings, and agrarian crimes etc.
- Freedom of word, press, unions, assemblies, and strikes with spread of political freedoms to military servicemen within the restrictions allowed by military-technical conditions.
- Abolition of all hereditary, religious, and national class restrictions.
- Immediate preparations for the convocation on basis of universal, equal, secret, and direct vote for the Constituent Assembly which will determine the form of government and the constitution.
- Replacement of the police with a public militsiya and its elected chairmanship subordinated to the local authorities.
- Elections to the authorities of local self-government on the basis of universal, direct, equal, and secret vote.
- Non-disarmament and non-withdrawal out of Petrograd the military units participating in the revolution movement.
- Preservation of strict discipline in ranks and performing military services - elimination of all restrictions on soldier’s rights which are granted to all other citizens.

Ultimately, the Provisional Government was meant to be dissolved after the Constituent Assembly was elected and had established a new Russian Constitution. This means that the Provisional Government has a mandate to govern Russia while providing for the organization of democratic elections for the Constituent Assembly. Immediately after his own abdication the former Tsar Nicholas tried to name his brother, Grand Duke Michael, as the next emperor. Michael declined, accepting the authority of the Provisional Government until

Along with the Provisional Government, a rival political authority known as the Petrograd Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies, or the Petrograd Soviet, has been established to represent workers and soldiers. It was formed by imprisoned socialist labor leaders who were freed by disaffected soldiers when the revolution broke out. The Petrograd Soviet has an executive committee called Ispolkom through which it can issue orders. Seats on Ispolkom are largely split between the Socialist-Revolutionary Party and the Mensheviks, but smaller parties like the Popular Socialists and Vladimir Lenin’s radical Bolsheviks are also represented. The Soviet also has an official newspaper called Ivestia. Under their first official order, Order No. 1, military units were not to obey the orders of the Provisional Government if they contradict the orders of the Petrograd Soviet. Reception to this order across different units has been mixed. Some units are still under the control of officers loyal to the Provisional Government, while others are now being run by elected soldiers’ committees loyal to the Petrograd Soviet. While the order was only meant to apply to units in Petrograd, discipline in frontline units has also begun to break down. While most people in the Soviet oppose the war, they recognize that as long as fighting continues discipline on front must remain intact in order to hold the Central Powers at Bay. Order No. 2 was issued to annul Order No. 1, but this was largely ignored. It seems that restoring order in the military will not be easy.
Prelude to Revolution
The Russian Provisional Government, 1917

Pictured: Europe, Spring 1917. The Central Powers occupy much of the western Russian Empire, including Poland, the Baltics, and parts of Russia itself. Although the USA has joined the war it will take them months to mobilize and deploy their forces to relieve the Allies.

The awkward balance of power in the capital has led to what is being called Dual Power, or Dvoryevlastiye, under which political control of the country is de facto divided between the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet. The Petrograd Soviet and its socialist parties hold sway over military conscripts and urban industrial workers. The sympathies of military officers, capitalists, and bourgeoisie professionals generally lie with the Provisional Government and liberal parties like the Kadets and Octobrists. Many right-wing military officers and Cossacks even wish for autocratic power to be returned to the Tsar, an idea the socialists find abhorrent. The peasantry in the countryside is less politically engaged, but in the chaos they have started taking over the land of the nobles, many of whom have fled the country. What to do with the country’s agricultural land is a subject of great debate. Liberals want the peasants to become private landowners, while the socialist parties debate about whether to socialize or nationalize the land. The chaos in the capital has led to rumblings of separatism among Russia’s many ethnic regions and Cossack hosts. Without a strong central government to unite the former Empire, full-fledged independence movements could develop in areas like Ukraine or the Caucuses.

