

# YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

**F**or Russia, 1917 was the year that changed everything. After more than three centuries of rule, the mighty Romanov dynasty was forced out of power in March and a revolutionary government installed in its place.

But the upheaval was still far from over: by October, the new regime would itself be toppled by Vladimir Lenin's Bolshevik Party, setting in motion a chain of events that would lead to a brutal civil war, the birth of the USSR, and the despotic tyranny of Joseph Stalin.

In this month's essential guide, we explore the remarkable story behind the Russian Revolution, revealing how decades of political unrest and

simmering class tension would explode into a full-blown socialist uprising. With expert insight supplied courtesy of author and historian Helen Rappaport, we'll delve into the lives of the major players – from Tsar Nicholas II to Leon Trotsky – while also answering some of the period's biggest questions: how did Lenin seize power? Why were the Romanovs murdered? And just who was Rasputin?

We begin our journey, however, with a handy timeline outlining the key events you need to know. Turn the page to get started.

**A NOTE ON DATES**  
Until February 1918, Russia still used the Julian calendar, which was 13 days behind the Gregorian calendar already adopted by the rest of Europe. Unless stated otherwise, we have used the Julian dates throughout this guide (e.g. the February Revolution is stated as beginning on 23 February 1917, even though it was 8 March elsewhere in Europe).

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**HELEN RAPPAPORT** is a bestselling author and historian who specialises in late imperial and revolutionary Russia. Her books include *Caught in the Revolution: Petrograd, 1917* and *The Race to Save the Romanovs*.

# RUSSIA TRANSFORMED

An overview of the bitter protests, brutal murders and social upheaval that led to the birth of the USSR

WORDS: EMMA SLATTERY WILLIAMS

Timeline dates follow the Julian calendar until 14 February 1918, when Russia adopted the Gregorian calendar

**19 FEB 1861**

Serfdom is brought to an end across the Russian empire by the reigning tsar, Alexander II. But although peasants are no longer forced to live under the control of wealthy landowners, many become trapped in dire poverty, paying for their land.

**1 MAR 1881**

A member of the radical 'People's Will' group assassinates Alexander II in St Petersburg. He is succeeded by his son, Alexander III, who enacts anti-terror measures that limit civil rights and freedom of the press.

**8 MAY 1887**

Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (who will later adopt the surname Lenin)'s brother, political activist Alexander Ilyich Ulyanov, and four others are executed for plotting to assassinate Alexander III.

**1891-92**

▼ A famine kills 375,000 people across Russia. The tsarist regime's handling of the crisis sparks widespread discontent and prompts an international outcry, as well as campaigns to help victims.

**20 OCT 1894**



▲ Alexander III succumbs to illness. His 26-year-old son, Nicholas II (above), takes the Russian throne.

**8 DEC 1895**



▼ Lenin is arrested for sedition. He is held in solitary confinement for 13 months, before being exiled to Siberia until 1900.

**17 FEB 1898**

The Russian Social Democratic Labour Party is formed. In 1903, it will split into two factions: the radical Bolshevik wing, led by Lenin, and the more moderate Menshevik wing, led by Julius Martov.

**1904-05**

▼ Russia's decisive defeat during the Russo-Japanese war leads to a loss of international prestige.



**9 JAN 1905**

Troops open fire on pro-reform campaigners in the Russian capital of St Petersburg. Tsar Nicholas II is widely blamed, and the atrocity becomes known as 'Bloody Sunday'. A period of unrest known as the 1905 Revolution begins.

**JUN 1905**

► Men on board the battleship *Potemkin* rebel against their officers and sail to the port of Odessa. The mutiny triggers a pro-revolutionary protest in the city, which is suppressed by Cossack troops.



**22-27 AUG 1917**



◀ Russian army general Lavr Kornilov launches a failed coup against the Provisional Government, deeming it to be too weak against the Bolshevik threat. However, Lenin actually benefits from the chaos and Bolshevik support increases.

**3-7 JUL 1917**

Armed demonstrations break out in Petrograd against the Provisional Government. Kerensky succeeds Lvov as prime minister and quickly crushes the protests.

**18-22 JUN 1917**

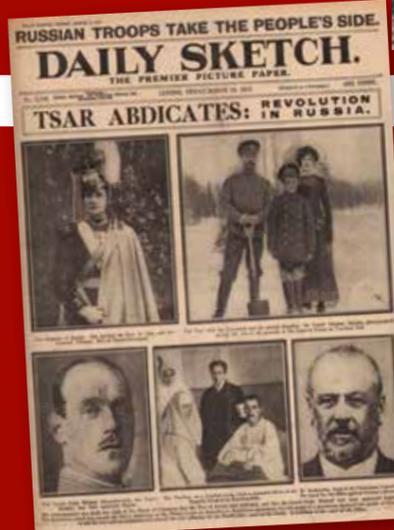
An offensive against the Allies (orchestrated by the Russian war minister, Alexander Kerensky) ends in dismal failure, with many troops outright refusing to fight. It will be Russia's last offensive in WWI.

**18 APR 1917**

A leaked telegram sent by foreign minister Pavel Milyukov suggests that Russia will continue fighting the unpopular war. Unrest continues, and Bolshevik support grows.

**3 APR 1917**

Lenin returns to Russia having spent most of the previous 16 years in exile. He bases himself in Petrograd - formerly St Petersburg - which was renamed as a result of wartime efforts to remove words of German origin from the lexicon.



**2 MAR 1917**

◀ Tsar Nicholas II abdicates the throne and Russia's new Provisional Government is established, led by Prince Georgiy Lvov.

**23 FEB 1917**

Thousands of Russian workers (many of them women), go on strike, protesting against food shortages and the economic effects of the ongoing war. The first of two revolutions in 1917 begins.

**17 DEC 1916**



▲ Grigory Rasputin, controversial 'holy man' and close confidant of the imperial family, is murdered.

**20 JUL 1914**

▼ Russia enters World War I.



**17 OCT 1905**

Tsar Nicholas II issues the October Manifesto, basic civil liberties and an elected parliament called a 'Duma'. Despite this, many see the reforms as insufficient, and discontent remains.

**1 SEP 1917**

▼ The Provisional Government proclaims Russia a republic, with Kerensky as its president.



**25/26 OCT 1917**

The Bolsheviks seize control of Petrograd, including the Winter Palace - the last stronghold of the Provisional Government. The second revolution of 1917 is complete, with Lenin installed as Russia's leader.

**12 NOV 1917**

Russia's new Constituent Assembly holds democratic elections, with the Socialist Revolutionary Party winning the most seats. However, the rival Bolshevik Party begins to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the victory.

**5-6 JAN 1918**

▼ The Constituent Assembly is forcibly dissolved by the Bolsheviks, who become the dominant political power.



**3 MAR 1918\***

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk ends Russia's participation in World War I. It also requires the ruling Bolshevik government to give up more than a million square miles of territory.

\* Russia adopted the Gregorian calendar on 14 February 1918

**8 MAR 1918**

The Bolshevik Party changes its name to the Communist Party. Four days later it declares that Moscow, not Petrograd, is now the Russian capital. The latter's proximity to hostile foreign powers is among the main reasons.



▲ Nicholas II and his family are murdered while under house arrest in Ekaterinburg.

**16-17 JUL 1918**

**30 AUG 1918**

A period of mass arrests and executions known as the 'Red Terror' begins, sparked by an attempt on Lenin's life by a former Socialist Revolutionary. By now, Russia is embroiled in a civil war that involves multiple groups opposed to Bolshevik rule.



**NOV 1920**

▼ A coalition of anti-Bolshevik forces, known as the White Army, is forced to withdraw from the Crimea by Lenin's opposing Red Army.

**MAR 1921**

An unsuccessful uprising against the Bolsheviks, spearheaded by sailors, soldiers and civilians, takes place in the port city of Kronstadt.

**30 DEC 1922**

► With the civil war now over, Lenin founds the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). It comprises Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and the Transcaucasus. ☉



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# THE GATHERING STORM

The seeds of discontent and revolution were sown in Russia many years before they finally came to fruition in 1917

**B**y the end of the 19th century, Russia was the largest contiguous land empire in the world – stretching from the Black Sea to the Bering Strait. This vast empire had many nationalities within its 125 million-strong population, many of whom followed different religions and spoke different languages – yet it fell to one ruler to keep it under control.

The agricultural system of Russia had changed little for centuries. Unlike the British empire – Russia’s rival in terms of influence and control over Central Asia – Russia had not experienced a major industrial revolution. Much of

the population were peasant farmers. Serfdom – which gave total authority to the landowner to control the life and work of the peasant serfs residing on his land – wasn’t abolished until 1861, making Russia almost the last country in Europe to end the system. But although liberation from serfdom meant Russia’s poor were no longer formally tied to landowners and could legally own land without consent, it wasn’t the freedom they had hoped for. Landowners often kept the best land for themselves, leaving their former serfs with land that yielded few crops, yet commanded high

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
**A MULTICULTURAL EMPIRE**  
 As well as ethnic Russians, there were around 20 other nationalities within the Russian population with their own languages, including Poles, Jews, Finns, Estonians, Latvians, Germans and Moldovans.

redemption payments against the money they borrowed from the state in order to ‘redeem’ it. Making the payments was then made difficult when there was little in the way of food to sell.

### A DOOMED DYNASTY

The enormous Russian empire had been ruled by a tsar (or tsaritsa), who exercised absolute power, since the mid-16th century. For 300 of the 400 years that passed between then and 1917, that authority had been wielded by the powerful Romanov dynasty. The tsar or tsaritsa was also the head of the Russian Orthodox Church. There was no elected parliament, with the nobility – which made up about 10 per cent of the population – owning most of Russia’s land and in charge of the country’s civil service and armed forces.

In 1855, Alexander II came to the Russian throne and proved himself to be one of the most progressive leaders Russia had seen. In 1861, Alexander brought in



LEFT: Bloody Sunday began as a peaceful rally in protest against hardship and poor working conditions

BELOW: Father Gapon, seen at the opening of a St Petersburg workers’ club, led the march



**“THE TSAR HAD NO LIMITATIONS TO HIS POWER”**

Nicholas II – the last tsar of Russia – was crowned in May 1896, nearly two years after his father’s death

the Emancipation Edict, which ended serfdom in Russia. He also ensured that military conscription included all classes, rather than just the peasantry, and introduced educational reforms.

Russia seemed to be heading in a new direction, but in 1881, Alexander was assassinated by members of a group known as The People’s Will. These disillusioned radicals believed that the reforms of Alexander II were not progressive enough and desired an end to tsarism in order to bring about a modern Russia. Though the assassination didn’t trigger a revolution at that point, it encouraged a wave of killings of government officials, ministers and even members of the Romanov family in the years that followed.

Alexander’s son, Alexander III, ascended the throne after his father’s death and quickly took a harsh line against rebellion and dissenters. On the day he died, Alexander II had signed a proclamation that would have created legislative commissions made up of elected representatives – a small step towards a constitutional monarchy. Alexander III reversed this decision before it could be implemented and announced his intention to retain the tsar’s autocratic power. He also stated his intention to strengthen Russia as a major

power by implementing a policy of Russification – through which Russian culture was imposed on ethnic minorities in order to create a singular national identity. This included suppressing all languages apart from Russian and promoting conversion to the Russian Orthodox Church. Order was maintained by a secret-police organisation, the

Okhrana – created after the assassination of Alexander II in 1881 – whose role was to combat political terrorism and left-wing revolutionary activity. The Okhrana relied heavily on fear to maintain peace, and political prisoners often found themselves exiled to remote Siberia, with its hostile, long winters.

Alexander III continued to reverse the more liberal reforms of his father until his premature death in 1894, whereby his son Nicholas II came to the throne. Nicholas inherited an empire that he had shown little interest in ruling before his father’s death, and there was widespread hope that the authoritarian regime of Alexander III might be softened under his rule. It was not to be. Fearful of change, democratic reform and of loosening the monarchy’s hold on power, Nicholas stuck doggedly to the repressive system introduced by his father until forced by the growth of the revolutionary movement to bring in a State Duma (parliament) in 1906.

### A GLIMPSE OF THE FUTURE

The year 1905 is often considered a practice run for the revolutions of 1917. Speaking in 1920, Vladimir Lenin would himself refer to 1905 as a “dress rehearsal” for the upheaval that followed.

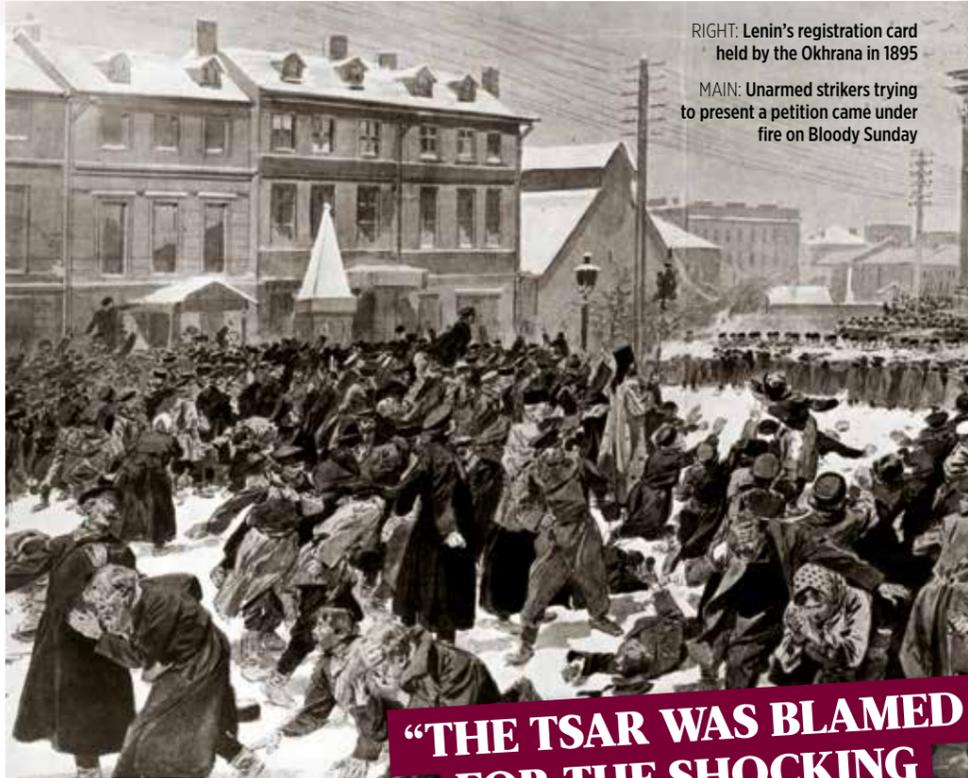
In the early years of the 20th century, despite seeing an end to serfdom in 1861, life for Russia’s poor was still hard and famine was a regular occurrence. The average Russians in rural areas were trapped in the daily grind of poverty, land hunger and famines; in urban areas the workers were crowded into unhealthy tenements and worked long hours with little or no employment rights or regulation of wages. An undercurrent of Marxist revolutionary thought had been slowly spreading across Russia since the late 19th century – encouraging the urban working classes to revolt against the wealthy. Karl Marx was a German political philosopher who believed that whichever class held economic power also held political power, and that when class conflict finally ended a new ideal state would be created, known as communism.

