

The Russian Revolution

The Great War made an already unstable Russia even more chaotic. Russian troops suffered a number of defeats with devastating numbers of casualties. Government mismanagement led to fuel and food shortages during the winter of 1916–1917, causing popular uprisings in St. Petersburg. In March 1917, revolutionary groups overthrew Tsar Nicholas II. The Romanov dynasty, after 300 years of rule, collapsed.

The monarchy was replaced by a provisional government that included socialists, liberals, and conservatives. Vying for political power outside of the Duma, the Russian parliament, were several *soviets*, groups of workers or soldiers led by socialists, which promised the Russian people reforms such as land redistribution and better opportunities for education. A few months after the fall of the tsar, Vladimir Lenin returned to Russia from exile in Switzerland. He was the leader of the *Bolsheviks*, a party of radical socialists that seized power in November 1917, promising “peace, land, and bread” to hungry, weary Russians. (Test Prep: Create a chart that compares the Russian and the Chinese Revolutions. See pages 557–558.)

Throughout the 1917 upheavals, Russian troops continued to suffer an astounding number of casualties on the Eastern Front of the war against the Central Powers. Four months after he took control of the Russian government, Lenin appealed for peace with Germany. In March 1918, the leaders of the new *Soviet Russia* signed the *Treaty of Brest-Litovsk* with Germany, ending Russia’s involvement in World War I. The treaty called for Russia to hand over to Germany an enormous amount of land, including most of Ukraine. But the treaty gave the new Bolshevik government time to concentrate on building a *Communist* state based on Marxist principles of common ownership of all property. The Bolshevik government also had to fight a civil war against anti-Communist forces that were supported by France, Britain, Japan, and the United States. In November 1920, the Russian government declared victory.

Continuing Revolution in Russia As you read in Chapter 25, Russian revolutionaries unseated the royal Romanov dynasty in the spring of 1917. In the fall of that year, the Bolsheviks seized power and set up a Communist government led by Vladimir Lenin. The Communists believed that workers eventually should own the means of production and that collective ownership would lead to collective prosperity and a just society. Toward that long-term goal, the Soviet government abolished private trade, distributed peasants’ crops to feed urban workers, and took over ownership of the country’s factories and heavy industries.

Although Lenin and the Bolshevik Party had promised “peace, land, and bread” during World War I, they instead presided over a populace that faced starvation during the widespread *Russian Civil War* (1918–1921). Hundreds of thousands of Russians, Ukrainians, and others revolted against the Soviet government’s actions. Urban factory workers and sailors went on strike, and peasants began to hoard their food stocks. Industrial and agricultural production dropped sharply.

By 1921, Lenin realized that the Soviet economy was near complete collapse. Thus, he instituted a temporary retreat from Communist economic policies. Under his *New Economic Plan (NEP)*, he reintroduced private trade, allowing farmers to sell their products on a small scale. Although the government permitted some economic liberties, it maintained strict political control. The NEP enjoyed modest successes, but it came to an end when Lenin died in 1924.

Joseph Stalin Several years after Lenin’s death, Joseph Stalin took control of the *Politburo*, the Communist Party’s central organization, setting himself up as a dictator. He remained in power for almost 30 years. Once in power, Stalin abandoned Lenin’s NEP and instituted the first *Five-Year Plan*, which attempted to transform the *Union of Soviet Socialist Republics* (also called the *U.S.S.R.* or Soviet Union) into an industrial power. He wanted his largely agricultural nation to “catch up” to the industrial nations of the West. At the same time, Stalin *collectivized* agriculture, a process in which farmland was taken from private owners and given to collectives to manage. In theory, a collective, or *Kolkhoz*, was a group of peasants who freely joined together to farm a certain portion of land. In practice, however, peasants were forced by the state to work on a specific collective and were expected to follow detailed plans and to reach specific goals set by the government. This elimination of private land ownership and the forced redistribution of land, livestock, and tools enraged farmers. Each year, the government seized food to send to the cities. The farmers retaliated against collectivization by burning crops and killing livestock. Many moved to the cities for a better life. It seemed to them that Stalin cared more about urban workers than rural farmers.

A series of five-year plans had mixed results. The collectivization of agriculture was a huge failure. Millions of peasants starved to death, especially in the Ukraine. Heavy industry, however, grew tremendously in the 1930s. Although consumer goods were in short supply, there were plenty of factory jobs available, and the cost of living was low.

Stalin’s brutal regime is widely condemned today. He punished his political opponents by executing them or sentencing them to life terms in labor camps, where many died. In addition, his agricultural policies led to the deaths of many millions of Soviet citizens. Because Stalin kept tight control of the press, details of his atrocities went largely unreported. Nonetheless, in the 1930s, an economically depressed world viewed the U.S.S.R. with a mix of horror and wonder. The U.S.S.R. was rapidly industrializing and increasing its military power. It presented a challenge to countries with capitalist economies

whose people were experiencing high levels of unemployment. (Test Prep: Write a paragraph connecting the U.S.S.R. with the ideology of Marxism. See page 432.)