On 18 April, after the Petrograd Soviet declared its rejection of “acquisitionist ambitions,” Pavel Milyukov, who was then the Provisional Government’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, wrote a letter to the Allies, stating that Russia reserved the right to annex Constantinople from the Ottoman Empire after the war. The
The Provisional Government had previously argued that Russia’s continued involvement in the war was only for the purpose of fulfilling treaty obligations to its allies and to defend its besieged territory. When this note was leaked to the public many war-weary citizens were outraged, setting off a series of protests known as the April Crisis. In the aftermath of this immense backlash Pavel Milyukov and Alexander Guchkov were forced to resign from the cabinet. The Provisional Government, which previously had only one socialist in its cabinet (Alexander Kerensky, Socialist-Revolutionary Party), has formed a coalition government with the Petrograd Soviet. The power of the liberals and constitutional monarchists has been reduced and the balance of power in the cabinet is now roughly even between them and the socialists. Guchkov’s former role as Minister of War has been filled by Alexander Kerensky. Milyukov’s former role as Minister of Foreign Affairs has been filled by non-party member Mikhail Tereshchenko. The socialist parties who have joined the coalition have agreed to support the war effort for the time being. Simply put, securing Russia’s exit from the war is easier said than done. If Russia sues for peace, the great strain the war has put on its economy will be eliminated and the Provisional Government will be able to focus on its many internal issues. However, a peace settlement with Germany and Austria-Hungary would likely come with harsh demands of territorial concessions and diplomatic consequences for relations with Britain and France. The only major party in the Petrograd Soviet which has refused to join the coalition are the Bolsheviks, who now preach for the transfer of “all power to the Soviets.” Now that the other socialist parties have entered the coalition, they are the real opposition to the Provisional Government. Those who are most dissatisfied with the government will see them as the alternative and rally around them.

Political Parties

Octobrist Party: The Union of 17 October, also known as the Octobrist Party, is a liberal reformist and constitutional monarchist party. Like most other reformist parties in Russia it was created during the Revolution of 1905. Since 1906 it has been headed by Alexander Guchkov. The Octobrists were a major political force in the Duma before the outbreak of the Great War. With the rise in popularity of more radical groups, the Octobrists have declined somewhat. The Octobrists are politically to the

Pictured: The Winter Palace, headquarters of the Provisional Government.
right of the Kadets and are the only major party which is explicitly committed to preserving the monarchy, albeit in a limited constitutional state. They draw support from many upper-class businessmen and bureaucrats. Guchkov was initially the Provisional Government’s War Minister but because of backlash to his pro-war stance and association with Mikhailov he has resigned following the April Crisis, further decreasing the Octobrists power. They are part of the alliance of liberal parties known as the Progressive Bloc, which includes the Kadets, Progressists, and Octobrists.

Constitutional Democratic Party (Kadet): The Party of People’s Freedom, also known as the Constitutional Democratic Party, is a liberal reformist political party whose members include constitutional monarchists and moderate republicans. A member of the Constitutional Democratic Party is called a Kadet. The party was founded by Pavel Milyukov during the Revolution of 1905 and performed well in early Duma elections. After the February Revolution the Kadets held great power in the Provisional Government, with Pavel Milyukov serving as Minister of Foreign Affairs. While the Kadets may not have approved of the ‘Tsar’s’ management of the war, they still believe Russia should fulfill its military obligations to its allies for as long the war continues. Milyukov’s letter to the Allies was met with anger by many war-weary soldiers and workers in Petrograd, pushing some towards the radical Bolsheviks, and resulting in Milyukov’s resignation. Some of the liberal reforms the party supports include freedom of religion, press, and assembly as well as the eight-hour workday and the right to strike. They will undoubtedly push to establish a Russian Constitution in which to enshrine these freedoms. The Kadets also support full citizenship for all of Russia’s minorities and therefore draw support from groups like Jews and Volga Germans. Many Kadets are nobles or educated bourgeois professionals, such as professors, engineers, and lawyers. They are part of the alliance of liberal parties known as the Progressive Bloc, which includes the Kadets, Progressists, and Octobrists.

Pictured: Symbol of the Party of People’s Freedom, or Constitutional Democratic Party. The word ‘freedom’ is written on the woman’s shield. The term Kadet is an acronym for “Constitutional Democratic” from the Cyrillic letters К (Ka) and Д (De.)

Progressist: The Progressive Party, or Progressist Party, was formed in 1912 as a successor to the Peaceful Renewal Party of 1907-1908 by former Kadets and Octobrists. Its members are forward thinking capitalists and intelligentsia who want to bring Russia into the modern day. Their primary goals are the creation of a strong rule-of-law state with a free market economy and the implementation of an active foreign policy consistent with the national interests of the country. Many in the party now support a federal form of government headed by a president. They are politically to the left of the Octobrists and to the Right of the Kadets. They are part of the alliance of liberal parties known as the Progressive Bloc, which includes the Kadets, Progressists, and Octobrists.
Popular Socialist: The Popular Socialist Party was founded in 1906, by a number of moderate dissidents from the Socialist-Revolutionary Party (SRs). These dissidents rejected the SR's adoption of terrorist tactics and wanted to 'nationalize' land (i.e., turn it over to the state), rather than 'socialize' it (i.e., make it common property of the peasantry), as the SRs propose. The Popular Socialists also plan to financially compensate landowners, unlike the SRs or Bolsheviks. They are closely allied with the Trudovik faction of the SRs but disapprove of the influence of Marxism on SR leaders like Chernov. The Popular Socialists formed part of the new coalition after the April Crisis and Alexey Peshek honov joined Provisional Government cabinet as Minister of Food.

