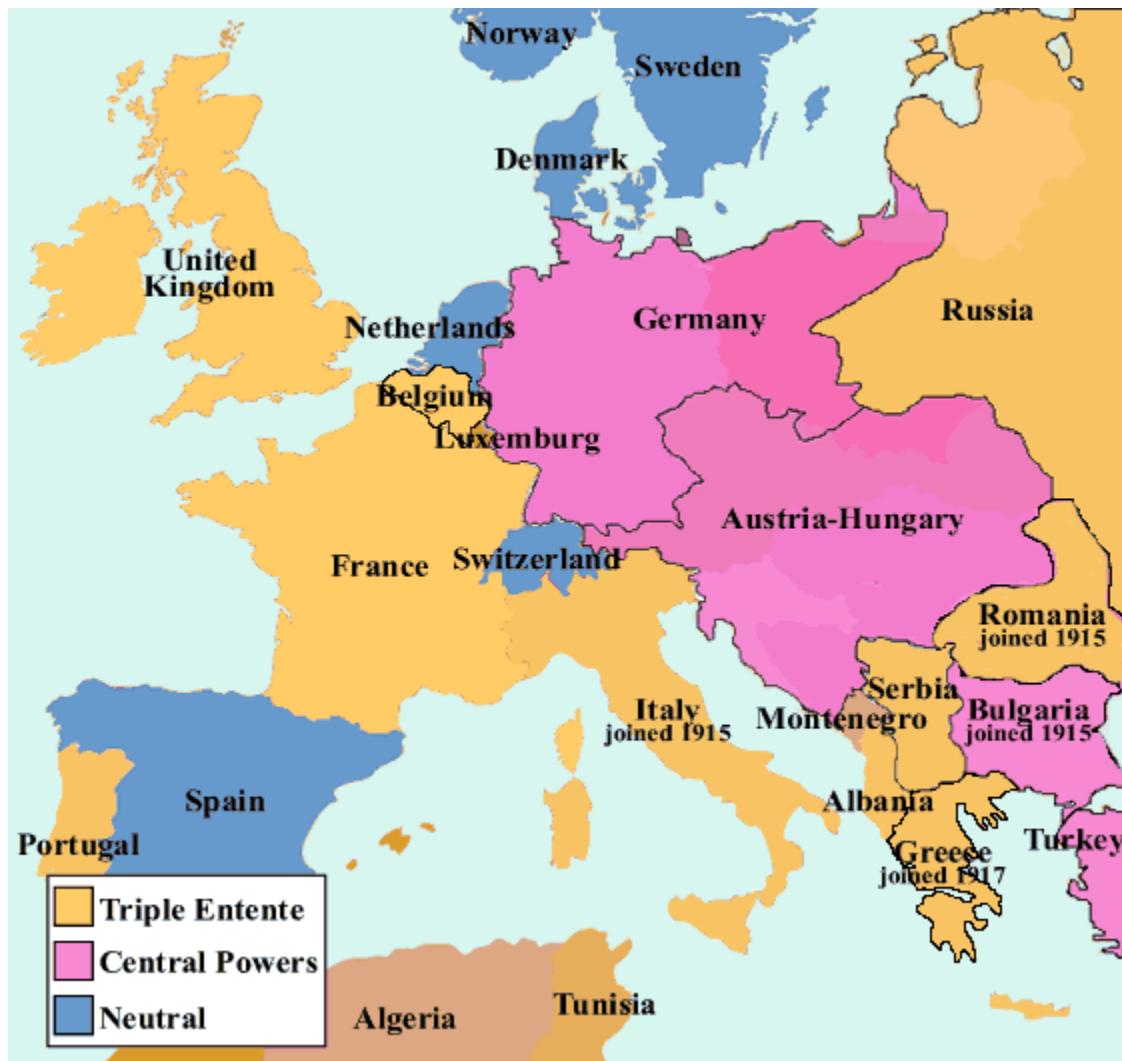


HISTORY OF RUSSIA, PART 2 OLLI, FALL 2018

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1. WORLD WAR I

On July 28, 1914, a month after the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Ferdinand by Serbian nationalists, Austria declared war on Serbia, a Russian ally. Russia responded by a general mobilization, to which Germany responded August 1 by declaring war on Russia. World War I started, with Russia on the side of the Allies, France and Great Britain, against the Central Powers, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Turkey.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CeyIV-NloU> (WWI)

The Great War (as World War I was initially called) started on both sides with a great outpouring of patriotism and beliefs that it would be victoriously over by Christmas. In Russia, patriotic demonstrations attacked the German embassy; the Duma dissolved itself because it did not want to burden the government with unnecessary politics at a time of war. Anti-German feelings led to the changing of the German-sounding name St. Petersburg of the capital to a more Russian-sounding Petrograd. The Russian socialists, in common with all the major workers' parties of the 2nd International, came behind the defense of their

Fatherland. A small, but eventually significant exception to the nationalistic flag waving was the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic Party, headed by Vladimir Lenin in a Swiss exile. Lenin declared the war to be an imperialist war waged by the exploiting bourgeoisie, which was the real enemy to the working class on both sides.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k7B-nlmdX0g> (Dr. Zhivago, march to the war)

The strategic goal of Russia on their western front was the destruction of the German rule in East Prussia and Poland and of the Austrian rule in Galicia and Bukovina. The Poles were promised a reunification under the rule of the tsar, but the West Ukrainians in Galicia awaited Russification and persecution of the Greek Catholic church. Initially, the Russian military operations proceeded quite well in the South-West, by advancing deep into Galicia, taking its eastern capital Lemberg (Lwow). But the defeat in the Battle of Tannenberg stopped the Russians in East Prussia already at the end of August.



The German-Austrian offensive of the Spring 1915 was a key event of World War I on the Eastern Front. By September 1915, the Russians were pushed back by some 300 miles, losing Russian Poland, Galicia and most of the Baltic region. The Russian human cost was enormous: 2 million men, out of which 1 million as prisoners of war. The defeats of 1915 demonstrated deficiencies of Imperial Russia, its lack of preparedness for a major war, and the inability of the tsarist administration to manage the country under

such critical circumstances. The Tsar Nicolas II was losing authority among the people already before the war, but only the WW I military disasters led to the eventual fall of the monarchy.

Despite some success of the Russian offensive on the Austrian sector of the front in June 1916, the overall military situation kept worsening, leading to a deepening social crisis, which the newly convened Duma was unable to stem. While the Tsar was at front, the Empress Alexandra became the real autocrat in Petrograd. Her German origin and the great influence on her of a “holy man” Rasputin were resented by the people, leading to wild rumors of improper life at the court. In December 1916, conspirators from the ranks of the nobility and the military assassinated Rasputin, hoping that his removal would strengthen the monarchy, but even this desperate act did not stop the decay of the tsarist state.