On 9 January 1905, a group of peaceful protesters marched towards the Winter Palace in St Petersburg to deliver a petition to the Nicholas II. Led by a priest named Father Gapon, the protesters demanded changes to their working conditions and wished to call on the tsar to help them, believing him to be unaware of their plight. As the protesters approached, Russian troops charged and opened fire at the group of men, women and children – probably on the orders of Nicholas II’s uncle,



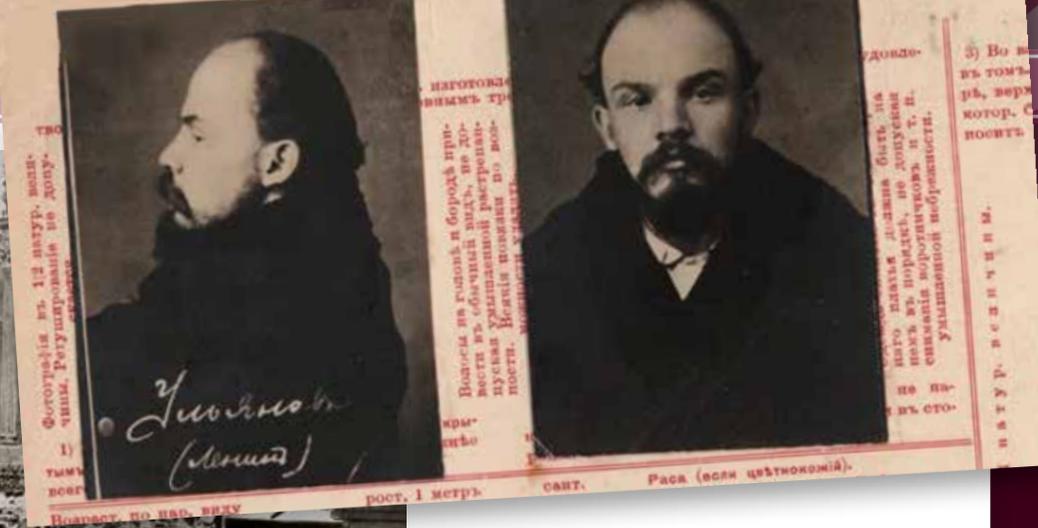
ABOVE: Even after serfdom was abolished in Russia, life for peasants was still extremely tough – with famines a regular occurrence  
 RIGHT: Tsar Alexander II was known as the ‘liberator’ and brought in modest reforms until his assassination in 1881





RIGHT: Lenin's registration card held by the Okhrana in 1895

MAIN: Unarmed strikers trying to present a petition came under fire on Bloody Sunday

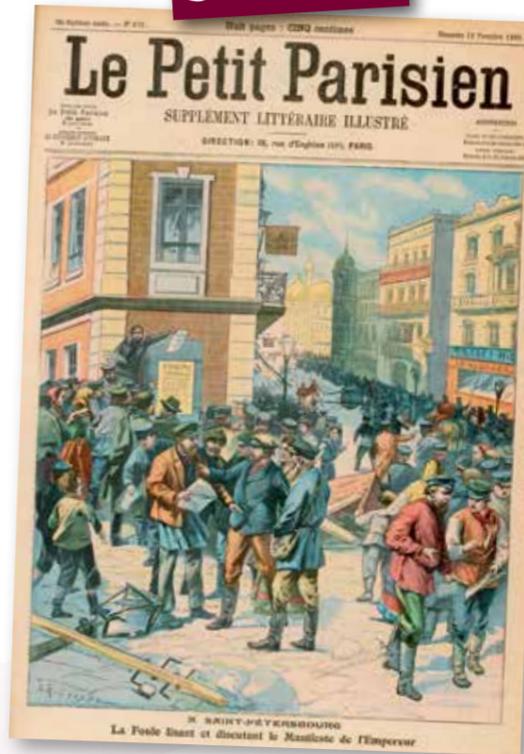


**“THE TSAR WAS BLAMED FOR THE SHOCKING ATTACK, WHICH BECAME KNOWN AS BLOODY SUNDAY”**

◀ Grand Duke Vladimir, commander of the Imperial Guard, though he wasn't in St Petersburg at the time. (The order was executed by Prince Sergey Vasilchikov, Commander of the Guards Corps, who was in charge of law and order in Vladimir's absence.) More than 100 people were killed and many more injured. Nicholas, who hadn't given the order to fire and who wasn't even at the Winter Palace, was still blamed for the shocking attack, which became known as Bloody Sunday.

The incident horrified the world, and within Russia, anger and resentment against the imperial family turned into protests and strikes. Peasants rose up against their landlords, in some instances burning down their manor houses. It's thought that 400,000 industrial workers in Russian Poland went on strike in January 1905, with a much larger general strike also taking place that October. Significantly, the general strike included workers on the railways, bringing Russia almost to a halt.

A council of workers – a soviet – was created to help organise the strike in St Petersburg, and other cities also set up their own councils. While these soviets didn't last long before being shut down, the idea of a workers' group for resistance and revolution would re-emerge again in 1917. The St Petersburg Soviet chairman, revolutionary Leon Trotsky, would later play a significant role in Russia's future. But more unrest was yet to come.



Newspapers around the world reported on Nicholas II's October Manifesto

**A BEGRUDGING COMPROMISE**

Between February 1904 and September 1905, Russia was at war with Japan over land in what is now China. For Russia this was supposed to be a sure victory, but instead it suffered a humiliating defeat. Mutinies within the navy culminated in June 1905 with an uprising onboard the battleship *Potemkin*. The sailors took command from the officers, killing some of them, before sailing to Odessa. Here, more riots broke out in support of the mutineers and more than 1,000 people were killed when the city's garrison fired on them.

In October 1905, Nicholas II issued the October Manifesto in a bid to end the widespread unrest. The manifesto allowed for the creation of a parliament, known as the Duma, with elected representatives chosen in a general election – though only men over the age of 25 were allowed to vote, and soldiers and officers were excluded. The manifesto also allowed for more civil rights, including freedom of speech, the right to form political parties and trade unions, and an agreement that new laws would have to pass through the Duma. The October Manifesto appeased the liberal middle classes, and the general strike was called off. But it did not significantly improve conditions for Russia's workers or peasants.

For his part, Nicholas did not like the idea of completely handing control over to the Duma and the Russian people, so he kept the power to veto any legislation as well as the right to dissolve the Duma.

As a result, between 1906 and 1917, Russia saw four Dumas. The first two were dissolved for being deemed too radical a threat to tsarism. The third – which did sit its intended five-year term – only allowed the wealthy to vote so was more sympathetic towards tsarism and demanded little in the way of reform. The fourth Duma was made up of Octobrists (supporters of the October Manifesto) and socialists – decisions weren't easily agreed on, and by 1915 it had been suspended owing to Russia's involvement in World War I (although it did sit briefly from February to June 1916, and again in November 1916).

**LENIN IN EXILE**

The Okhrana rounded up many of the revolutionaries who opposed tsarism, among them Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, whose elder brother Alexander had been executed for attempting to assassinate Alexander III. Charged with sedition, in 1897 Lenin had been exiled to Siberia for three years. He had spent the 16 years after that in Europe, becoming a prominent figure in revolutionary thought as well as within the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. Lenin returned to Russia in 1905, but as a crackdown on opposition to the tsar emerged, he fled once again in 1907. And he wasn't alone. Fear of execution in this period saw a drop in membership of revolutionary groups, with those who remained forced to take their revolutionary activities underground.

In 1911, Russian prime minister Petr Stolypin was assassinated in Kiev by a revolutionary anarchist. Stolypin had brought in agrarian reforms that intended to give land to peasant farmers and make them loyal to the imperial regime. But he had also undertaken a harsh line of repression and martial law against revolutionaries and those who opposed the monarchy.

The unrest would continue to simmer over the following decade, eventually leading to the Romanovs' fall from power. The discontent felt in 1905 would inspire those who called for even more radical change in 1917. ○

WORDS: EMMA SLATTERY WILLIAMS

**IN NUMBERS**



**165 MILLION**

Population of the Russian empire in 1914



**84%**

Percentage of the population of European Russia, according to the 1897 census, who were peasants

**0.5%**

Percentage of the population, in 1897, that made up the ruling classes



**5,772 MILES**

The length of the Trans-Siberian railway – the world's longest single railway line – which was completed in July 1904

**17**

The age of Michael I, of the Romanov dynasty, when he was elected tsar in 1613



**13 DAYS**

Until February 1918, Russia used the Julian calendar, which was 13 days behind the Gregorian calendar used by the rest of Europe



**8.8 MILLION SQUARE MILES**

The size of the Russian empire at its peak

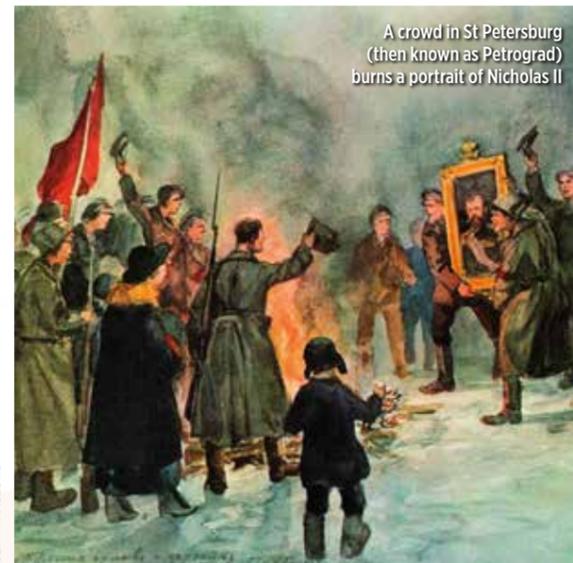
# 6 MYTHS OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

We debunk the most common misconceptions about this turbulent time in history with help from expert Helen Rappaport

**1 THERE WAS ONLY ONE REVOLUTION IN 1917**

**W**hen we discuss the Russian Revolution of 1917, we are actually talking about two separate events that took place within the same year; the first was a spontaneous movement that overthrew the reigning tsar, Nicholas II, while the second was an orchestrated coup and Bolshevik takeover.

In March 1917, Nicholas abdicated in the sincere belief that by doing so he would save Russia at a time of deep political turmoil and a disastrous war. The Bolshevik revolution, however, wouldn't happen for around eight months, when, led by Lenin, the Bolsheviks eventually wrestled power from the Provisional Government. Though intrinsically linked, the two events were separate; combined, they created a year that would change Russia forever.



A crowd in St Petersburg (then known as Petrograd) burns a portrait of Nicholas II



The future Tsar Nicholas II (standing far left) pictured alongside his parents and younger siblings, c1894

**2 NICHOLAS II WAS A BAD RULER**

**I**f there was a single figure to blame for the fall of the Romanov dynasty, Nicholas II is often deemed to have been that person. He is commonly cast as an ineffectual leader who brought his dynasty's collapse on himself. "But," argues Helen Rappaport, "it can't be underestimated what a massive job it was to be ruler of Russia - the vast scale of that country and its population was far beyond that of anywhere else in Europe, and Nicholas had many disparate peoples to govern."

Growing up, Nicholas had not shown much inclination to rule, and came to the throne much earlier than expected - he was aged just 26 when his father,

Alexander III, died at the age of 49. Both father and son had assumed they would have more time together to prepare Nicholas for the role of tsar.

"People have often taken the easy route by blaming Nicholas for the downfall of the Russian monarchy," says Rappaport. "Nicholas II was limited in his capabilities as a monarch, but that was mainly because he was ill-prepared to be tsar, a role that was rather unexpectedly thrust upon him when his father died quite suddenly.

"It's very easy to say Nicholas was a weak tsar, lacking the insight and skills to govern with authority. Unfortunately,

**"HE WAS WELL-MEANING, WELL-INTENTIONED, AND TOOK HIS ROLE AS FATHER OF THE PEOPLE VERY SERIOUSLY"**



**DID YOU KNOW?**  
**THE PEACEFUL TSAR?**  
Nicholas II was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize after initiating the 1899 Hague Convention. The conference, attended by 26 nations, sought to codify the laws of war and bring the arms race under control.

he surrounded himself with mainly reactionary ministers who blocked any attempts at reform and gave him bad advice."

Despite his failings as tsar, he was a devoted father and husband: "In many ways, the tragedy of Nicholas was that he was a real family man who engaged with his children far more than many aristocratic parents of his time. He was an incredibly loving and hands-on father."

Prepared or not, Nicholas treated the role of tsar as his duty and, believes Rappaport, truly cared for his people - even if he didn't always act on their concerns: "He was well-meaning, well-intentioned, and he took his role as father of the Russian people incredibly seriously. And he was very devout and tried to be a good Christian tsar."