In the 1920s, there was a period of experimentation in Russian literature and the visual arts. Ilya If and Evgeny Petrov wrote the humorous novel *The Twelve Chairs*, while Aleksander Blok wrote lyrical poems. Sergei Eisenstein made wonderful silent films about events in Russia, such as *Battleship Potemkin*, about the mutiny of a Russian crew against their officers of the Tsarist regime, while Kazimir Malevich made interesting abstract paintings. Then in the 1930s, the Soviet government began promoting *socialist realism*. Paintings and films had to be done in a realistic manner with an uplifting moral that showed the advantages of socialism. An early example of socialist realism in Soviet literature was the novel *Cement*, by Fyodor Gladkov, about life working in a cement factory.

The Mexican Revolution Mexico entered the twentieth century as an independent nation firmly under the control of a dictator, *Porfirio Diaz*. He had allowed much of the country's resources to come under the control of foreign investors, particularly those from the United States. Additionally, Mexican peasants held almost no land; 97 percent of the land was controlled by the wealthiest one percent of the population. When Diaz jailed Francisco Madero, the opposition candidate for president in 1910, revolution broke out with insurrections in northern Mexico. Madero escaped and set up revolutionary offices in El Paso. Then, in 1911, Madero's troops, under the command of Francisco "Pancho" Villa defeated Mexican troops, sending Diaz into exile. Madero was elected president later in 1911. A series of leaders and governments followed this initial victory for the Revolution.

One revolutionary leader, *Emiliano Zapata*, gave voice to the injustice peasants felt toward the unfair distribution of land and wealth. Zapata began the actual process of redistributing land to impoverished peasants.

While the goals of land redistribution, universal suffrage, and public education were not soon realized, they were written into the Mexican constitution in 1917. In the 1930s, efforts at land reform were more successful under *Lazaro Cardenas*. His regime also nationalized the oil industry in Mexico in 1938, angering foreign investors. Despite these reforms, the interwar period did not see dramatic changes in Mexico's social hierarchy.

Upheaval in China Following the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, China did not have a stable government until 1949. The intervening years brought tremendous upheaval and division to the nation. Dr. Sun Yat-sen became the leader of the Chinese Republic in 1912, but the central government was weak, as much of China was controlled by war lords, each in control of a specific region. The regional power structure was a holdover from the Qing Dynasty, which relied on regional armies instead of a national army. The regional armies lacked standardization, rendering control by a central government nearly impossible.

Urban intellectuals and college students in China had high hopes for the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. They expected that their country would finally win independence from Western European control. Instead, the Big Four decided to give much of China's European-controlled territory to Japan, which had given a great deal of economic aid to the Allies during the war. When news of the treaty reached China, the cities revolted. Though college students and elite youth led the May Fourth Movement, all classes in urban areas participated in the protests.

Communists and Nationalist Two main groups jockeyed for power in the wake of the protests: Communists and nationalists. The *Chinese Communist Party (CCP)*, led by Mao Zedong (or Mao Tse-tung), the son of a prosperous peasant who was inspired by the Communist revolution in Russia. Instead of energizing the working classes of Chinese cities, however, Mao believed that China's Communist revolution could be based on the revolt of peasants, who made up the vast majority of China's population. The Chinese Nationalist Party, or *Kuomintang*, was led by Sun Yat-sen. Sun Yat-sen was devoted to full independence and allied with Mao's forces to free China from foreign domination and to overthrow the war lords.

Following Sun Yat-sen's death in 1925, Chiang Kai-shek took control of the Nationalist Party. Chiang Kai-shek's was a conservative and had deep-seated distrust of Communism. In 1927, Chiang Kai-shek's forces attacked and nearly annihilated Mao's forces, initiating the Chinese Civil War.

The Long March Mao and remnants of the Chinese Communist Party retreated into China's interior, and for several years they trained in hiding. In 1934, Chiang Kai-shek's forces again attacked Mao's army stationed in the rural areas of Jiangxi. After the attack, Mao's forces began what is now known as the *Long March*. This trek, which covered about 6,000 miles and took an entire year, traversed some of the world's most treacherous mountains, deepest marshes, and driest deserts. Of the 80,000 or more who began the walk, only 10,000 remained to assemble in 1935 in northern China. Although the Chinese Communist Party did not immediately gain control of the country afterward, the Long March brought popularity for the party and admiration from many Chinese, who were in awe of Mao and his army's tremendous stamina.

Communists and Nationalists Join Forces Meanwhile, the Nationalist Kuomintang continued to rule much of China during the 1930s. Chiang Kai-shek, however, was out of touch with the diverse needs of the Chinese people. He advocated Confucianism at a time when the old traditions were no longer in vogue. When criticism from opponents threatened his power, he suppressed free speech. Corruption was rampant in the Nationalist government as well. These factors alienated Chinese urban intellectuals. To make matters worse, Japan's expansionism into China in the 1930s severely weakened the country, particularly in northeast China. In 1935, the Nationalists and Communists suspended their civil war to unite against Japan. In 1945, with the defeat of the Japanese at the end of World War II, the Communists and Nationalist once again resumed their fight for control of China.