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=Grigori+Rasputin+youtube&view=detail&mid=BA86DCBC386382B375A8BA86DCBC386382B375A8&FORM=VIRE> (Rasputin)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t1b3f2UykG0> (WWI)

2. FEBRUARY 1917 REVOLUTION

The collapse of the tsarist regime was triggered by food shortages in Petrograd. It should be noted that such problems became serious in most countries engaged in WW 1 (unlike in WW 2, when efficiently administered rationing system was introduced early on both sides), but in Russia, the advanced decay of the government structures exacerbated these difficulties. Large anti-government demonstrations broke up in the capital in late February (old calendar) 1917 with chants “Bread!” and “Down with the Tsar!”, culminating with a general strike on February 24 that had strident political character, with demands like “Down with the Tsar!” and “Down with the War”. When huge crowds of workers started to march on the center of the city on Sunday, February 25, the police and army open fire, killing many people – the 2nd Russian Bloody Sunday. The first occurred in 1905, triggering the failed revolution of that year, but now the Petrograd military garrison chose to side with people and mutinied, instead of adhering to their oath of allegiance to the Tsar. This turned the disturbances into a full-scale revolution.

Remarkably, all this was spontaneous, without any organized leadership. The socialists [social democrats and socialist revolutionaries (the SRs)], whose leaders were in exile, were all caught by surprise by the sudden dramatic events. This included even the anti-war Bolshevik faction of social democrats, whose exiled leader Lenin had told reportedly a socialist gathering in Switzerland earlier that year that they perhaps might not see in their lifetime the revolution they had been pining for so much. But on February 28, the Petrograd Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies convened under a Menshevik (the moderate faction of social democrats) leadership. (Such Soviets (from the Russian for councils) appeared first in the 1905 revolution). At the same time Duma (the then parliament of very limited power in the Russian imperial autocracy) leaders formed a Temporary Committee for the Restoration of Order, which proclaimed itself in charge of the state.

Thus, in the very early days of the Revolution, there emerged two centers of power, even though, at the beginning, the Soviet wanted the Duma to form a government, hoping that socialism would evolve in the

new democratic order. According to classical socialist (Marxist) doctrine, there would have to a “bourgeois-democratic” revolution before socialism could be built.

The serious threat of a full-scale mutiny at the front persuaded the Duma leaders that only the abdication of the Tsar would save the war campaign and thus the country. Under their pressure, the Tsar abdicated on March 2 in favor of his brother Grand Duke Michail, but he declined after some hesitation to accept the throne. Thus, on March 3, the rule of the imperial Romanov dynasty over Russia ended. The Duma leaders then formed a Provisional Government with the Soviet support, subject to adherence to a long list of democratic demands. An uneasy framework of dual power was established, which lasted until the Bolsheviks overthrew the Provisional Government and took full power in October. The only member of the Petrograd Soviet in the Provisional Government was Alexander Kerensky, an SR who was also a Duma deputy. The first Prime Minister was Prince Lvov, a member of the Kadet Party, whose program was a liberal, not social, revolution that would establish universal equal civic and political rights. The Kadets planned for universal elections for a Constituent Assembly that would give the country a permanent government, and draft and adopt a constitution guaranteeing the new democratic order. The Provisional Government eventually scheduled the Constituent Assembly election for November 1917.

If the Provisional Government’s immediate main aim was to establish order in the country and in the armed forces, it did not succeed. The end of monarchy only encouraged the revolutionary demands of the Soviets that were being formed across the country and in the army. The Petrograd Soviet decreed already early March that the control of the army be passed to soldiers’ committees. The Soviets started to demand land distribution to peasants. While the Provisional Government wanted that any such reforms were to be dealt with only after the elections to the Constituent Assembly, the radicalized people were taking impatiently things into their hands, which the Provisional Government had no effective means to control.

Already by the Spring 1917, the dominant political power were not the liberals but the SR’s and Mensheviks. When the 1st All-Russia Congress of Soviets met early June, among its delegates were 285 SR’s, 248 Mensheviks and 105 Bolsheviks. The Congress still conditionally supported the Provisional Government, but left SR’s demanded an immediate agrarian reform, and their influence in the countryside grew with time.

Of a decisive importance for the Bolsheviks was the return of Lenin from exile. His passage from Switzerland through Germany and Finland, together with some other, not only Bolshevik, exiles was in a “sealed” railway carriage, provided by the German authorities, who banked on his disruptive effect on the Russian war conduct. Lenin arrived in Petrograd on April 3, at a time when the Bolsheviks were divided on how to proceed in the revolution. Lenin’s famous April Theses, which he announced on his arrival, startled even almost all domestic Bolsheviks. The Theses were radical and populist, they demanded the transfer of all powers to the Soviets, an immediate end of the war, and the division of land to the peasants. This was a clean break with Mensheviks and the “Defensists” of the 2nd International. Instead of waiting for the completion of the liberal “bourgeois” stage of the revolution, Lenin called for an immediate “socialist proletarian” revolution, breaking with the Marxist canon of the time.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PRfvH37PmlU> (Lenin’s return)

The lesson Lenin learned from the failed 1905 revolution was that the Russian bourgeoisie was too weak to lead a democratic revolution as well as the war. Moreover, he believed that the Western and Central Europe was now on the brink of a socialist revolution that would bring the war as an unjust and imperialist enterprise on both sides to an end. But the practical implications of the Theses that the Bolsheviks should not support the Provisional Government but organize the masses against it went far beyond anything that even the most extreme Bolsheviks considered possible. But Lenin gradually managed to bring his Party round the Thesis. The dominance of his personality and strength of his convictions were important factors,

but the main factor in his favor was the growing popularity of the Party with the soldiers and workers who, not caring much about any dogma of the socialist theory, did not want to wait for the promised socialist panacea in two stages when it was apparently possible to reach in one swoop.

The war was the most serious and divisive issue facing the Provisional Government. Already on April 20-21 thousands of armed workers and soldiers demonstrated on the streets of Petrograd against the war and the “bourgeois” government ministers. The Soviet leaders, fearful of a civil war, formed a coalition with the liberals to strengthen the authority of the Provisional Government, where now the socialists (Mensheviks, SRs, and SR-break-away Trudoviks) had now six out of the sixteen posts. They were led by the Georgian Menshevik Tsereteli, who shaped the socialist policy of Revolutionary Defenseism. But the Bolsheviks kept their determined opposition against the war.