**THE WILL OF THE TSAR**

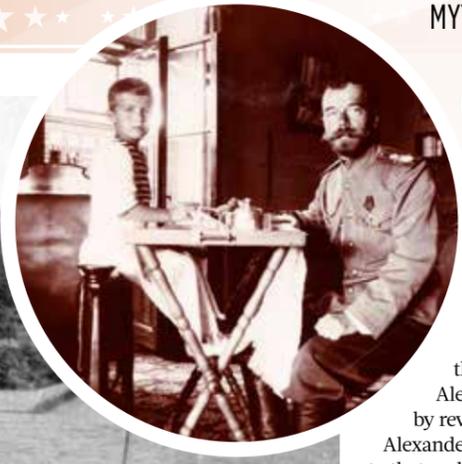
Nicholas, like many autocratic rulers, stubbornly believed in his divine right to rule, which made him less inclined to believe that his people knew what they wanted. His inexperience when it came to ruling and his natural resistance to change also meant that he didn't pick the best ministers: "He didn't have the breadth of understanding or imagination to be good in terms of the people he chose to work under him, in his choice of ministers. He made lots of mistakes.

He was too often bullied into taking on the wrong people, or surrounding himself with 'yes men' who were appointed not for their talent, but through influence at court. Very often, ministerial appointments were made through family connections and the incredibly Byzantine bureaucracy of tsarist Russia."

Rappaport suggests that if we re-evaluate Nicholas II, we might have more sympathy for him:

"He was one of these people, unfortunately, by an accident of birth, born to be tsar but not really well-equipped for the job. I think he deserves some degree of pity and sympathy. First of all, it took 10 years for Nicholas and Alexandra to produce a son and heir. And then it became evident that their beautiful, longed-for son had a life-threatening condition: haemophilia. Nicholas was terribly distracted by his son's condition, and a great amount of his time was preoccupied with protecting Alexei and pacifying a very highly neurotic wife."

The influence of Nicholas' father, Alexander III, may have also played a huge role in his style of ruling: "His father was a very harsh, authoritarian man - quite a bully, actually," continues Rappaport. "It's important to remember



INSET: Nicholas II with his youngest child and only son, Alexei

MAIN: Nicholas II and Alexei in happier days - they, and the rest of their family, would be murdered in 1918

that Alexander III came to the throne on the back of the assassination of his father, Alexander II, who was murdered by revolutionaries. The whole of Alexander III's reign was a response to that and can be seen as a cranking-up of authority, and a clamp-down on dissent. That was the system that Nicholas inherited. It did loosen a bit under him, but unfortunately not sufficiently."

Attempting to honour the rule of his father, keep a hold of his power and work within a system that was desperately in need of reform all made ruling for Nicholas difficult: "He was hamstrung by a very antiquated system that was resistant to reform, as well as fearful of change himself and limited in his vision for democracy and constitutional government - two concepts that were alien to Nicholas, really."



A contemporary illustration depicts the carnage caused by the bomb in St Petersburg that killed Tsar Alexander II in 1881



Alexander II lies in state after his assassination - his son, Alexander III, would crack down on the revolutionary groups he blamed for his father's death

# RASPUTIN PLAYED AN INFLUENTIAL ROLE IN THE REVOLUTION



Rasputin pictured with Alexandra and her son, Alexei, in 1916. The mystic claimed he could ease the symptoms of the boy's haemophilia

**“THE TRUTH HAS BEEN BURIED UNDER 100 YEARS OF DISINFORMATION AND CHARACTER ASSASSINATION”**

The mysterious figure of Grigory Rasputin has been inexplicably linked to the Russian Revolution and the fall of the Romanovs. From cartoons to pop songs, he has permeated popular culture, but Helen Rappaport suggests that Rasputin's part in the events of 1917 has been massively overstated and that he was, in fact, the victim of gossip-mongering.

“Rasputin's role in the revolution has been grossly exaggerated. There is so much that is wrong with the whole Rasputin story, and unfortunately, the truth has been buried under 100 years of disinformation, character assassination, hype, rumour and gossip.”

A self-proclaimed 'holy man' from Siberia, Rasputin became a spiritual advisor to the imperial family. He attracted much speculation at the time, and many believed that he had an unhealthy influence over the royals, especially the tsaritsa; contemporary cartoons even suggested that the pair had a sexual relationship.

Rasputin claimed he could ease the symptoms of Alexei's haemophilia and became a source of comfort to Alexandra: “Rasputin fundamentally was a friend and a wise guru to the imperial family who were very isolated, partly because of the terrible fear they all had of political assassination, but also because they had to protect Alexei,” claims Rappaport. “To them, Rasputin was a wise counsellor who they consulted about matters of religion. But he wasn't at the palace every five minutes trying to cure Alexei. Far from it. He went there occasionally and sometimes consulted with Alexandra over the telephone if she needed advice.”

**A NECESSARY EVIL**  
Rappaport suggests that not all members of the imperial family, however, fell under Rasputin's spell: “Nicholas was actually



ABOVE: Prince Felix Yusupov – the ringleader of Rasputin's brutal assassination in December 1916

TOP: A satirical cartoon ridicules the family's relationship with the self-proclaimed 'holy man'

quite sceptical about Rasputin. He found him very wise when they discussed religious matters, but he took Rasputin's influence over Alexandra as something he just had to put up with. Rasputin was Alexandra's emotional, mental, spiritual prop to keep her going when her beloved son suffered bad attacks of bleeding. The tsar understood that. He knew he could not remove Rasputin from the family



Rasputin's frozen corpse after being dragged out of the Malaya Nevka river. Rumours that he was still alive when thrown in were found to be false

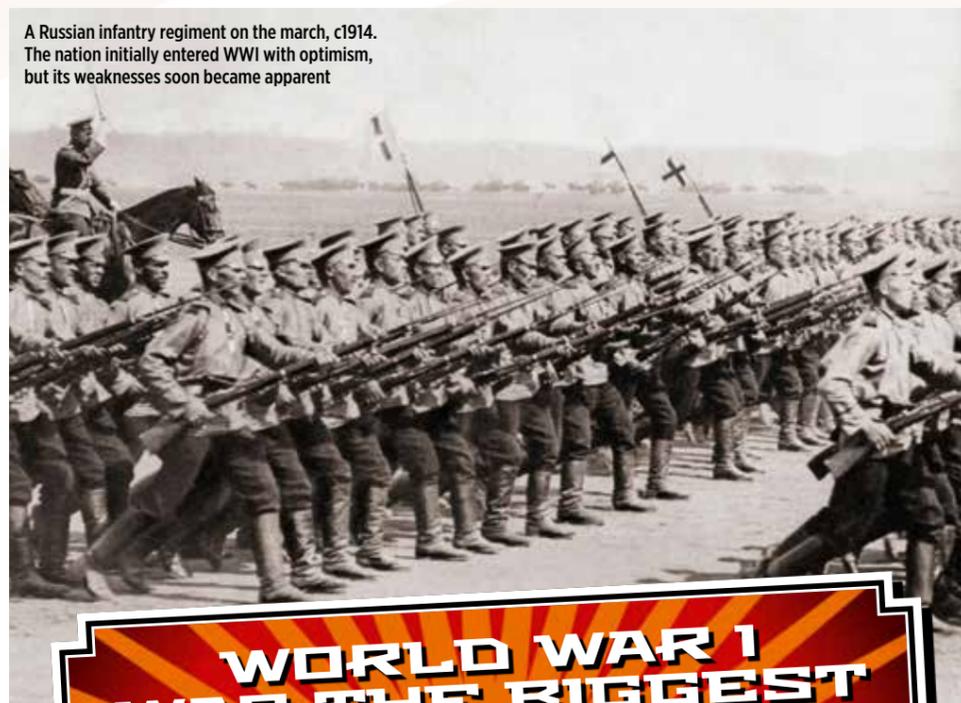
**DID YOU KNOW?**  
**MYSTERIOUS MYSTIC**  
Little is known about Rasputin's early years. It's thought that he married at 18 or 19 and had as many as seven children (only three of whom survived to adulthood). He had a religious awakening before travelling around Russia as a 'holy man'.

because he was too important to his wife.”

As public hatred for Rasputin grew, there were concerns that the mystic's influence over the imperial family was hindering the war effort and undermining Russia's foreign policy. On 17 December 1916, Rasputin visited Prince Felix Yusupov (the husband of Nicholas II's niece, Princess Irina) at his palace in Petrograd – supposedly on the pretext that Yusupov's wife wanted to meet him. According to Yusupov, he led him to a basement, where he plied Rasputin with drink before shooting him. But Rasputin did not die immediately, despite bleeding heavily. As a result, Yusupov called in his co-conspirators Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich and Vladimir Purishkevich (who were waiting in another room) to finish the job. It was allegedly Purishkevich – a member of the State Duma – who fired the final, fatal two shots at close range.

After his death, Rasputin's body was thrown into the Malaya Nevka river. A myth at the time stated that the mystic was still alive at this point and had to be drowned, but an autopsy on the body pointed to blood loss as the cause of death. In recent years it has been suggested that a British agent was also involved in the plot to rid Russia of the so-called 'Mad Monk'.

Says Rappaport: “As often happens in history, the media and the gossips got a handle on what they thought was the truth about Rasputin and circulated the most hideous character assassinations about him – they demonised the man. A lot of what was said about him was completely unfounded, if not absolute lies. It remains very difficult to separate out truth from fiction when it comes to Rasputin.”



A Russian infantry regiment on the march, c1914. The nation initially entered WWI with optimism, but its weaknesses soon became apparent

# WORLD WAR I WAS THE BIGGEST CATALYST FOR REVOLUTION

World War I was devastating for Russia, which, as a country, was ill-prepared for a war on such a global scale – especially amidst the political and economic turmoil taking place internally. But, although the war exacerbated unrest and promoted ill-feeling towards the tsar, revolution had been brewing long before this, claims Rappaport, who believes 1905 was the point at which Russia could have avoided revolution.

“The year 1905 could have been a big turning point in Russian history. If Nicholas had agreed at that point to the introduction of a constitutional government and a proper democratic system, and if he'd had the courage and the wisdom to institute a major reform of Russian bureaucracy and government, the tide of revolution could have been halted. Russia

could have ended up as a constitutional monarchy, much like Britain. But Nicholas wasn't brave enough and they missed their moment.”

Rappaport even suggests that, initially, World War I offered a distraction from the revolutionary unrest: “When war broke out in 1914, it proved to be a temporary diversion from the growing revolutionary movement. But as time went on, the war became disastrous for Russia. The army was largely peasant conscript; there were huge high rates of desertion; the army was very poorly supplied and under-equipped; some soldiers didn't even have boots or ammunition. Morale was terribly low, and that, combined

with shortages in the big cities – because most of the food was being diverted to the army at the front – led to a resurgence of protests and strikes and marches, which then triggered the February Revolution.”

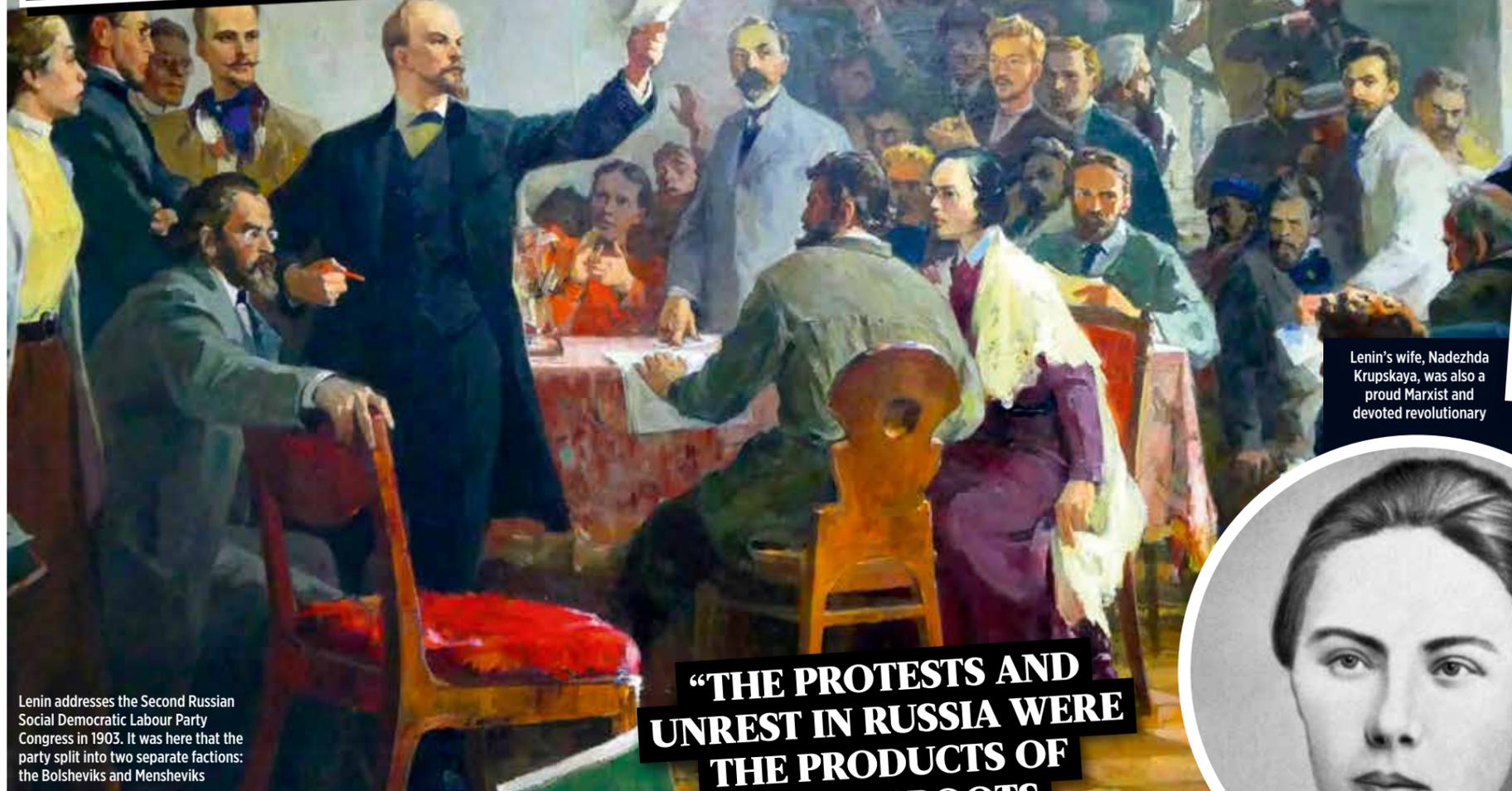


ABOVE: A French newspaper depicts the unrest and looting of 1905



LEFT: Food shortages across Russia left many families queuing outside shops for paltry supplies

**5 LENIN WAS PRESENT THROUGHOUT THE EVENTS OF 1917**



Lenin addresses the Second Russian Social Democratic Labour Party Congress in 1903. It was here that the party split into two separate factions: the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks

**“THE PROTESTS AND UNREST IN RUSSIA WERE THE PRODUCTS OF A GRASSROOTS MOVEMENT”**

Although Lenin played a major role in the Bolsheviks' rise to power and would eventually become leader of the new Soviet Russia, the revolutionary movements that had been bubbling away in Russia since 1905 remained active even when Lenin wasn't in the country.