Socialist-Revolutionary Party (SR): Having been founded in 1902 when a number of smaller revolutionary groups merged, the Socialist-Revolutionaries, or SRs, played a major role in the Revolution of 1905. From 1902 to 1908 the party had a dedicated paramilitary wing, the SR Combat Organization, which frequently carried out terrorist attacks on Tsarist officials. After the Duma was established, they boycotted several elections in protest of its limited power. A splinter group called the Trudoviks was formed when some moderate SRs disagreed with the party's decision to boycott the Duma. Notable members of the Trudoviks include Alexander Kerensky and Pavel Pereverzev. The party ideology is based on the Narodnik-populist movement of the 1860s and 1870s and is heavily influenced by the writings of Viktor Chernov. The party is not officially Marxist, but many SRs identify as Marxists. The SRs favor revolutionary socialism, democratic socialism, and agrarian socialism. The SRs draw great support from Russia's rural peasantry, who in particular favor their program of land-socialization (i.e., making it common property of the peasantry) as opposed to the Bolshevik program of land-nationalization (i.e., turning it over to the state). The party also has a more inclusive definition of the proletariat than the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. They and the Mensheviks have roughly equal power in the Ispolkom, the executive committee of the Petrograd Soviet. Both the SRs and Mensheviks fear growing radicalism in the Soviet. The party is split on the issue of the war, but most SRs recognize the necessity of compromise and plan to continue the war for the time being. As he was then a member of the Duma, Kerensky was in a position to join the Provisional Government when the February Revolution came. He was for a time the only socialist in the Provisional Government cabinet and the link between it and the Petrograd Soviet. Following the April Crisis, the SRs and have entered into a coalition with the liberal Provisional Government and more socialists have been added to the cabinet. Viktor Chernov has been made Minister of Agriculture, Alexander Kerensky has been selected as Minister of War, and Pavel Pereverzev is the new Minister of Justice.

Pictured: Symbol of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party. The Cyrillic letters С (Es) and Р (Er) for “Socialist Revolutionary” are on either side of the sun.
Mensheviks: The Mensheviks are the more moderate faction of the communist Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP). They split with the more radical Bolsheviks in 1903 following a dispute in the RSDLP between Julius Martov and Vladimir Lenin over party organization. Martov's supporters, who were in the minority in a crucial vote on party membership rules, came to be called Mensheviks (minority group), while Lenin's adherents were known as Bolsheviks (majority group). Ironically, as of May 1917, the Mensheviks are more powerful in the Petrograd Soviet and have more seats on Ispolkom. Nikolay Chkheidze, a leading Menshevik, is chairman of the Petrograd Soviet. As a far-left communist party they support radical change and nationalization of land and industry, but unlike the Bolsheviks they see more gradual reform as an option. In the Soviet power is split fairly evenly between the Mensheviks and SRs. The core of the disagreement between the Mensheviks and SRs is over whether to focus on the rural peasants or urban industrial workers as ‘the vanguard of the revolution.’ The Mensheviks favor the urban workers and support nationalization of agricultural land, while the SRs favor rural peasants and support socialization of the land. The Mensheviks willing to tolerate their opposition in the Provisional Government and were willing to join the coalition government after the April Crisis, even if it means cooperating with the war effort for the time being. Matvey Skobelev has been made minister of Labor and Irakli Tsereteli has been made Minister of Post and Telegraph.

Bolsheviks: The radical Bolsheviks were unwilling to even participate in a government that would continue the ‘Imperialist War’ against the Central Powers and have denounced the Mensheviks and SRs for doing so. As the only major party which is still not involved in the coalition government, they are in a unique position. They are effectively immune to criticism since they have no actual responsibility in the government and will be a natural rallying point for Russians who are dissatisfied with the Provisional Government and the war. After returning from exile in Germany, Vladimir Lenin has taken control of the Bolsheviks in Petrograd. They are the third most powerful party in the Petrograd Soviet, behind the Mensheviks and SRs. The dominant ideology in the party is Leninism, the political theory for the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, led by a revolutionary vanguard party, as the political prelude to the establishment of socialism, and later communism. The function of the Leninist vanguard party is to provide the working classes with the education, organization, and revolutionary leadership necessary to depose capitalism in the Russian. The Bolsheviks support radical policies of immediate nationalization of land and industry. They have little patience for liberals or less radical socialists, who fear their extremist tendencies.
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