What turned out to be fatal for the Provisional Government was its launching of an offensive in June. Russia was under a strong pressure from its allies to increase its war effort, and the socialists in the Government convinced themselves that the soldiers would fight bravely to defend the Revolution since the defeat by the Germans would lead to the restoration of the Romanov (“German”) dynasty. But, after a brief advance of two days, the German launched a counter-offensive, and the Russian offensive not only collapsed, but the whole Russian front disintegrated. Soldiers turned their guns against their commanding officers rather than going into battle. Widespread desertion ensued.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7QkJWIHFSA> (Dr Zhivago, desertions)

The coalition fell apart, and an uprising in July erupted when a Petrograd garrison was ordered to the front. Armed soldiers chanted with demonstrators the Bolshevik slogan “All Power to the Soviets”. The Bolshevik Central Committee agreed to support them, but it did not decide yet to an attempt to seize power by force. Uncharacteristically, Lenin hesitated. In the end, without a firm Bolshevik support and because of the Soviet opposition to this as a “betrayal” of the revolution, the uprising folded in.

After the July events, Alexander Kerensky, an SR who originally was the only Duma deputy in the Petrograd Soviet, took over from Prince Lvov as the prime minister of the Provisional Government. The PG now wanted to rule without Soviet support. An anti-Bolshevik campaign ensued. Most Bolshevik leaders, including Trotsky, were arrested, but Lenin fled into hiding after a warrant for his arrest had been issued. He was now firmly determined to prepare for an armed seizure of power.

Another important event leading to the Bolshevik takeover in October was the Kornilov Affair in August. General Kornilov was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Russian armed forces by Kerensky. He pushed for tough measures to curb the power of the Soviets in the army. Eventually, he sent a Cossack force to occupy Petrograd and disarm its garrison. At this point, Kerensky condemned Kornilov as a “counter-revolutionary” and dismissed him as Commander-in-Chief. The Petrograd Soviet mobilized an armed force for the defense of the capital. The Bolsheviks were “rehabilitated” and several of their leaders, including Trotsky, were released. Kornilov’s march on Petersburg came to an end when a Soviet delegation met the Cossacks and persuaded them into laying down their arms. The end result of the Kornilov Affair was a serious weakening of the PG power and Kerensky’s prestige, and the strengthening of the Bolsheviks., who won their first majority in the Petersburg Soviet on August 31. The Soviets of Moscow and some other big cities followed the suit soon. The Bolshevik were reaping benefits for their slogan “All power to the Soviets”.



3. OCTOBER 1917

The cooperation of the socialist parties in the defeat of Kornilov opened for some Bolshevik leaders the prospect of attaining Soviet power by political means, but when the SRs and the Mensheviks failed to break with the Kadets, Lenin, still hiding in Finland, resolved that now the time came for an uprising against the PG. The changing political fortunes showed in the results of municipal elections at the end of September. In Moscow, the vote for SR fell from 56% to 14% and for Mensheviks from 14% to 4%, but for Bolsheviks it increased from 11% to 51% and for Kadets from 17% to 31%, underlining the increasing polarization in the country.

The Bolshevik Central Committee ignored for the time being Lenin's calls for an insurrection, and resolved to wait for the 2nd All-Russian Soviet Congress, due to convene on October 20, for the transfer of power to the Soviets. Lenin, still on the run, returned to Petrograd and convened a secret meeting of the Central Committee on October 10, in which he forced the decision by 10 votes against 2 to prepare for an uprising. An important ally of Lenin in this became Leon Trotsky, who only relatively recently joined the Bolshevik leadership. Still, most of the Bolshevik leaders were against any such action before the Soviet Congress. But Lenin again had his way when the Central Committee on its meeting on October 16 approved his motion for an immediate armed uprising, by 19 votes to 2.

The Soviet Congress was delayed to October 25, giving the Bolsheviks more time to prepare. Moreover, the Petrograd garrison's Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC), formed on October 20, came to support firmly the Bolsheviks. Late evening October 24, Lenin set off for the Bolshevik headquarters in the Smolny Institute to give the command for the insurrection to begin. The overthrow of the PG on was a short military operation, limited to a few Government locations in Petrograd. The Red Guards of the MRC took relatively easily the Winter Palace, the seat of the PG, on October 25, with Kerensky fleeing the city. The PG collapsed without any significant resistance. Great majority of Petrograd's citizens did not notice that the Bolsheviks took power.

The seizure of the Winter Palace was announced to the Soviet Congress, meeting in the Smolny Institute, in the evening of October 25. Just before that, it had passed a resolution to form a Socialist government based on all parties in the Soviet. But hearing that the Bolsheviks seized power, most Menshevik and SR delegates declared that they would have nothing to do with such a “criminal venture” and walked out, led by the Menshevik leader Martov. The Bolshevik delegates hurled abuse at them, Trotsky’s “Go where you belong now, the rubbish heap of history!” became famous. The rump Soviet approved a Bolshevik government, The Council (Soviet) of People’s Commissars (Sovnarkom), led by Lenin. His plan had worked. By walking out of the Congress, the Mensheviks and the SRs gave the Bolsheviks a monopoly of power.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NQ_bkU6m9XQ (October Rev. Lenin)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SL2ZblXOmhg> (October Revolution “debunked”)

4. BOLSHEVIK DICTATORSHIP, CIVIL WAR, CONSOLIDATION

Few people thought that the new regime would last. The Bolsheviks had a tenuous hold on the capital, but no grip at all on the provinces. The Railwaymen Union, made up of workers from all socialist parties tried to force the Bolsheviks to form a socialist coalition government by threatening a strike that would bring the railways to a halt, and the Bolsheviks opened talks with Mensheviks and SR’s on October 29. But Lenin was open to no compromise.

The seizure of power split irrevocably the socialist movement in Russia. Although it had been carried out in the name of the Soviet Congress, Lenin had no intention to rule through the Congress, or its permanent executive, where left SRs and Mensheviks were to act as “parliamentary” brake on the Sovnarkom. Already on November 4, the Sovnarkom decreed for itself the right to pass legislation without approval from the Soviet.