One particularly common misconception is that Lenin personally led the uprising that led to the tsar's abdication in March 1917, but this is not the case. As Helen Rappaport explains: "Lenin was living in exile in Europe at the time, although revolution was always on his mind and he was pulling strings in some ways."

"He [Lenin] was plotting revolution, from one bolthole to the next; he spent 1900 until the spring of 1917 traipsing around Europe from one poky flat to another with his wife, and most of the time, his mother-in-law. He was in Switzerland. He was in Poland. He was in Paris, London and Germany. He went here, there and everywhere, constantly moving on because he was public enemy number one in Russia."

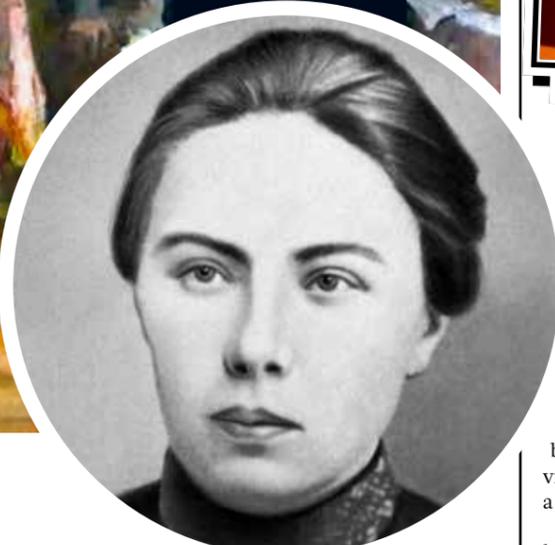
"And from his various boltholes, Lenin ran Russia's revolutionary movement. He and his wife organised an underground network of couriers and revolutionaries who smuggled their illegal literature, the journal *Iskra*, into Russia and kept tabs on all the revolutionaries in hiding."

Lenin did return to Russia for a brief period after the 1905 Revolution, but had fled again by 1907. As Rappaport says, it was those in Russia taking part in the strikes and protests who had more to lose. "The people living in Russia were the ones taking the risks. Lenin was okay. He might not have had much money, but at least he wasn't likely to get the secret police knocking on his door any minute. He conducted the whole thing from a distance, in a sort of vacuum."

The protests and unrest in Russia were the products of a grassroots movement, fuelled by discontent with the autocratic

**DID YOU KNOW? NOT AT REST**  
Even in 2021, the Romanovs have still not been reunited. The Russian Orthodox Church has held back on burying the remains of Alexei and Maria in order to complete further tests, so they have not yet been interred with their parents and siblings.

Lenin's wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya, was also a proud Marxist and devoted revolutionary



A skull belonging to one of the members of the imperial family, discovered in 1979 but not excavated until 1991



**6 ONE OF THE ROMANOV DAUGHTERS SURVIVED**

After the Romanovs were murdered in Ekaterinburg in July 1918, the Bolsheviks initially stated that the imperial children, at least, had been taken to safety. The truth of what had happened to the tsar's family wouldn't emerge for some time in order to keep the support of the Russian people. This allowed rumours to spread, including that the youngest Romanov daughter, 17-year-old Anastasia, had survived after she was taken away by a sympathetic guard. For those appalled at the violence inflicted on the imperial family, this was a tiny glimmer of hope that they could cling to.

Helen Rappaport explains why the truth of what happened to the Romanovs stayed covered up for so long: "People knew Nicholas had been murdered quite soon after it happened; the Bolsheviks did admit to killing him. There are several reasons why the whole truth didn't come out straight away. Firstly, there was the embarrassment of all the foreign governments who had let the family down and who hadn't done enough to try and save them. But another reason is that the Bolsheviks themselves were the inventors of fake news. Right from the moment they murdered the imperial family, they started putting out stories that the children had been evacuated somewhere safe, which simply wasn't true. In all the fog of the civil war that came after the revolution, when no one knew exactly what had happened to Alexandra and the children,

rumour, counter-rumours and all kinds of stories began circulating. The Bolsheviks sat back and let everyone run around in circles wondering what had happened without admitting to what they had actually done. It would have been a pretty poor show if they had come out and admitted to killing the children - they just weren't going to do that."

**PRETENDER PRINCESSES**

Many imposters claimed to be Anastasia, with perhaps the most famous of these being Anna Anderson. Born Franziska Schanzkowska in Poland in 1899, Anderson first began claiming to be the lost princess in Berlin in 1920, and for many years kept attempting to prove her identity, until a West German court rejected her case in 1970.

The graves of the Romanovs were found in 1979, but this was kept quiet by the Russian government. An official excavation began in 1991, after the fall of the Soviet Union, and the remains of five family members were discovered. Their bodies were laid to rest in St Petersburg's Peter and Paul Cathedral. In 2007, the final bodies, those of Alexei and Maria, were found, although they have yet to be buried.

DNA testing has proved that Nicholas II, Alexandra and all of their five children were killed in 1918 - there were no survivors. In the 1990s, Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh - and the grandnephew of Alexandra Romanov - allowed his DNA to be tested to help solve the mystery once and for all.

**WORDS: EMMA SLATTERY WILLIAMS**

GETTY IMAGES X3, ALAMY X1

# WHY DID REVOLUTION TAKE PLACE IN 1917?

Opposition to the old imperial regime, World War I and economic collapse were just some of the reasons that led to political and social revolution in Russia



ABOVE: Russian soldiers wander across a frozen battlefield strewn with the bodies of their comrades  
 MAIN: Tsar Nicholas II (right) confers with his cousin, Grand Duke Nicholas



**“AROUND 1.6 MILLION RUSSIAN SOLDIERS HAD BEEN KILLED BY DECEMBER 1916”**

## WORLD WAR I

World War I caused chaos and devastation across all of Europe and pitted some of the world's biggest powers – and royal families – against each other. Russia entered World War I in late July 1914; at first, the Russian people united behind the tsar and the Russian war effort in a wave of patriotism, but enthusiasm for the conflict soon waned.

Russia suffered greatly during the war, with around 1.6 million of its soldiers killed by December 1916 and millions more wounded or taken prisoner. Communications and transport within Russia were also incredibly poor and this hindered the war effort: despite producing great numbers of artillery shells, for example, they couldn't get them to the front.

In the summer of 1916, Russia launched its last major offensive of the war – the Brusilov Offensive – during which it was forced to retreat. The failed offensive saw a massive drop in morale with high levels of desertion.

The previous year had seen Nicholas II sack Grand Duke Nicholas, a member of his own family, and appoint himself commander-in-chief of the Russian army, a position the tsar was not qualified for. As millions of Russian soldiers and civilians were killed, Nicholas II, as head of the army, became a target for discontent, and was held accountable for the suffering of the Russian people.

Thousands of Russians called for an end to the country's participation in the war. In March 1918, after the Bolsheviks had seized power, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed with Germany, ending Russia's involvement and fulfilling one of the key promises of the Bolshevik campaign of the previous year.

## THE ROMANOV DYNASTY

The Romanovs had been Russia's ruling family since Michael I came to power in 1613, but there had been gathering resentment and opposition to the repressive tsarist regime well before Nicholas II ascended the throne in 1894. For much of the late 19th century, revolutionary groups had posed a threat to the monarchy, and the imperial family had become wary and distant from the Russian people – actions that made them appear uncaring and inconsiderate.

Nicholas II's heir, Alexei, had been born with haemophilia, a genetic disorder that prevents blood from clotting, and which can result in prolonged internal bleeding. As heir to the throne, it was vital that Alexei was protected, and Nicholas found himself often preoccupied with his family and frequently ill son.

Nicholas' father, Alexander III, had done little to prepare his son for the role of tsar and constantly belittled Nicholas, believing that his son was not up to the job. This in turn did much

to undermine Nicholas' confidence, and his lack of preparedness for the role was evident when Alexander fell sick and died unexpectedly in 1894, leaving his 26-year-old son in charge of a vast and unruly empire.

### RESISTANT TO REFORM

Nicholas proved as reluctant to share power and undertake reforms as his predecessors, and repeatedly dissolved the State Dumas. Author and historian Helen Rappaport explains: "The State Duma was a loosely democratic legislative body, but every time it started out, Nicholas very quickly dissolved it because the minute the deputies all got together, they started making demands for reforms. Nicholas just couldn't countenance the extensive constitutional reforms they were asking for. There was one more attempt to get the Duma going in November 1907, and that did last five years. But there was constant fighting to get any reforms through because Nicholas was so stubborn."

Nicholas firmly believed that

autocracy was right for Russia. His refusal to accept change was a key reason why the Russian people rose up against him.

"Nicholas stuck doggedly to the principle of divine rule, of being the monarch and ruling by right – a God-given right," says Rappaport. "He was fearful of reform; fearful of changing anything about the old system his father had handed down to him. His political inflexibility marred his positive qualities, particularly as a family man."

Members of one of the Dumas gather in 1907 – most would last only a few months before being dissolved by Nicholas II



The tsaritsa, Alexandra, was not popular with her husband's family and, as a German, dislike of her intensified among the Russian people after World War I began in 1914. As Nicholas became involved in Russia's military efforts, Alexandra was increasingly left in charge.

Alexandra was very fond of the self-proclaimed holy man Grigory Rasputin and relied on him for spiritual and emotional support, especially during Alexei's periods of illness. Rasputin was widely believed to be a womanising drunkard, and ministerial changes made by Alexandra in her husband's absence



Nicholas II reads out his declaration of abdication to Duma representatives

were suspected to be a result of Rasputin pulling strings behind the scenes. Whether Rasputin could really help Alexei – as he claimed – is unclear, although the tsaritsa believed fully in his abilities. Their relationship was a gold mine for the gossip mills of the time, which suggested that Rasputin exerted an unhealthy influence over the imperial family, and even went so far as to suggest that he had seduced the tsaritsa – and that he was interfering in matters of state. Rasputin would ultimately begin to symbolise everything the Russian people believed was wrong with tsarism.

"Alexandra was a very domineering wife," says Rappaport, "and even more autocratic than

her husband – very narrow-minded and slavishly religious. She was her own worst enemy. In many ways, you can say that her close friendship with Rasputin was the fatal flaw, because the gossips condemned them both, whether or not the rumours were true. Things might have been different had Nicholas had a different wife."

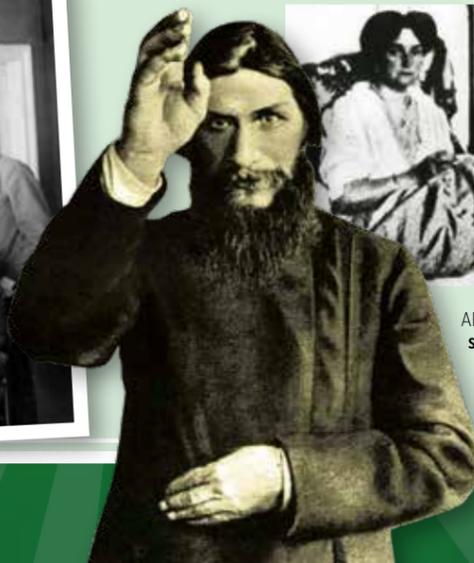
### THE END OF A DYNASTY

In February 1917, in the face of rebellion and widespread unrest, and having lost the support of his armed forces, many of whom had joined the rebels, Nicholas II agreed to share power with the Duma. But it was too little, too late, and his offer was refused. The Petrograd Soviet then issued Order Number 1, which demanded the military to obey only the orders of the Soviet and not those of the Provisional Government, and on 2 March, Nicholas II was formally asked to abdicate. After attempting to pass the throne to his brother, Grand Duke Michael (who refused), Nicholas reluctantly complied with the demand. In that instant, 300 years of Romanov rule came to an end.

ABOVE: Tsaritsa Alexandra with Alexei, who suffered from haemophilia, in c1907



LEFT: Grigory Rasputin was an adviser to the imperial family



## ECONOMIC COLLAPSE AND PUBLIC UNREST

Russia's importation of goods from abroad ceased during World War I. The railways (which were generally undeveloped to begin with) were taken over for military use, making food and resources difficult to transport around the vast country. By 1916, inflation had reached 200 per cent and life was especially difficult for the Russian poor, as prices soared higher and higher.

The loss of agricultural workers to the war effort made internal food production difficult. Russia's agricultural methods were still quite antiquated compared to the rest of Europe, relying on a huge amount of manpower. With food in short supply and prices rising, starvation became widespread – especially in the cities of Petrograd and Moscow – leading to unrest and strikes: the Russian people began to realise that autocracy and tsarism would not solve their problems and they needed change.



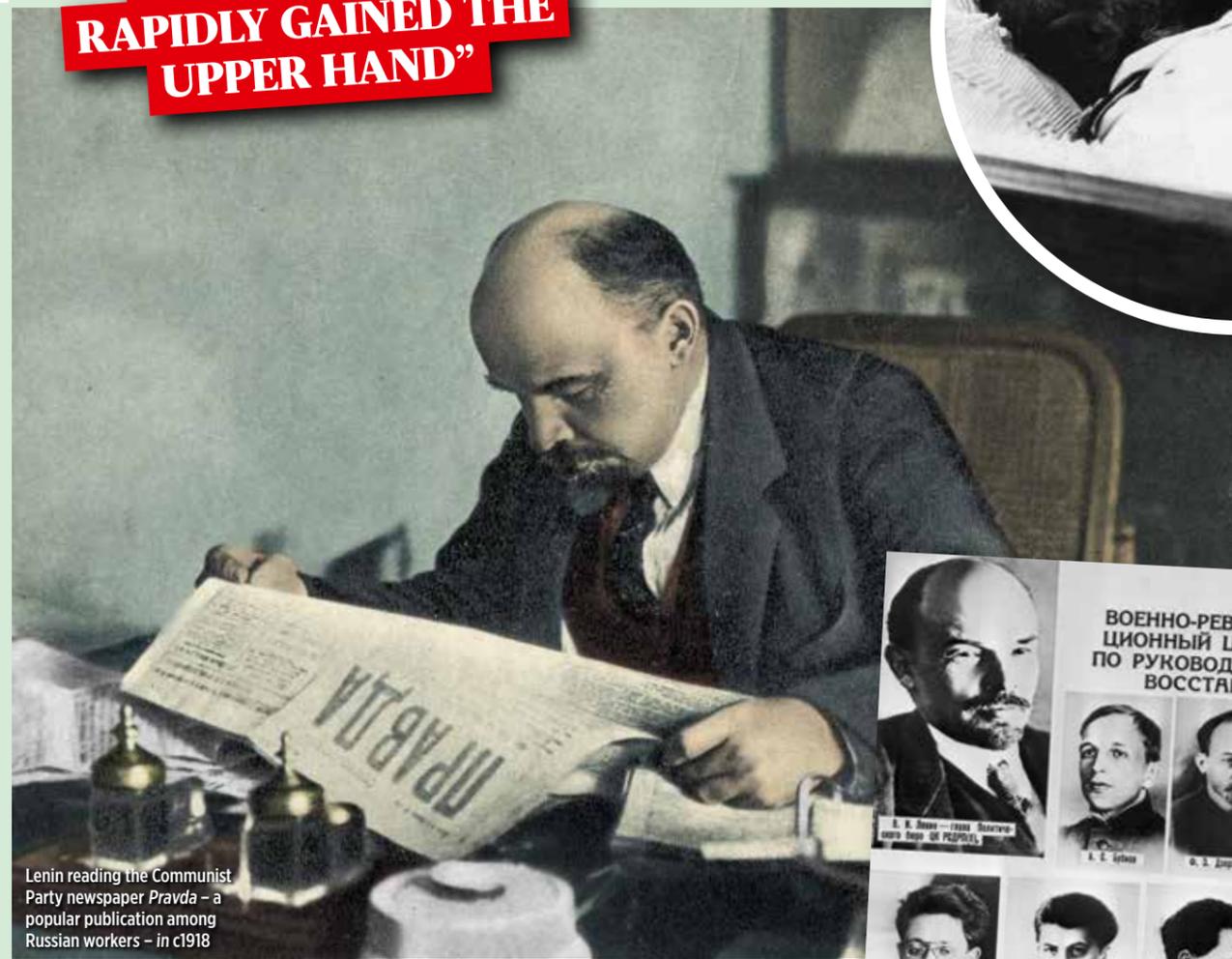
German soldiers occupying Poland (of which some was part of the Russian empire during WWI) hand out food to peasants

### DID YOU KNOW?

#### PEOPLE POWER

More than 200,000 protesters gathered in Petrograd on 24 February 1917, shortly after the rationing of bread. Many were striking workers calling for better working conditions and protesting against food shortages.

## “LENIN’S PARTY RAPIDLY GAINED THE UPPER HAND”



Lenin reading the Communist Party newspaper *Pravda* – a popular publication among Russian workers – in c1918



Russian prime minister Petr Stolypin was assassinated in 1911



MAIN: Lenin depicted travelling on a train back to Russia in 1917, following the February Revolution

LEFT: Portraits of key leaders of the October Revolution, including Lenin (top left) and Joseph Stalin (bottom centre)



## THE RISE OF REVOLUTIONARIES

Since the end of the 19th century, radical socialist parties had been forming and spreading ideas, such as the eradication of tsarism and the creation of a worker-run government. In 1898, the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) was established in Minsk with Lenin as one of its key members. The party was inspired by the ideas of German philosopher Karl Marx, and its members believed that Russia would have to undergo industrial development in order for a socialist revolution to be successful. During

a congress in 1903, the party split into two factions – the Bolsheviks with Lenin at the helm, and the Mensheviks.

Helen Rappaport explains what was behind this ideological split: “There were a lot of arguments and conflict over what kind of a line RSDLP was going to take. Some wanted it to be much more aggressively politically violent while others wanted something a bit softer. It was after days of rowing and haranguing, particularly from Lenin, that the party finally split. The Bolsheviks wanted a French-style Jacobin group of real hardline intellectuals – the brightest brains of the movement – to control, lead and really dictate the path through revolution. The Mensheviks, on the

other hand, wanted a much more open and all-embracing, broad-based party. After the split, the two groups went their separate ways in opposition to each other, with Lenin’s party rapidly gaining the upper hand.”

### FANNING THE FLAMES

Even though they were not based in Russia for the majority of the early 20th century, these socialist parties were still gaining traction in Russia. The Bolshevik newspaper, *Pravda*, was popular with workers. Through the agrarian reforms of Prime Minister Petr Stolypin and the Okhrana (the section of the Russian police department that dealt with left-wing political terrorism and revolutionary activity), membership

of revolutionary movements had dropped, but many continued illicitly underground.

Revolutionaries in Russia did celebrate successes before the events of 1917 though, and in 1911, Stolypin was killed in Kiev by an anarchist revolutionary. Stolypin was someone who, Rappaport says, “could and did make a difference briefly to Russia”. He intended to undertake reforms that would modernise Russia as an economic force, while maintaining the autocratic power of the throne.

Lenin, by then living in exile in Switzerland, was surprised to hear of the February Revolution and the fall of the tsar, and swiftly made plans to return to Russia. He

was assisted by the German government, which saw internal conflict in Russia as being beneficial for them.

On 3 April, Lenin arrived in Petrograd and delivered a 90-minute speech condemning the Provisional Government that had taken over from the tsar and calling for a social revolution. His directives, which became known as the April Theses, included an end to the war, transfer of power to the proletariat and the poor, as well as the formation of an organisation that would spread revolution across the world.

WORDS: EMMA SLATTERY WILLIAMS

# VLADIMIR LENIN

## FROM REVOLUTIONARY TO DICTATOR

A look at the life of the fanatical Marxist who led the Bolsheviks to power in 1917 and built, on a foundation of war and oppression, the world's first communist state

**W**ith no Vladimir Lenin, there would almost certainly have been no October Revolution in Russia in 1917. That means no communist state, no Soviet Union, and no knowing how different the 20th century could have been. And it all began in 1887 when 17-year-old Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov took his first steps towards becoming the Russian revolutionary. Having grown up in a comfortable, loving home in Simbirsk – later renamed Ulyanovsk in his honour – he became angry and bitter at the execution of his elder brother, Alexander, for his part in an attempted assassination of Tsar Alexander III.

Ulyanov went on to be expelled from Kazan University for anti-government protests and, following a brief law career, moved to the capital of St Petersburg to throw himself into life as a revolutionary. A fanatical Marxist, poring over *The Communist Manifesto* and *Das Kapital*, Ulyanov envisioned the end of capitalism at the hands of the working classes of the world, but not as some nebulous theoretical goal. To him, a revolution could be forged in practice, and this formed the basis of his prolific writings on politics, philosophy and economics.

### THE PATH TO POWER

Ulyanov's first major work, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (1899), would be written in Siberia, where he had been exiled (and also where he married fellow revolutionary Nadezhda Krupskaya). He spent years away from Russia, living in Europe and building an international reputation. That did not quell his influence in Russia, though. In his 1902 pamphlet, *What Is To Be Done?* – published under



**“LENIN EXPECTED THAT  
RUSSIA WOULD INSPIRE  
GLOBAL REVOLUTION”**

the name Vladimir Lenin – he called on Marxists to form a party as the “vanguard” of the proletariat drive to socialist revolution, which became a pillar of Leninism.

The party he prepared as that vanguard became the Bolsheviks, a faction that split from the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. They were disciplined and zealous, and had a gifted tactician as a leader. Lenin kept his Bolsheviks together amidst unrest and division for over a decade after the Russian Revolution of 1905, which he saw as the “dress rehearsal” for things to come.

By 1917, Russia was a powder keg. World War I left the nation depleted, leading to one revolution early in the year that overthrew the tsarist regime, ending centuries of imperial rule. Yet Lenin sensed an even greater opportunity. Smuggled into Russia with German help, he became a critic of the bourgeois

Provisional Government, which had replaced Tsar Nicholas II, and won over the workers' councils, or soviets, with promises of bread, peace and a government of workers, peasants and soldiers.

Lenin would be the man who launched the second revolution of 1917. He persuaded the Bolsheviks to take action, and prepared the Red Guard volunteers for an armed uprising. In the so-called October Revolution, a near-bloodless coup, he became chairman of Russia's new executive, the Sovnarkom.

Lenin quickly ended Russia's involvement in World War I. Not everyone supported the move, considering the ruinous terms of the peace treaty, nor his next to disband the Constituent Assembly. Such was the opposition among bourgeoisie, monarchists and rival socialists that civil war broke out. Fighting between the Bolshevik Red

Army, commanded by Leon Trotsky, and counterrevolutionary ‘Whites’ lasted three years, during which the Bolsheviks murdered the tsar and the imperial family – completing, after 30 years, the plot of Lenin's brother.

When Lenin himself barely survived an assassination attempt in 1918, a period of political repression began. The Red Terror saw the executions of 100,000 opponents at the hands of the Cheka, the secret police. Lenin could be ruthless and cared little for the suffering of the Russian people. The huge losses of the Russian Civil War as a whole, combatants and civilians combined, were up to 10 million.

### AN IMMORTAL LEGACY

Russia became a one-party state under the Bolsheviks, now the Communist Party, and Lenin transformed the country's ideological framework. Once the Red Army had won the Civil War, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was officially formed on 30 December 1922, with Lenin expectant that Russia would inspire global revolution. But with millions dead and an all-powerful leadership, Lenin laid the foundations of communist totalitarianism under Joseph Stalin.

Lenin did grow concerned about Stalin's power, but a number of strokes from 1922 left him unable to act decisively, and he died, aged 53, on 21 January 1924. To legitimise the regime without him, the party used his face and name on everything – St Petersburg, which had been called Petrograd since the war, then became Leningrad – and his corpse was embalmed.

To this day, people can visit Lenin's body in Moscow and look upon the man who changed not only Russia, but the course of the 20th century itself. ○

# THE DEATH OF A DYNASTY

On one fateful night in July 1918, Bolshevik revolutionaries brought the 300-year-old Romanov dynasty to a brutal and bloody end. We revisit the imperial family's tragic final chapter

Tsar Nicholas II and Tsaritsa Alexandra surrounded by their five children, 1913. Five years later they would all be murdered



**O**n the night of 16–17 July 1918, a father, mother, their five children and four of their staff were shot and stabbed to death in the basement of a house in Ekaterinburg, near the Ural Mountains. The victims were former tsar Nicholas II, his wife Alexandra, son Alexei (13), and daughters, Olga (22), Tatiana (21), Maria (19) and Anastasia (17).

When Nicholas II abdicated in March 1917, the imperial family was initially held under house arrest in the Alexander Palace, about 14 miles south of Petrograd. Despite the curtailment of their freedom, the family was permitted to maintain a number of staff and were able to live quite comfortably, without the pressures

of imperial life. At the end of July, the family was transferred to the town of Tobolsk in western Siberia, where they enjoyed time outdoors, while various monarchist groups tried to conceive a viable rescue plan.

But rescue never came. By May 1918, after the Bolsheviks had consolidated their power, the entire former imperial family had been secretly moved to The Ipatiev House in Ekaterinburg near the remote Ural Mountains – known ominously as the ‘The House of Special Purpose’. Four members of the imperial household accompanied them: Evgeniy Botkin, the imperial physician, Anna Demidova, a maid of the Alexandra’s, head footman Alexei Trupp, and head cook Ivan Kharitonov.

News of the tsar's abdication in March 1917 made headlines across the globe. But it would not be the only revolution to take place that year

Life in Ekaterinburg was harsher than their previous imprisonments. The Romanovs were permitted to walk around the grounds twice a day and prayed every morning, but they were not allowed to look out of the windows, on pain of death, and guards armed with machine guns surrounded the building. The guards were on constant watch for escape attempts and liked to enter the family’s rooms unannounced – often mocking them and making crude jokes. A former member of the Cheka (the much-feared early Soviet secret police agency), Yakov Yurovsky, was installed in early July 1918 to command the guards – he would ultimately supervise the family’s execution.

**RUNNING OUT OF TIME**

As civil war raged between the Bolsheviks and those who wanted to remove them from power, discussion among Bolshevik leaders turned to what should be done with the former imperial family. Initially, the plan had been for Nicholas to stand trial for what they saw as his crimes against Russia, but there were real fears that the family might be rescued and used to aid the counterrevolutionary movement.