From the first days, Lenin set out to destroy all the ‘counter-revolutionary’ parties opposed to his seizure of power. On October 27, Sovnarkom banned all opposition press. Kadet, Menshevik and SR leaders were arrested by the MRC. By the end of November, the Bolsheviks had to release criminals to make room in the prisons for the new political prisoners. On December 1917, the Cheka (Extraordinary Commission for Struggle against Counter-Revolution and Sabotage) replaced the MRC; this was the dreaded security organ that later became the NKVD and KGB. Its first head was Felix Dzerzhinsky, of Polish noble origin (he was the only head of security not to die disgraced; his equally, if not more bloodied successors, Yagoda, Yezhov and Beria were all executed by the regime). The Soviet Congress passed already on October 26 the Decree on Land and the Decree on Peace. This helped Bolsheviks to gain relatively quickly control of the Soviets in most cities and countryside, and start to suppress brutally not only any opposition, but all members of the former ruling classes - the “bourgeoisie”, nobility, former government officials; the Red Terror began.

At the beginning, all opposition hopes were pinned on the Constituent Assembly, which was allowed to be elected in November and December, by universal adult suffrage by every citizens, not only workers, peasants and soldiers. It seemed unlikely that the Bolsheviks would dare to challenge it. If some Bolsheviks were divided on this, Lenin had always been contempt of “formal, bourgeois’ democracy, for which there was no place in the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Plurality winners of the elections were the SR’s, with 39.5%, Bolsheviks got 22.5%, Kadets 4.5 % and Mensheviks only 3.2. In Ukraine, the great majority preferred their national parties; the Bolsheviks were supported predominantly by workers and soldiers in

big cities. The Assembly convened in Petrograd on January 5, and after a short debate, the Bolsheviks walked out, followed by Left SRs. The next day, the deputies were barred from entering and presented with a Sovnarkom degree dissolving the Constituent Assembly.

The Decree on Peace was a bombastic “Proclamation to the Peoples of All the Belligerent Nations”, calling for a “just and democratic” peace with no annexations or indemnities. But the Bolsheviks had no means to end the war except by the fanning the flames of revolution in the West. They hoped to transform the war into civil wars that would unite the workers against their governments. To those on the left of Lenin, such as Nikolai Bukharin, a separate peace with imperialist Germany would be a betrayal of the international cause, and they favored waging of a “revolutionary war”, which would spark the world revolution. But Lenin became increasingly skeptical about this, and argued for a “breathing” space to consolidate the Bolshevik power. He wanted the war in Europe to last as long as possible to make revolutions more likely.

A Bolshevik delegation, soon led by Trotsky, met the Germans in the Belorussian town of Brest-Litovsk on November 16 to negotiate an armistice. The negotiations dragged on --- the German demands, Ukrainian “independence” under a German protectorate, and loss of Baltic and Polish territories) were too severe for Trotsky to accept. But Lenin insisted that the Bolshevik government had no choice but to sign a separate peace to save their revolution. In the meantime, the Germans resumed hostilities, and advanced within 5 days 150 miles toward Petrograd. Under these dire circumstances, the CC of the Party yielded to Lenin, and a separate peace treaty with Germans was signed on March 3. Under its terms, Russia was to give up almost all its European territory; Poland Finland, Estonia a Lithuania achieved nominal independence; Soviet troops evacuated Ukraine. The Soviet Russia lost 34% of its population (55 million people), 34% of its agricultural land, 54% of industrial enterprises and 89% of the coalmines. It was reduced on a par with the 17th century Muscovy. Germany won and Russia lost the war on the Eastern Front. But Lenin’s revolution was saved. And, in a little more than half a year, in a remarkable reversal of fortune, Germany was to lose all its gains by its defeat in WW1. Lenin was vindicated, and his prestige in the Party was enhanced to an unassailable degree. It only remained for the World Revolution to come.

In March 1918, Lenin moved the country’s capital from Petersburg, which was threatened as being too close to the war, back to the old Russian capital Moscow. Among other administrative changes was the adoption, already in February, of the Gregorian calendar. And, on its 7th Congress in March 1918, the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (b) changed its name to the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks). A significant episode in 1918 was an attempted uprising by the Left SR, who had joined Lenin’s government, but opposed the Brest-Litovsk treaty. In July 1918, two Left SR activists assassinated the German ambassador in Moscow, hoping to instigate a revolt against the peace treaty. This failed, and the end result was the suppression of the Left SR, the only non-Bolshevik socialists that were allowed to operate in the open after the October revolution. On August 30, Fanny Kaplan, allegedly on SR orders, attempted to assassinate Lenin. Indiscriminate Red Terror began. Thousands of “bourgeois hostages” were arrested and may summarily shot. Lenin had no patience with those who were squeamish about using terror, “How you can make a revolution without firing squads?”, he asked. Terror was an integral part of the Bolshevik regime from the beginning. Its victims may have been in excess of 1 million, as many as those killed in the battles of the ensuing civil war.

By mid-May 1918 the country was already in a civil war. Curiously, it were the Czechoslovak Legions that were involved in its start. They were formed by the Czechs and Slovaks who deserted the Austro-Hungarian army or were taken as prisoners of war, and after the February revolution joined the Russians in their war against Austria-Hungary and Germany, fighting for the independence of their homeland. After the Brest-Litovsk treaty, they negotiated with the Bolshevik Government a passage through the whole Siberia on the Trans-Siberian Railway to the Pacific port of Vladivostok, to sail from there to Europe to join the fight on the Western Front. On June 8, a fight developed in Western Siberia between them and the local Soviets

who wanted to disarm them, against the agreement that allowed them to keep their arms. Very quickly, the legionaries took from the Bolsheviks one town after another on the railway line, with their disciplined and well-organized force vastly superior to that of the Red Guards. On June 8, the Czechs took the Volga town of Samara, where they helped to install a government of the Right SRs.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ih7FcT5mBRM> (Czechoslovak Legions)

It was apparently the threat of the encroaching Czechoslovak Legions that sealed the fate of the Imperial family, who was interned in Yekaterinburg, a town east of the Ural Mountains. They were there executed, Nicolas II, his wife Alexandra, and five children – four daughters and the crown prince Alexei --- together with some of their servants by the Bolsheviks on the night 16-17 July 1918. The Government in Moscow did not officially admit their responsibility for the execution, but some evidence came to light after the fall of communism that Lenin, if he himself did not give the execution order, he endorsed it after the event. The whole murdered imperial family have now been canonized as saints by the Russian Orthodox Church.



Fighting had already erupted in Spring 1918 on the Don River, where Kornilov had formed White Guards from a Volunteer Army. Kornilov was killed in battle, but soon White Guards led by General Denikin and the rebelling Don Cossacks became a formidable force fighting the Bolsheviks. Perhaps paradoxically, Lenin saw the Civil War as a necessary phase of the class struggle. “Our Party is for civil war!” Trotsky told the Soviet on June 4, “Long live civil War!” Lenin often said that the defeat of Paris Commune in 1871 was due the failure of the communards not to wage a civil war.