In early July, a group of Czech Legion troops (Czech and Slovak deserters from the Austro-Hungarian army who had allied with counterrevolutionary forces against the Bolsheviks) were approaching Ekaterinburg. The family could hear their gunfire and this sealed their fate. The Bolsheviks could not risk the



Tsar Nicholas II and his five children on the roof of a greenhouse during their imprisonment at Tobolsk – one of the last known photographs of the imperial family

**“THE IMPERIAL FAMILY ENJOYED TIME OUTDOORS WHILE VARIOUS MONARCHIST GROUPS TRIED TO CONCEIVE A VIABLE RESCUE PLAN”**



**DID YOU KNOW?**  
**A LUCKY HOUND**  
 The sole survivor of the Romanov massacre was Joy, the spaniel of Tsarevich Alexei's spaniel, who was rescued by an officer in the British Expeditionary Force. Joy lived out the rest of his life in the royal kennels at Windsor.

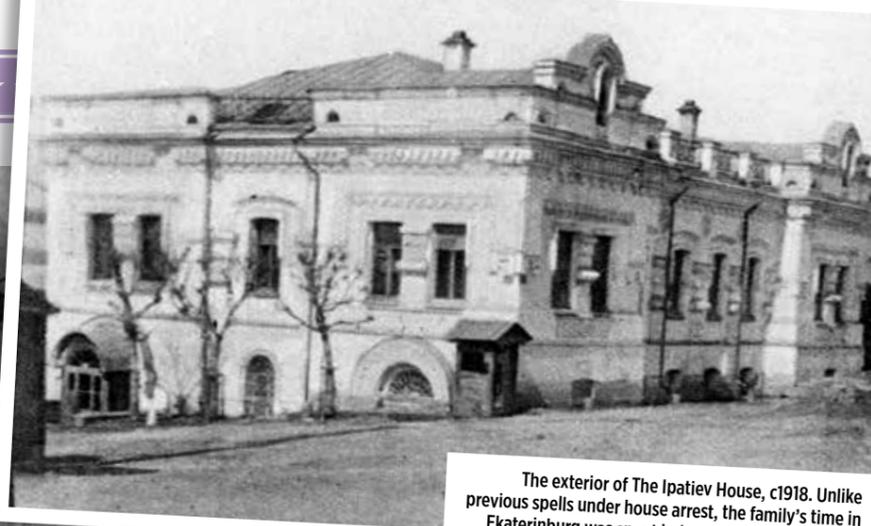


ABOVE: The Tsarevich Alexei with his dog, Joy. The spaniel was found and rescued after the murders



RIGHT: Grand Duchess Tatiana and a lady-in-waiting pictured with Nicholas II during the family's spell under house arrest at the Alexander Palace, 1917

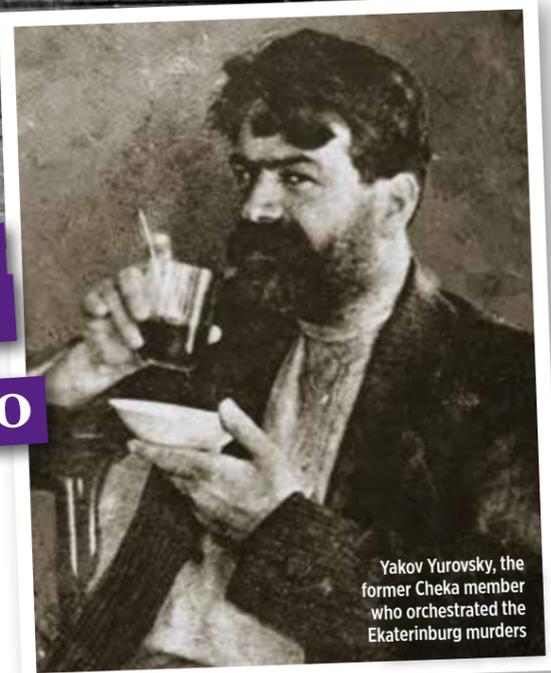
The bullet-ridden basement of The Ipatiev House, pictured soon after the murders. Once they were dead, the family's bodies were doused with acid and dumped in unmarked graves



The exterior of The Ipatiev House, c1918. Unlike previous spells under house arrest, the family's time in Ekaterinburg was spent indoors under armed guard



Tsar Nicholas II (left) bore a striking resemblance to his cousin, King George V (right). However, George decided against bringing him to Britain



Yakov Yurovsky, the former Cheka member who orchestrated the Ekaterinburg murders

**“LENIN WAS CAREFUL NOT TO PUT ANYTHING IN WRITING THAT MIGHT LINK HIM TO THE DEATHS”**

◀ Romanovs falling into enemy hands. Tragically the Czechs did not take the city until the end of July, by which time the family had been killed.

Officially, local Bolsheviks were said to have made the decision to kill the family, but evidence suggests that Lenin himself had previously authorised the murders. He was careful, though, not to put anything in writing that might link him to the deaths in order to keep his hands clean of any involvement in the murder of children.

**BULLETS AND BAYONETS**

A few hours after going to sleep on the night of 16 July, Nicholas, his family and servants were woken abruptly and taken to a basement room where they were told to wait for trucks that were supposed to be coming.

Yurovsky then informed Nicholas that he had been sentenced to death and his Cheka squad began firing. As the main target, Nicholas is believed to have died almost instantly; those who survived the initial shots were subsequently bayoneted to death.

The frenzied massacre in the small basement room took 20 minutes and left 11 dead. Their bodies were thrown into a shallow mine, but as this was not deep enough, they were then moved to another grave where they were doused in acid to render the bodies unrecognisable – the Bolsheviks did not want their grave to become a place of pilgrimage and veneration. The killers attempted to burn the bodies of the two smaller children, Maria and Alexei, in a separate grave.

The following day, the Bolsheviks released a statement announcing that Nicholas was dead but that the rest of the imperial family had been taken to safety.

Public reaction to news of the tsar's death was largely indifferent, though,

claims Helen Rappaport: “By the time they [the Romanovs] were murdered, the family had been completely out of the public eye for nearly 16 months – since March 1917.

“It's important to remember that this was a time of terrible political turmoil in Russia, of economic collapse and starvation. People were just preoccupied by other things, like staying alive. The fate of the tsar mattered very little in the grander scheme of things. When

the Russian people were finally told that Nicholas had been killed, there was certainly no breast-beating or wailing on the streets. People had suffered so much throughout the revolution and the war, that their former tsar's death was seen as just one out of millions of others.”

Nicholas and his family weren't the only Romanovs to be killed during the Russian Revolution. Nicholas' brother, Grand Duke Michael, was killed in June 1918, and within 24 hours of the Ekaterinburg murders, other members of the extended Romanov family met brutal ends at the hands of the Bolsheviks, not far away at Alapaevsk.

The truth about the fate of the Romanovs was shrouded in mystery for many years; the Bolsheviks denied their deaths and allowed rumour and counter-rumour to circulate. It wasn't in Lenin or the Bolsheviks' interests to admit they had murdered the imperial family, so when rumours of survivors emerged, they weren't disputed. The deaths of Alexandra and the children weren't officially acknowledged until 1926 and it wasn't until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, that the full, bloody story was finally revealed. Ⓞ

**WORDS: EMMA SLATTERY WILLIAMS**

**COULD THE ROMANOVS HAVE BEEN SAVED?**

Europe looked on in horror as the Romanov dynasty collapsed in 1917 – not since the execution of Louis XVI during the French Revolution had a monarchy crumbled so dramatically. But could anyone have done anything to save them?

Before the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Britain and Russia had been close allies for many years. But as war raged on, the rescue of the imperial family became far less of a priority compared to keeping Russia in the war. Whatever George V's thoughts were, he had no powers as a constitutional monarch to bring his cousin, Nicholas II, and the imperial family to Britain.

Nevertheless, an offer of asylum for the duration of the war was eventually offered by the British government, but was not pursued – it's believed that George was worried about the stability of his own monarchy and what the impact of bringing a controversial and 'bloody' ruler to Britain could be on his own reign. Alexandra's German heritage was an additional concern, as anti-German sentiment was high in Britain.

The view across most European royal houses was that the Romanovs were simply too much of a threat to be granted asylum. Norway and Sweden made token gestures of help but did not offer to get them out, nor did Denmark. Alfonso XIII of Spain was one of the few who offered asylum to the family, but the Romanovs had been killed before this could happen.

“Ultimately, the whole situation was taken out of the hands of every foreign government, whether they wanted to help or not, because it was the Petrograd Soviet who would make the final decision,” explains Helen Rappaport. “And the Soviet was adamant that the former tsar should remain in Russia. We need to look at the facts, the geography and the political situation: it was impossible, no one could have got them out. And the Romanovs themselves didn't want to abandon Russia.”



Few European monarchies could, or would, do anything to help Tsar Nicholas II and his family after their fall from power

# RIVALRY OF THE REVOLUTION

We examine the lives of three wildly different revolutionaries, each of whom sought power and influence following the collapse of Russia's tsarist regime

WORDS: JON BAUCKHAM

## ALEXANDER KERENSKY

The deposed prime minister

For a few frenzied months, Alexander Kerensky (1881-1970) was the most powerful man in Russia. Following the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II in March 1917, the Socialist Revolutionary Party politician was appointed justice minister in Prince Georgiy Lvov's Provisional Government, before being promoted to war minister and eventually succeeding Lvov in the highest office of all.

Indeed, for a brief time, it seemed as though Kerensky – a former lawyer who had devoted his career to defending revolutionaries – would be the figurehead of post-tsarist Russia. Through impassioned speeches, often with tears rolling down his cheeks, Kerensky promised to lead the nation towards a brighter future, devoid of the corruption that typified the old regime.

Yet, by the end of 1917, he would be driven from power by Vladimir Lenin: a fellow middle-class intellectual from the same hometown, and ironically, a man Kerensky's schoolteacher father had once taught.

### WAR WEARINESS

The seeds of Kerensky's demise were arguably sown in the summer of 1917, when, as war minister, he declared his intention to continue the costly (and deeply unpopular) conflict against Germany. The decision proved disastrous. Following a failed offensive on the Eastern Front, weary soldiers rebelled against their officers and deserted in their droves, with many returning home to oppose the new regime.

Although Kerensky was victorious in suppressing Bolshevik-supported unrest in Petrograd (after which he succeeded Lvov as prime minister), he was forced to turn to the Bolshevik militia for assistance when General Lavr Kornilov, the Russian army's commander-in-chief, launched a coup against the Provisional Government.

Kornilov was arrested before he could reach the capital, but Kerensky had already paved the way for his own downfall. In October, it would be this same group of Bolsheviks – now armed with government weapons – that would force him into a humiliating escape from the Winter Palace.

After failing to mount a rebellion, Kerensky spent time in Britain, France and Australia, before settling in the US. He died in New York City, aged 89.

**“THROUGH IMPASSIONED SPEECHES, KERENSKY PROMISED TO LEAD RUSSIA TOWARDS A BRIGHTER FUTURE”**

## LEON TROTSKY

The military mastermind

The man who engineered the Red Army's success during the Russian Civil War was not always known as Leon Trotsky. Hailing from a Jewish farming family, Trotsky was born Lev Davidovich Bronstein in 1879, only adopting his famous moniker while fleeing exile from Siberia in 1902.

Indeed, Trotsky had been a fierce opponent of the tsarist regime long before he helped lead the second of 1917's two revolutions. The bespectacled intellectual had originally joined the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) as a teenager, before his aforementioned escape from Siberia – where he had been exiled for participating in radical activities – took him to London and a job with the party newspaper, *Iskra*.

But following the RSDLP's split in 1903, Trotsky did not follow Vladimir Lenin into the radical Bolshevik faction, and instead remained determinedly independent. In fact, it was only while briefly imprisoned by the Provisional Government after his return to Russia in 1917 that Trotsky fully committed himself to the Bolshevik cause. Elected chairman of the Petrograd Soviet that September, he helped topple Alexander Kerensky the following month.

### FROM HERO TO OUTCAST

In the wake of the October Revolution, Trotsky was tasked with building a fighting force to defend the new Bolshevik regime. Thanks to his strong abilities as a military tactician, he guided his Red Army to victory over a coalition of 'Whites' in 1920, regularly touring the battlefields in an armoured train.

But after the Russian Civil War, Trotsky found himself increasingly demonised and ostracised as a political heretic.

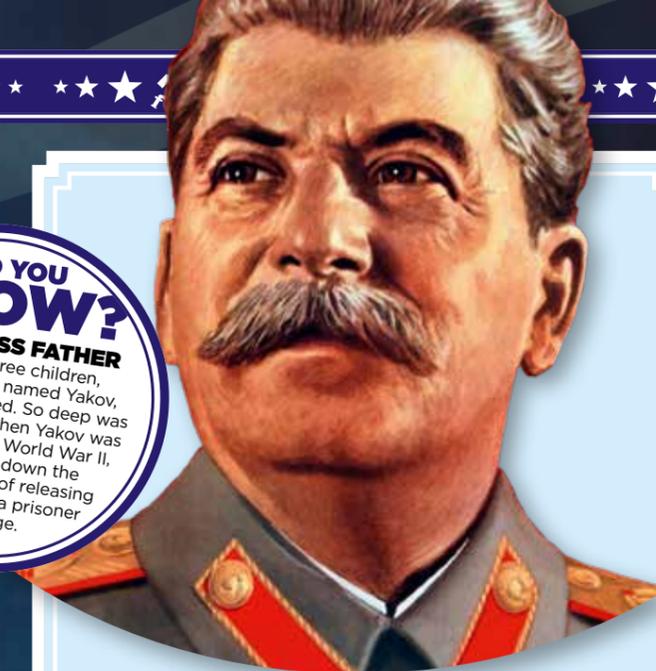
Previously seen as Lenin's successor, he was pushed to the sidelines by the Communist Party's new general secretary, Joseph Stalin. Once Lenin had died in 1924, Trotsky fell out of favour and was eventually banished from the Soviet Union altogether.