To Trotsky, who became Commissar of War, the ease of the Czech victories made it clear that the Red Army had to be reformed on the model of the tsarist conscription army, with regular units replacing the ragtag Red Guards. Along with young workers and peasants, some 75,000 ex-tsarist officers were recruited to serve in the Red Army for their military expertise, but they were controlled politically in the field by Bolshevik political commissars, who could overrule their command. In the end, this unique system of military organization proved itself. After initial advances of the Whites, who were helped for a while by an Anglo-French intervention, the Red Army started winning. By the end of the civil war in 1920-21, the Red Army had grown to 5 million.

Economically, the country was run in the civil war by the draconian system of War Communism, which was a command economy enforced by the naked power of the state. It abolished private trade, large industries were run by militarized labor, agricultural produce was secured by forced requisition from the peasants, and universal rationing replaced to a great degree money. On one view, War Communism was necessitated by the Civil War, but some argue that it was an attempt to impose socialism by decree and was abandoned in the end only after it was impossible to continue any longer.

Against the backdrop of the Civil War, at a Congress held in Moscow on 2-6 March 1919, left-wing socialist delegates from 34 parties in Europe and the United States founded the Third International, known also as the Communist International (Comintern). The Comintern was to organize and lead the workers of the world to a proletarian revolution, following the example of the Bolsheviks. As a matter of fact, a revolutionary wave was sweeping through the post-war Europe. The defeated German and Austro-Hungarian Empires collapsed like the Russian one, and there were revolts and uprisings led by Councils-Soviets on the Russian model. For some time after the war, it looked to many that the world revolution the Bolsheviks hoped and worked for was indeed coming. But in August 1920, a decisive turn came about in the Battle of Warsaw, where the Red Army led by Trotsky set on spreading the Red power to Poland, which had gained its independence after the war, was stopped and defeated by the new Polish army.

The revolutionary wave in Europe subsided, but the civil war ended by the Bolshevik victory. With the exception of Finland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, and parts of Poland and Romania, the Soviet Power now extended over all the territory of the pre-war Imperial Russia. But the costs of the Civil War and War Communism were enormous. The peasants supported the Reds against the Whites only for as long as their revolutionary gain, the land, was threatened. Once the Whites were defeated, the peasants turned against the Bolsheviks, whose requisitionings brought much of rural Russia to starvation. Slogans like "Soviets without the Bolsheviks!" or "Long Live the Bolsheviks! Death to the Communists!" expressed the mood of the countryside. And the workers, hungry due to the deepening urban food crisis and angered by the Bolsheviks' subordination of trade unions to the Party-State, were going on strike across the country. In March 1921, the sailors of the Kronstadt naval base in the Gulf of Finland rebelled. In 1917, Trotsky had called them "the pride and glory of the Russian revolution". Now they demanded freedom of speech and assembly, and the end to the Bolshevik dictatorship. Trotsky himself took command of the suppression of the mutiny; 2,500 Kronstadt sailors were shot without trial and hundreds were sent to the first Soviet prison camp in Solovki, on a frozen White Sea island. This happened during the 10th Party Congress, where Lenin forced a secret resolution banning factions, targeting the Workers' Opposition that had emerged in the Party, but which turned out as one of the most fateful for the Party's future.

But Lenin realized that the time came for a tactical retreat and consolidation. At the same Congress, another landmark resolution was approved to replace food requisitionings by a tax in kind. This abandoned the central plank of War Communism and laid grounds for the New Economic Policy (NEP). The NEP allowed

a limited market economy. It was seen by many Bolsheviks as a betrayal of their principles and the Revolution, but Lenin's prestige again carried his policy through. Gradually, the country was restored to a modicum of some prosperity; the agricultural and industrial production was restored to the 1913 pre-war level only in 1928. In that year, four years after Lenin's death, his successor Stalin abandoned NEP. In the light of the later developments, the NEP years became to be regarded by many as the most "tranquil" Soviet period before WWII.

5. SUCCESSION STRUGGLE, STALIN THE VICTOR

Lenin recovered from Fanny Kaplan bullets, only to suffer a major stroke May 25, 1922. Trotsky, who led the Red Army to victory in the civil war, appeared to be the second to Lenin in its aftermath. But he was to some degree an "outsider" to the Bolshevik Party rank and file; though a leading member of the Party leadership, he never had held a lower post in the Party. Stalin, the Commissar for Nationalities, had not been so visible, but had a strong position in the Party apparatus, where he had worked for many years as a faithful lieutenant of Lenin. By most in the Party leadership, he was underestimated as an intellectual non-entity, limited by his revolutionary background Caucasus. This included not only Trotsky, but also Lenin, who made Stalin the General Secretary of the Party in April 1922. This turned out to be an all-important post, controlling the now ruling Party's secretariat and its bureaucracy in the provinces. During Lenin's absence, the government was run by the triumvirate Stalin, Kamenev and Zinoviev, which emerged as an anti-Trotsky bloc. While Kamenev was fond of Stalin, they had been together in exile in Siberia, Zinoviev disliked Trotsky, but both saw in Stalin a useful ally who posed no threat to their own aspirations to the leadership. (Interestingly, Kamenev and Zinoviev's were the only two votes against Lenin's final decision to launch the takeover of the Provisional Government in October 1917, which Trotsky strongly supported and Stalin went along with). When Lenin recovered and returned to work, he reportedly asked Trotsky to join him in a bloc against bureaucracy, but then he suffered a second stroke.

Between December 23 and January 4, Lenin dictated to his secretary a series of notes for the forthcoming Party Congress that became to be known as his Testament. One of the issues the notes were concerned with was the nationalities question, and Lenin warned against the Great Russian chauvinism against national minorities. Stalin, as the Commissar of Nationalities, proposed that non-Russian territories should be a part of Russia only as autonomous regions, but Lenin wanted them to have the rights of sovereign republics in a Soviet federation, supporting in this Georgian Bolsheviks. But the most explosive issue addressed in the Testament was that of the succession. To underline his preference for a collective leadership, Lenin did not spare his criticism of the major Party leaders: Kamenev and Zinoviev for their stance against him in October 1917, Bucharin was "the favorite of the Party but his theoretical views could only be classified as Marxist with reserve," Trotsky was "perhaps the most capable man in the CC" but "displayed excessive self-assurance", yet to Stalin received his most devastating words: "Stalin is too rude... and this defect becomes intolerable in a General Secretary. I suggest that the comrades think about a way to remove Stalin from his post and replace him with someone who has greater tolerance, greater loyalty, greater courtesy and consideration to comrades, less capriciousness, etc." But, very shortly after he had dictated these notes, Lenin suffered a third, most massive stroke, until his death, January 21, 1924, he was very seriously incapacitated, able to utter only a few syllables.

When the 12th Party Congress convened in April 1923, the Testament was not read to the delegates as Lenin had wanted; the triumvirate saw to that, and Trotsky, lacking majority support in the CC, did not fight it. Instead, he decided to pose from the Left as a champion of the rank and file against the suppression

of the inter-party democracy by the triumvirate. A Left Opposition supporting Trotsky emerged, but at a CC plenum in October 1923 a motion censoring Trotsky for “factionalism” was passed. Thus Trotsky had been effectively finished as a major political force in the Soviet union even before Lenin died. At each step, he was deftly out-maneuvered by Stalin. When Lenin died in January 1924, Trotsky, recovering from an illness at the Black Sea, even did not manage to come to Lenin’s funeral, reportedly because a wrong date of it had been given to him by Stalin. It was left to Stalin to deliver an eulogy that enhanced his image as a most rightful Lenin’s heir. Against wishes of Lenin’s widow, Nadezda Krupskaya, Lenin’s body was embalmed and put into a mausoleum on Moscow’s Red Square, displayed to the public for adoration.

At the 13th Party Congress, held a few months after Lenin’s death, Lenin’s Testament was read to the CC on the insistence of Lenin’s widow, and Stalin offered Pharisaical-style his resignation, but Kamenev and Zinoviev persuaded the meeting to disregard Lenin’s advice. The Congress instead turned into a chorus of denunciations against Trotsky and for Party unity behind Stalin’s leadership. Trotsky was eventually expelled from the CC, together with Zinoviev (against whom and Kamenev Stalin had in the meantime turned against, too) in October 1927, and from the Party altogether in December 1927, with Kamenev and Zinoviev. In 1928, after he had been exiled to Kazakhstan, Trotsky was expelled from the Soviet Union. By 1928 Stalin emerged as a victor of the succession struggle, though it was not until the beginning of the 1930s that he became an absolute dictator with no constraints.



Lenin’s funeral, January 1924



Dzherzhinsky's funeral July 1926



Joseph V. Stalin (Dzhugashvili) (1878—1953)

6. COLLECTIVIZATION, GREAT TERROR

The basic elements of the Stalinist regime – the one-party state, the system of terror and the cult of the leader – were already in place in 1924. But Lenin's NEP continued into 1928. A bad harvest in 1927 led to a breakdown of the supply of grain into the cities, to which Stalin responded by returning to the methods and class struggle of the Civil War, exploiting the resentment of many in the Party who saw the NEP as a

retreat from the revolution's goal. He called for a crash industrialization of the country in a Five Year Plan, arguing that the NEP was too slow for the necessary industrial development and too uncertain for procuring food.

The Five-Year Plan promised to create a socialist society of universal abundance for the proletariat. A central plank of the Plan was the collectivization of the agriculture. Marxist ideology had taught the Bolsheviks that the peasant farming was incompatible with a Socialist society, in which no means of productions were to be privately owned and controlled. Stalin's contribution to Marxism-Leninism became to be Socialism in One Country --- that a true socialism can, and in Russia's case ought to be, built in a single country. According to the orthodox Marxist cannon this had to wait for a victorious world revolution.

The collectivization was a brutal-force transformation of the Russian peasantry, some 120 million people in 200,000 villages, into a system of collective farms, where the traditional ownership and management of land and animals were to be replaced by a progressive socialist collective system. The peasants resisted to it by all means available to them. They killed most of their livestock rather than turning them to the collective farm and tried to hide their grain seed. The Party used the means of class struggle by dividing the peasants into poor and small on the one side, and rich, the "kulaks", on the other. Invariably, the kulaks were no big landowners (after the revolution they were in fact none), but only the good farmers, who were moderately successful in the NEP. The Party exhortation was "Throw your bourgeois humanism out of the window and act like a Bolshevik worth of Comrade Stalin. Beat down the kulak wherever he raises his head. It's war --- it's them or us! The last remnant of capitalist farming must be wiped out at all cost!"

The costs of collectivization were horrific. The "destruction of the kulaks as a class" resulted in some 2 million kulaks and their families transported to special settlements and the Gulag labor camps in the Urals and Siberia by 1932. Millions of peasants ran away from the collective farms. The victims of the "Terror-Famine" of 1932-33 that occurred as a result of a wholesale seizure of harvest are estimated to count some 8 million, mostly in Ukraine, where the Famine is now commemorated as a genocide. At the height of this social holocaust, many hardened Bolsheviks who were carrying this class warfare in the country side were losing heart. But Stalin pressed relentlessly on even when the country was brought to brink of catastrophe also by the disastrous tempo to fulfill the fantastic targets of the Five Year Plan. In 1932 the workers' wages were reduced in real terms to half their 1928 level.

But Stalin won. The 17th Party Congress in January 1934 was dubbed the "Congress of Victors". The targets of the Five Year Plan and Collectivization were proclaimed to have been gloriously achieved. In real terms, this victory amounted to the re-enslavement of the more than 100 million strong peasantry, who had been freed from serfdom in 1870s and given land by the revolution of 1917, the impoverishment and loss of all rights of the working class, in whose name the revolution had been carried out and the Party dictatorship was exercised, and the total destruction of any vestiges of inter-Party discussion if not democracy. It was Stalin's personal triumph, firmly establishing his despotic rule that would last till his death in 1953.

The Congress of Victors coincided with the 10th anniversary of the death of Lenin. Stalin was hailed for completing the revolution Lenin had started by building a class-less Socialist Society. A cult of his personality of enormous proportions began to permeate all walks of life of the Soviet society. Strangely, at the congress was the last attempt to prevent Stalin having a complete control of the Party. In the secret ballot of the delegates to elect a new CC, 150 votes were according to many independent sources against Stalin. This is astonishing since the Party had already been completely taken over by the by Stalinist faction, with all the non-Stalinists purged. The ballots were destroyed, and only 3 such votes were recorded. But Stalin, Lenin's Testament still looming large in his paranoid mind, saw treachery everywhere and resolved to destroy preventively any potential opposition against him. On December 1, 1934, Sergei Kirov, Stalin's close associate and a rising star in the Party, was assassinated in Leningrad, where he was a regional Party

secretary, under mysterious circumstances, which were to this day never satisfactorily resolved. Be it as it may, Stalin used this (as Hitler used the Reichstag fire in 1933) to unleash a purge of the Party and all Soviet institutions from alleged traitors and conspirators against the Soviet regime, which grew into the Great Terror of 1936-38. As Saturn, the Revolution started to eat its own children, on an unprecedented massive scale.