In the 1930s, Trotsky regularly denounced the Stalinist regime from his new home in Mexico City

– but even there, he wasn't safe from the dictator's blood-soaked purges. On 20 August 1940, Trotsky was struck on the head with an ice axe by a Spanish communist acting upon Stalin's orders, and died the next day.

The dictator's former comrade was now permanently silenced.

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
**A RUTHLESS FATHER**  
Stalin had three children, including a son named Yakov, whom he despised. So deep was his dislike, that when Yakov was captured during World War II, Stalin turned down the Germans' offer of releasing him as part of a prisoner exchange.



## JOSEPH STALIN

The power-hungry tyrant

Few people in history have wielded as much power as Joseph Stalin, but the dictator's beginnings could not have been humbler. Born in 1878 in Georgia (then part of the Russian empire), the future revolutionary – christened Ioseb Dzhugashvili – grew up in hardship. Beaten by his alcoholic father and scarred by smallpox, he was sent to a seminary to train for the priesthood. However, the Georgian soon traded God for Karl Marx, and, aged 20, he quit the seminary and immersed himself in radicalism. In the early 1900s he became an acolyte of Vladimir Lenin, and was involved in the planning of several acts of armed banditry to raise funds for the Bolshevik cause.

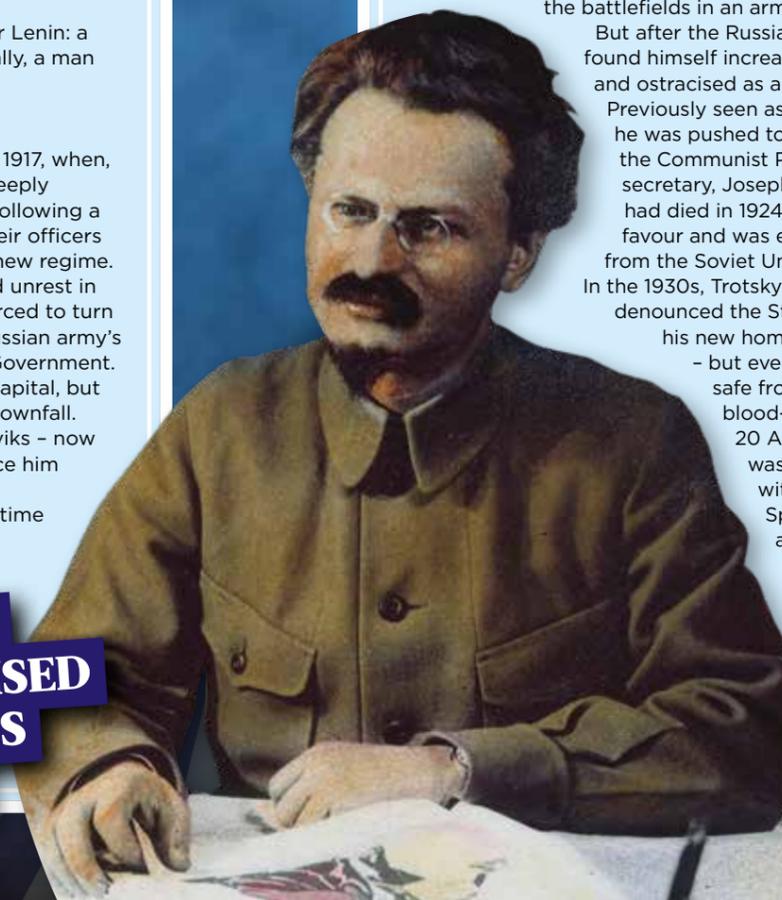
### THE PATH TO THE TOP

After spells in and out of prison, Stalin (a name he adopted in 1912, derived from the Russian word for 'steel') arrived in Petrograd in 1917 and established himself as a key figure within the Bolshevik Party, resuming editorship of its official newspaper, *Pravda*.

Crucially, he was on the party's central committee when it overthrew the Provisional Government in October, and – following Lenin's death – was able to exploit the resulting power vacuum to cast his main rival, Leon Trotsky, aside. Unlike Trotsky, who wanted to ignite a global revolution, Stalin saw his priority as strengthening the Soviet Union from within, declaring a policy of "socialism in one country".

Having seen off his leadership opponents by 1928, Stalin assumed control of the Communist Party, and, by default, the Soviet Union. During the dictator's quarter-century as premier, he ruled with increasing tyranny: his efforts to bring farms under state control triggered widespread famine, while his 'purges' of the late 1930s sent up to 1.2 million people to their graves.

Although Stalin's role in defeating Germany during World War II would prove his finest hour, it didn't stop his successor, Nikita Khrushchev, from introducing a policy of 'destalinisation' to cleanse the state of Stalin's image after his death in 1953. His powerful cult of personality is still very much alive today. ◉



# THE FINAL COUNTDOWN

Months of unrest in post-tsarist Russia ended in a revolution that would change the course of history

**A**fter the fall of the tsarist regime in March 1917, Russian society was anything but settled. Along with turmoil on the battlefields and economic unrest on the home front, there was little consensus on the shape of political advancement. The Provisional Government was balanced upon a series of fragile coalitions, while the return of Vladimir Lenin would further radicalise public debate. Three summer-into-autumn months would witness civil disquiet and failed coups, before the final outcome in October.

## 3 JULY REBELLIOUS RUSSIANS TAKE TO THE STREETS

“Take power, you son of a bitch, when it is handed to you!” These words – angrily yelled by a Petrograd protester and set to a soundtrack of gunfire peppering the air – articulated the frustrations of hundreds of thousands of impatient rebels who had gathered outside the city’s Tauride Palace, in a

mass protest later dubbed the July Days. The target of the heckle was Viktor Chernov, the moderate leader of the Petrograd Soviet (a soviet being a council representing workers and soldiers). The anger felt on the city streets had caused Russia’s Provisional Government to fold in on itself and the prime minister to resign. The crowd expected the Soviet to occupy the power vacuum. It didn’t. Instead, to howls of derision and consternation, Chernov called for the Provisional Government to be allowed to reconvene.

The protesters had differing backgrounds: industrial workers were joined by deserter soldiers from Petrograd Garrison, along with sailors from the Kronstadt naval base on the island of Kotlin, 20 miles out in the Gulf of Finland from Petrograd. There was one issue uniting them: the Provisional Government’s resoluteness in escalating the WWI war effort, despite the negative effect on both the economy and domestic life. Soldiers were deserting in huge numbers, many persuaded by the Bolsheviks, whose objectives were to undermine the war effort and see Russia pull out of the conflict. In June,

BELOW RIGHT: Bolshevik fighters pose atop a Provisional Government light armoured vehicle in November 1917

BELOW: Viktor Chernov resigned shortly after the July Days fizzled out



the 1st Infantry Reserve had drafted a resolution. “The slaughter continues,” it read, “and there is an industrial collapse in the making. We see the rich lining their pockets from this criminal war and we sense and know that a sinister and terrible famine is approaching.”

The war minister Alexander Kerensky ignored the growing disillusionment and declared a major offensive to push back Austro-Hungarian forces in the region of Galicia. While initially successful, the 20-day-long Kerensky Offensive in July was ultimately responsible for a catastrophic loss of life among Russian troops, the news of which prompted the unrest on Petrograd’s streets. But the July Days’ wouldn’t yield the change that was sought. While the protesters took control of the capital for a couple of days, during which Chernov managed to escape with his life, the protests were devoid of clear leadership. The government buildings weren’t seized and no power grab was made. Lenin’s Bolsheviks, at



Government troops fire on demonstrators during the unrest of July 1917

RIGHT: Lenin used a false passport to escape into Finland after an order for his arrest was issued in July 1917  
BELOW: Soldiers in Palace Square. The army’s loyalty was not absolute, with many troops aiding the insurrection



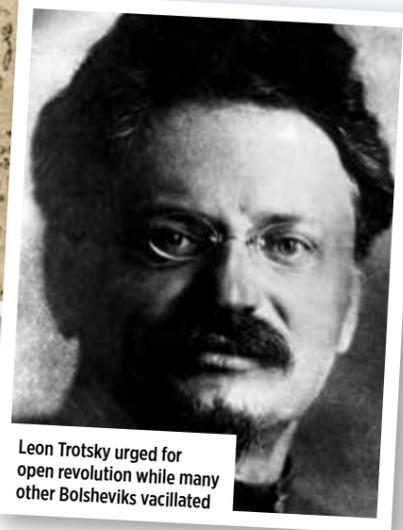
“Kerensky suspected that Kornilov, a fierce advocate of martial law, was planning a coup of his own”

that point not the majority faction in the Petrograd Soviet, believed it too early to seize power. But that time would come.

## 27 AUGUST A MILITARY COUP IS BREWING

After the July Days protests fizzled out, the Provisional Government was restored to power, this time under the leadership of Alexander Kerensky, who succeeded Prince Lvov as prime minister. Believing Lenin’s words to be the chief fuel of the unrest, the government put the Bolsheviks under the closest scrutiny, arresting many of its key players. Lenin, named in the press as a German spy for his anti-war pronouncements – and also widely discredited following the discovery of telegrams that showed the Bolsheviks had been taking German money to fund their campaign – fled to Finland. But it would turn out that Kerensky’s most immediate rival was closer to home.

Still sore from the failure of the offensive in Galicia, Kerensky appointed a new commander-in-chief of the Russian Army: Lavr Kornilov. Kornilov, eager to weaken any future Bolshevik-led uprising, mobilised his troops to Petrograd, quite possibly to remove the city’s Soviet. Kerensky, however, viewed this



Leon Trotsky urged for open revolution while many other Bolsheviks vacillated

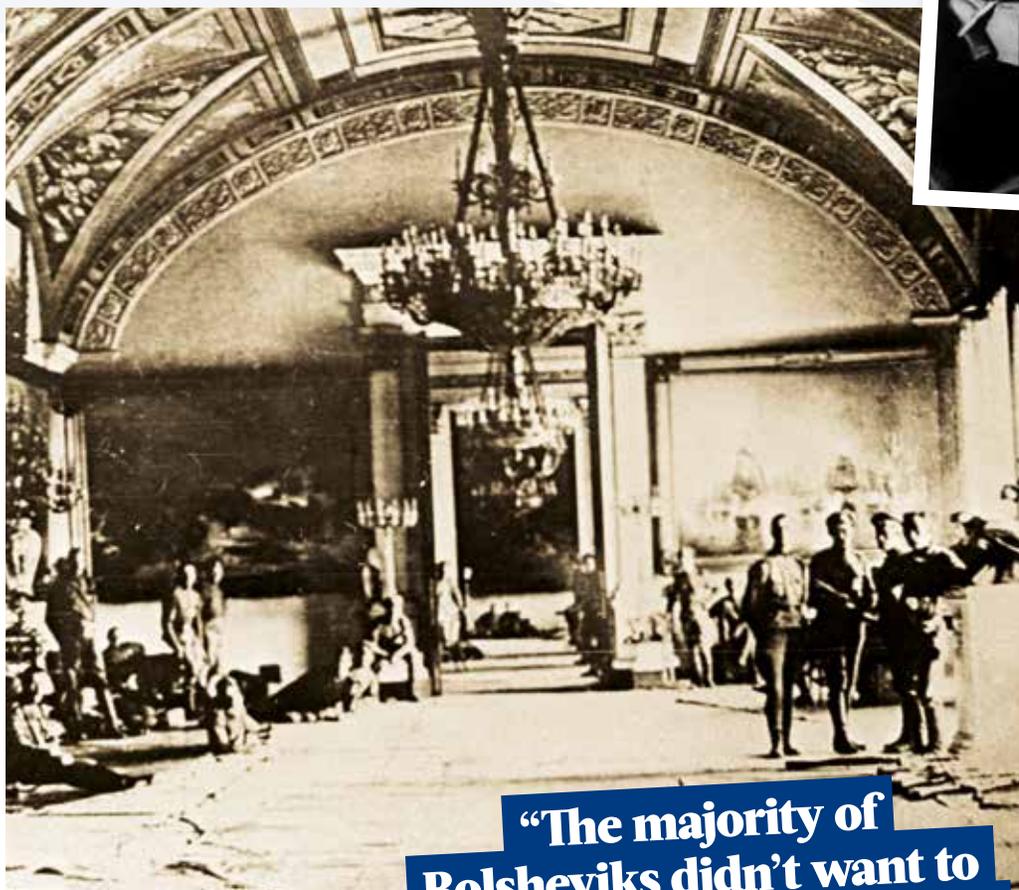
ammunition had been supplied by the Provisional Government, many of which ended up in the possession of the Bolshevik Red Guards. Not that any fighting broke out. Any attempted Kornilov coup was snuffed out within a few days, largely down to soviet agents embedding themselves in the approaching army ranks and being able to persuade Kornilov’s soldiers to desert. Railworkers also caused disruption, slowing the troops’ progress.

No coup may have ensued, but the Kornilov Affair was significant in at least three ways. Not only did it weaken the authority of Kerensky’s Provisional Government, but it also established the Bolsheviks as a powerful political force. Furthermore, it put weaponry in the hands of its Red Guards.

## 26 SEPTEMBER TROTSKY TAKES CHARGE OF THE PETROGRAD SOVIET

After the Kornilov Affair, Kerensky’s Provisional Government released, on bail, many of the prominent Bolsheviks it had arrested following the July Days. Within the Petrograd Soviet, Bolshevik authority was very much in the ascendancy, with the Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionary factions weakened by their support for the Provisional Government and its policy of maintaining, even expanding, the war effort. In the final week of September, Trotsky was elected chairman of the Petrograd Soviet. His continual anti-war propaganda was finding an audience among the proletariat (the working classes), too; Bolshevik party membership rose by a third in just one month.