The enormous scale and scope of the Great Terror, not to speak of its rationale, is beyond comprehension. Perhaps its most absurd aspect is that its Party, Government and Army victims were dedicated to the Communist cause and to Stalin. Many went to their execution with “Long live Stalin!” on their lips. Apart from the infamous Moscow Trials, there were no court trials, only three-member Commissions (Troikas) in all provincial regions, which were given ever increasing quota of enemies of people to “repress”, which meant more than often execution by a GPU, later NKVD (successors to Cheka) firing squad. No evidence of purported crimes was required, only, in more important cases, confessions that were extracted by brutal physical pressure and torture. The Party itself, including foreign members of the Komintern apparatus, was given over to be terrorized by the State Security (GPU, NKVD), which had become Stalin’s personal instrument of power already earlier. The Security chiefs Yagoda, and after him Yezhov (themselves eventually executed) carried out Stalin’s direct orders without any Party control. The numbers of victims are staggering. The official number stands at over 1.5 million detained and imprisoned in labor camps, of whom over 680,000 were shot – an average of 1,000 (1,500 at the peak) executions a day. The Party that rallied behind Stalin at the 17th Congress in 1934 was virtually destroyed: of the 139 CC members elected at the Congress, 102 were shot, and only one third of the delegates survived to attend the 18th Congress in 1939. The Congress of Victors was thus in fact the Congress of Victims.

The purge in the Red Army and Navy destroyed three of the five marshals (equivalent to five-star generals), 13 of 15 Army commanders, eight of nine admirals, 154 out of 186 division commanders; altogether more than 25% of the Red Army officer corps were purged. The most spectacular military victim was Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky, Deputy Commissar for Defense, a hero of the civil war. This blow crippled Red Army’s fighting capacity in the initial, disastrous phase of the war against the Nazi invaders in 1941.

Apart from the Party, government and military officials, leading members of the so-called intelligentsia (intellectuals, writers and artists), and surviving kulaks, were targeted en masse, too.

The most visible were the Moscow Trials, in which die-hard Bolshevik comrades of Lenin already purged from the Party leadership now confessed to being traitors and spies from the early days of the revolution. In August 1936, Zinoviev, Kamenev and 14 other former Party leaders were sentenced to death after abjectly confessing to all the incredible charges brought against them. A second trial, in January 1937, further seventeen former supporters of Trotsky were sentenced to death. In the third, biggest show trial in March 1938, Nicolai Bukharin, member of Lenin’s politburo and Stalin’s ally after Lenin’s death, and G. Yagoda, the NKVD chief who organized the first show trial, along with twelve other Bolsheviks were sentenced to be shot for conspiring with the “Trotsky-Zinoviev Center” to assassinate the Soviet leaders, sabotage the economy, and spying for the fascist states, to which they all duly confessed. The whole world watched in amazement to these spectacles, and many foreign observers who witnessed the trials were willingly duped to believe in the guilt of the defendants.

While it can be argued that the Party ruthless dictatorship originated already in the first days of Lenin’s revolution and was inevitable to his project, the horrors of the collectivization and the Great Terror were perhaps something that Revolution could do without. It is difficult to imagine that without Stalin the country would be destined to go through that same irrationally bloody phase. Be it as it may, the despot must have realized that a time had come to stop the bloodletting, and by the beginning of 1939 the period of the Great

Terror over. The Soviet Union returned to its normal mode of the “dictatorship of proletariat”, exercised by the supreme leader Stalin.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1z-hx9CeQVo>, (Stalin cult, purges)



Stalin and Bukharin



Stalin, Rykov, Zinoviev and Bukharin

7. WORLD WAR II

The period of Stalin’s collectivization of agriculture and crush industrialization coincided with the deep crisis of the capitalist economy – the Great Depression, and the rise of fascism – Hitler’s ascent to power in Germany. This could be one of the reasons why so many in Europe and America, alarmed by the dangers of fascism and the failings of Western economies, were not able to see the horrible realities of the Soviet Union for what they were. The Comintern party line of regarding the social democrats as “social fascists” serving the capitalist ruling classes changed into that of supporting left-of-center Popular Front alliances only in the mid-thirties, after Hitler was entrenched firmly in power in Germany. After the Spanish civil war erupted in 1936, the Soviet Union supported the Socialist-Communist government coalition in Spain against the insurgent Nationalist forces of General Franco, who was supported by fascist Germany and Italy, as much, if not more, as they tried to suppress the non-Stalinist Left (anarchists and Trotskyists) on the Republican side.

The Western policy of appeasement to ever intransigent German demands culminated in September 1938, after Germany had annexed Austria in March, in the infamous Munich Treaty between Britain, France, Germany and Italy, according to which Czechoslovakia was forced to give Hitler without fight its border regions settled predominantly by ethnic Germans, the so-called Sudetenland. Stalin’s eventual response to these developments was the Soviet-Nazi Nonaggression Pact, signed by the foreign ministers Molotov and Ribbentrop in Moscow in August 1939. After the devastating purges of the Red Army, Soviet Russia was in no position to fight a re-armed Germany, and Stalin no doubt intended the Pact as a means of gaining time and breathing space. Still, this came as a tremendous shock to the world Communists movement, even with the Stalinist Comintern slavishly towing the new party line.

A secret Protocol of the Pact delineated the German and Russian “spheres of influence”, with Eastern Poland, Baltic countries and Finland falling into the Russian one. This enabled Hitler to launch immediately war against Poland, on September 1, 1939, which had refused to comply with his demands concerning the so-called Danzig Corridor. This time, the Polish allies Britain and France had to declare a war on Germany, and thus World War 2 started. But, within two weeks, the valiant Poles were crushed. On September 17 Russia invaded Eastern Poland, which was shortly annexed by the Soviet Union to become western provinces of the Soviet Ukrainian and Belorussian Republics. In November 30, Russia invaded Finland, which refused to yield to the Russian demands on Finnish border territory, ostensibly for the protection of Leningrad. For two months the Finns, familiar with the harsh winter conditions (of up to -45 deg F), fought successfully back, but in the end the overwhelming Russian numbers overcame Finnish defenses, and in March 1940 the Winter War ended by the Fins having had to sign a treaty that ceded to Russia 11% of Finland’s territory, representing some 30% of its economy, which exceeded substantially the original Soviet demands. The turn of the Baltic countries Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia came in the Summer of 1940, when the Red Army invaded them after they had been forced to allow Soviet military bases on their territories. They were all annexed to the Soviet Union as its constituent Soviet Republics. Thus, by the end of 1940, the Soviet Russia ruled over all the territories of pre-WW1 Imperial Russia, with the exception of (most) Finland and Western Poland.