With the political climate conducive to Bolshevik aims, Lenin returned from



**25 OCTOBER  
THE BOLSHEVIKS  
ENTER THE  
WINTER PALACE**

Lenin and Trotsky weren't to be held back. The insurrection started the following morning, with Red Guards and troops sympathetic to the Bolshevik cause moving through Petrograd and securing positions both strategic and symbolic. The main target was the Winter Palace, which throughout the day was surrounded by more and more Bolshevik forces. In reality, the palace was a soft target. It was being defended by a few thousand inexperienced loyalists, many of whom – as revealed by an American journalist who managed to get into the building during the afternoon – were drunk and hungry. If there were to be a battle, it would be a tame, one-sided affair. And so it proved.

The 1,500-room Winter Palace was occupied later that evening with little resistance. The actions of the loyalist troops defending it were largely inconsequential; these soldiers largely chose to either flee or swap sides. Upstairs, government ministers fled to a dining room, where they hid until their mass arrest.

Across the city, the Congress of Soviets was being held to the sound of middle-distant gunfire. The more moderate Soviet members – the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries – were dismayed that the Bolsheviks had gone ahead with the (largely bloodless) coup. Both sides' positions were entrenched and intractable, and the congress ended when the moderates walked out in protest. This was a politically naïve move: it simply left the Bolsheviks with total power of the Soviets.

The next morning, Lenin issued a proclamation announcing the creation of a new government – The Council of People's Commissars – and calling for an immediate armistice with Germany, the redistribution of land to the peasantry and the introduction of full democracy in the army. A few months earlier, the notion of the minority Bolsheviks seizing control of the country would have been unlikely at best. Now they were the party of all power, revolutionaries about to rewrite the future for the now-socialist Russia. ◉

**WORDS: NIGE TASSELL**

**“The majority of Bolsheviks didn't want to consent to a possibly hasty and ill-considered coup”**

◀ Finland. While in exile, he had urged the immediate overthrow of the Provisional Government. Delay, he believed, could be grave. His reasoning was multiple: there was no guarantee that, in such a volatile political atmosphere, the current popularity of the Bolsheviks would be sustained for any great length; in the interim, Kerensky might actually welcome another Kornilov-style military coup, just to deny a Bolshevik grab of power; and the advancing Germans might even capture Petrograd before too long. The majority of Bolsheviks, though, didn't want to consent to a possibly hasty and ill-considered coup, preferring to wait for the support of the Congress of Soviets, due to be held in late October.

**24 OCTOBER  
PRIME MINISTER  
KERENSKY RAIDS  
BOLSHEVIK PREMISES**

In the meantime, Trotsky busied himself with the formation of the Military Revolutionary Committee, the body charged with organising the defence of Petrograd from either revolutionary or military forces through the deployment of armed militant factions. The mobilisation of Red Army units

wasn't excessively clandestine: if a revolution was being put together, it was being done in clear sight. And it was being done with the Provisional Government showing little outward concern. Those outside the government were a little alarmed and believed Kerensky had massively miscalculated by not executing Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders when they had the chance. The British ambassador Sir George Buchanan displayed a mixture of bemusement and fear when he noted how he “could not understand how a government that respected itself could allow Trotsky to go on inciting the masses to murder and pillage without arresting him”.

Kerensky did eventually take action. On 24 October, he instructed troops loyal to him to raid premises involved in the production of Bolshevik propaganda. Printing presses were severely damaged, phone lines cut. Was it too little, too late? Was he just delaying the inevitable? Trotsky, denouncing the government's actions as pre-emptive counterrevolutionary measures, urged an immediate response. Once again, more moderate Bolsheviks wanted to apply the brakes, fearing that troops still loyal to the government might be greater in number than thought.

ABOVE: The Winter Palace was the official residence of the Russian emperors, yet the Bolsheviks took control of it with little resistance

ABOVE RIGHT: Though there was little bloodshed, the Winter Palace was nonetheless damaged (and looted) during the October Revolution

# CONFLICT WITHIN

Lenin's October Revolution may have succeeded, but fresh turmoil was to come. We examine the Russian Civil War and the fight to topple the Bolshevik regime

Red Army chief Leon Trotsky regularly visited his troops, delivering morale-boosting speeches on the front line



In the wake of the October Revolution, Vladimir Lenin's Bolshevik government was not universally recognised, and Russia was plunged into a bitter civil war. The Red Army, founded by Leon Trotsky, sought to defend what the revolution had achieved, while groups of counter-revolutionary forces, known as the Whites (comprising monarchists and liberals alike), attempted to topple the Bolshevik regime.

Historians have struggled to pinpoint the precise moment that the Civil War began, but many view the October Revolution as the catalyst, with the period that followed marked by a deterioration in law and order as the Bolsheviks attempted to consolidate their grip on power. What is clear, however, is that by the spring of 1918, there were elements both inside and outside Russia working to depose Lenin's government.

On 3 March 1918, Bolshevik politician Grigory Sokolnikov signed a treaty ending Russia's participation in the war against Germany. But Russia's former allies, hoping to re-establish the Eastern Front and remove the Bolshevik threat, sent troops to help the Whites. Many major powers feared that communism

risked spreading to their own countries, so stayed on fighting in Russia long after the Armistice in November 1918. France (with a significant Greek force) occupied Odessa, Japan controlled Vladivostok, while Britain sent forces into the north.

In October 1919, a coalition of White forces attempted to seize Petrograd, but Trotsky personally rallied his Reds and successfully defended the city. The defeat, inflicted by an army that now included former tsarist officers among its ranks, was the final straw for many of the foreign powers, which decided to abandon the cause altogether. Without this vital support, the last major White army was defeated in 1920, sparking a mass exodus of White Russians into exile from Odessa and other Black Sea ports.

But the turmoil engulfing Russia was not yet over. One of Lenin's long-term goals had been to foment a worldwide communist revolution, beginning with newly independent Poland (formerly part of the German, Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires). However, before Lenin could make the first move, the Polish government – eager to expand its territory – orchestrated a capture of

Russian-controlled Kiev in May 1920. Lenin reacted by launching an invasion of Poland, hoping that the Polish people would turn against their government, but the Russians were roundly defeated. The Treaty of Riga, signed in March 1921, swiftly put an end to Lenin's ambitions and resulted in Poland being granted a large amount of land in Belorussia and Ukraine.

Despite the failures in Poland, Bolshevik rule was firmly established in Russia by the end of 1921 – a victory widely attributed to the fact that the Reds were united by a single cause. The various factions fighting the Bolsheviks may have shared a common enemy, but they lacked a cohesive military strategy and had vastly different agendas. Whereas some Whites wanted to resurrect the Provisional Government, others sought the establishment of some form of constitutional monarchy, which made it difficult to gain widespread support.

Additionally, by adopting an economic policy dubbed 'war communism', Lenin had ensured his military machine was well-oiled: he nationalised Russia's industry, utilised slave labour, and forcibly took grain from rural peasants to feed urban centres.

Overall, the Civil War and its ensuing economic effects took a heavy toll on the Russian people. It is estimated that more than nine million people perished through fighting, famine, disease and political executions – many more than the nation had suffered during World War I. 

WORDS: EMMA SLATTERY WILLIAMS



ABOVE: A 1918 poster urges Russian citizens to donate weapons to the Red Army cause

BELOW: The bodies of Bolshevik soldiers frozen in the snow. Around nine million people are thought to have died in the conflict



# WHAT HAPPENED NEXT

The revolutions that had transformed Russia would see it grow in strength, but the new regime would not survive the 20th century

In 1922, under Lenin's rule, Russia became the dominant constituent part of a new Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) – the world's first constitutionally socialist state. It was comprised of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic.

The civil war had greatly damaged the Russian economy, and this – combined with severe droughts, failed harvests, economic blockades, the requisition of grain and seed-grain from peasants and a disrupted transport system – culminated in a terrible famine between 1921 and 1922. Although Lenin did eventually accept international aid, more than five million people are thought to have died, either through starvation or associated

diseases. Millions also fled the new USSR, in particular those who had supported the Whites during the civil war. Known as 'White émigrés', they included members of the imperial government, businessmen, monarchists and officers, as well as poets and writers.

No political parties other than the ruling Communist Party of the Soviet Union were allowed within the USSR, and soon Lenin held power at least as great as any tsar. With complete control over government and the media, the USSR was in effect a totalitarian dictatorship. The Bolshevik secret police that Lenin had established in 1917 was replaced by the State Political Directorate (known as the GPU) and the Gulag system of forced labour camps was introduced. Around 18 million people – including dissidents, criminals and prosperous peasants, known as 'kulaks' – are thought to have

been incarcerated in the camps between their introduction in 1919 and Stalin's death in 1953. Hundreds of thousands of these prisoners died of starvation, disease, exhaustion or execution.

## EXIT LENIN, ENTER STALIN

Lenin, who had been increasingly unwell since 1921, suffered his first stroke in May 1922. Fearing imminent death, he dictated a letter now known as Lenin's Testament, in which he pointed out the dangers of a split within the party and outlined the strengths and weaknesses of its leaders, without specifying who should succeed him. He did, however, recommend that Stalin be removed from his position as general secretary. The full content of Lenin's Testament was kept in secret from most of the Soviet Congress, however, and would not be shared for many decades.

After Lenin died on 21 January 1924, the Soviets created a Leninist cult of the personality that promoted the dead leader as a saint-like figure in the fight for a communist state. Religious imagery was replaced with images of Lenin, and his body – embalmed and kept on permanent display in a mausoleum in Moscow, where it remains today – became a site of pilgrimage. Petrograd was renamed Leningrad in his honour,

Pro-democracy supporters in Vilnius, Lithuania, in 1991 – they're marking the 50th anniversary of the June Uprising against Stalin's regime



**“TROTSKY, A CRITIC OF STALIN'S PLANS, WAS EXPELLED FROM THE COMMUNIST PARTY IN 1927 AND EXILED”**

a change that persisted until a public referendum in 1991 returned it to its pre-World War I name of St Petersburg.

There was now a power vacuum in the USSR. As the mastermind behind the Bolshevik seizure of power, as well as the Red Army's success during the Russian Civil War, Leon Trotsky was seen as an obvious choice of leader for many. He was seen by some, however, as a more 'Westernised' member of the party, due to his time spent in exile, and many resented the trust Lenin had placed in him.

Joseph Stalin, on the other hand, had played a less prominent role than Trotsky in the Bolshevik takeover, but his position as general secretary of the Communist Party had allowed him to accrue great influence and power, and Lenin himself had relied on Stalin's administrative ability, before becoming critical of him. Three other members – Nikolay Bukharin, Grigory Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev – were also contenders for leadership.

A power struggle ensued, but Stalin's nationalistic brand of Marxism – 'socialism in one country' – and his focus on strengthening the USSR appealed to many in the Communist Party, and by 1929 he had become dictator of the USSR. Trotsky, a critic of Stalin's plans, was demonised, expelled from the Communist Party, and exiled.

He was assassinated in 1940, on Stalin's orders, in Mexico.

But Trotsky was far from the only victim of Stalin's bloodlust: between August 1936 and March 1938, Stalin carried out a 'Great Purge' to calm conflicts within the party. Thousands were killed, including those suspected of attempting coups.

Under Stalin's rule, the USSR would become a world superpower, and play a major role within the Allied victory over Nazi Germany in World War II – though at a cost, as the USSR suffered more losses in the conflict than any other combatant. After 1945, Stalin would subsequently gain control over much of Eastern Europe, creating a 'buffer zone' of Soviet satellite states intended to shield the USSR from the West. The scene for the lengthy Cold War, which lasted four decades, was set.

Stalin died in 1953. His successor, Nikita Khrushchev, would condemn him for perverting communism, and claim that Lenin had never wanted him in power. The Soviet government would also later admit the huge scale of atrocities committed under Stalin's rule.

The USSR eventually collapsed on 25 December 1991 – the regime that had seized power in the Russian Revolution and ruled for 74 years was no more.

**WORDS: EMMA SLATTERY WILLIAMS**



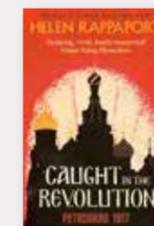
ABOVE: Gulag inmates were not simply imprisoned, but forced to carry out hard labour  
RIGHT: A crowd of thousands mourn Lenin, who acquired a saint-like status following his death in 1924



## GET HOOKED

If we've whetted your appetite for the Russian Revolution, explore the topic further with our pick of books, films and podcasts

### BOOKS



**Caught in the Revolution: Petrograd, 1917**  
By Helen Rappaport (Hutchinson, 2016)

Drawing on a rich trove of material, much of it previously unpublished, Helen Rappaport explores the outbreak of the Russian Revolution through eye-witness accounts left by foreign nationals – including suffragette leader Emmeline Pankhurst – who saw the drama unfold.



**The Penguin History of Modern Russia: From Tsarism to the Twenty-First Century**  
By Robert Service (Penguin, 2020)

Robert Service explores the complex, changing interaction between rulers and ruled from Tsar Nicholas II, through the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917; from Lenin and Stalin through to Gorbachev, Yeltsin, Putin and beyond.



**Lenin on the Train**  
By Catherine Merridale (Allen Lane, 2016)

In April 1917 Vladimir Ilyich Lenin travelled back to Russia by train. His country was at war and his route would take him through enemy territory. Catherine Merridale follows in the leader's tracks, creating a gripping account of events in Russia and Europe at one of the tensest moments of World War I.

### ONLINE AND AUDIO

► **The Romanovs** (BBC Radio 4): Ernie Rea and historians, including Helen Rappaport, discuss Nicholas II on an episode of *Beyond Belief*. Listen at [bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0bfxm8](http://bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0bfxm8)

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### WATCH



**Empire of the Tsars: Romanov Russia with Lucy Worsley**  
(available on BBC iPlayer)

Historian Lucy Worsley travels to Russia to tell the extraordinary story of the dynasty that ruled the country for more than three centuries – the Romanovs.



**October: Ten Days That Shook the World**  
(streaming on Amazon Prime)

Commissioned by the Soviet government in 1927, this film recreates the events of 1917 – from the crumbling of the Russian monarchy to the ousting of the Provisional Government.