In this period, Stalin did everything he could to keep to his Pact with Hitler. During not only the “Phoney War”, which lasted from the onset of WW2 on September 1, 1939, to the German attack on France and the Low Countries on May 10, 1940, but also after France was defeated, and Britain fought the Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain and the Blitz after July 1940, the Comintern policy guided the Communist Parties to regard the war as one between imperialist countries. The Communists in occupied Europe were instructed not to participate in the Resistance.

Since early Spring of 1941, reports from the extensive underground network of Soviet agents in Europe were of one increasingly alarming content: Hitler had decided and started preparations of an imminent attack on Soviet Union. Stalin to the last day before the German invasion of June 22, 1941 stubbornly ignored them, regarding them as provocation. When the massive German invasion force, more than 2 million strong, struck, it was a military disaster for Russia. The German forces achieved quickly major victories, occupying most of Ukraine; Kiev was captured on September 19; several million Soviet prisoners of war were taken by the end of 1941 (altogether, there were almost 6 million of Soviet POWs taken in the war). Many in the countryside greeted initially the Germans as liberators, but the brutal conduct of the invaders changed that soon.

By November 1941, the Germans got close to Moscow, and the evacuation of the capital started. But Stalin refuse to leave, which is regarded by many as an important factor in the turning of the war. The customary military parade was held on the Red Square on November 7 to mark the 24th anniversary of the October revolution, with Stalin surveying from the top of Lenin’s Mausoleum fresh Siberian troops, who marched from there directly to the front. This is to be contrasted with Stalin’s conduct in the days following the German attack of June 22 He did not make any public appearance or speech for several days, until in a radio broadcast in July 3 he appealed to the people of Soviet Russia to defend their Fatherland, addressing them not only by then usual “Comrades”, by also as “Brothers and Sisters ”.

Many came to regard the horrible tribulations of the war a respite from the mendacity and terror of the 1930’s, looking after the war, when the Stalinist practices resumed, at the war years with nostalgia. The traditional Russian patriotisms prevailed against the brutal practices and ideological trappings of the Soviet Regime. The persecution of the Russian Orthodox Church eased greatly, as it proved to be a very useful

ally in defense of Russia. The Soviet Army and the people fought in the end primarily for their Country, not for the Soviet Regime. The war became to be known as the Great Patriotic War. The British, and, after Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the Americans became their allies in this fight, but the Russians bore by far the heaviest burden of the war in Europe until the Allied Invasion of June 1944 in Normandy.

The big turning point in the war came in the battle of Stalingrad (formerly Tsaritsyn, now Volgograd), a Southern Russian industrial city on the River Volga, which started in late August 1942 and finished by the defeat of the German 6th Army in February 1943. The overextended Germans (and their remaining units some 100,000 men) had to surrender despite Hitler's orders to fight on. Altogether, some 2.2 million personnel were killed, wounded or captured. From then on, the Red Army had the upper hand, pressing in bloody battles the German invaders out of the Soviet Union. By the end of 1943 Kiev was liberated, and in October 1944 the Red Army fought its way into the territory of Nazi Germany. The battle of Berlin began on April 16, 1945, and its last garrison surrendered to the Russians on May, after Hitler had committed suicide in his Berlin bunker on April 30. The bloodiest war in history was over. The Russian war costs were horrendous: they lost at least 26 million lives, including 7-15 million civilian deaths (compared to the American and British losses of 300,000 and 400,000, respectively). The material costs were incalculable.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TgzrI1okwrQ> (Fall of Berlin)

8. COLD WAR, DE-STALINIZATION

After WW2, the Soviet Empire expanded further by adding to its control Central and Eastern European countries liberated by the Red Army: Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Albania became Soviet satellites, ruled by Communist parties. Out of these, Czechoslovakia came last under a complete Communist control, only in 1948. Unlike in other satellites, the Red Army left the country in 1945, and in the period 1945-48, the Czechoslovak government was a coalition of democratic parties with Communists, who, at the onset of the cold war, staged a winning coup in February 1948. Many thought, that Finland, which had a similar treaty of "friendship and cooperation" with the Soviet Union and a Communist participation in the government, was to follow the suit. But, for various reasons, it did not happen, and Finland was allowed a substantial degree of sovereignty at the cost of trying very hard not to "offend" its powerful neighbor. The Communist Yugoslavia became a special case: after its leader J. Tito, who led the Communist partisans in the liberation of much of Yugoslavia without Russian help, refused to succumb to Stalin's orders in 1948, he was denounced by Moscow as a traitor to the Communist cause, and the country pursued its own independent "non-aligned" course.



Post-WW1 Europe



Post-WW2 Europe

The post-WW2 world got increasingly bipolar, with the two superpowers, United States and the Soviet Union, which by 1949 also acquired atomic weapons. The WW2 alliance between the Soviet Union and the West broke into the Cold War, in which the West under a US leadership tried to contain Communism in Europe through massive economic help of the Marshall Plan, and the military alliance NATO. They succeeded in that, but were unable to prevent the Communist victory in the Chinese Civil War in 1949.

The hopes in Russia and Eastern Europe that the pre-war harsh Stalinist policies would not continue after the war were dashed by the realities of the Cold War. Despite the promises made by the East-European Communists in the early post-war years, the satellites had also to undergo purges, political show trials and forced collectivization. In Russia itself, over 1.5 million of returning POWs were sent to labor camps as traitors for their “crime” of surrendering to the enemy; in the beginning of 1953 the Gulag population reached more than 2,4 million. Stalin’s paranoia reached new depths in the antisemitic campaign of the so-called Doctors’ Plot of 1952-53, in which prominent, predominantly Jewish physicians were accused of trying to poison or murder by other means Soviet leaders, including Stalin himself. Preparations for massive deportations of Jews to Siberia were being made, which only Stalin’s death in March 1953 prevented from being carried out.

Stalin died of stroke on March 5, 1953, at the age of 74, at the height of his despotic power. The succession struggle that ensued was eventually won by Nikita Khrushchev, after out-maneuvering other members of Stalin’s politburo. Most notable of these was Lavrenti Beria, Stalin’s minister of interior and state security. Beria was arrested already in June 1953, at a Politburo meeting, by an Army detachment led by Marshal Zhukov, a hero of WW2 who fell after the war into Stalin’s disfavor and now conspired with Khrushchev. Beria was executed after a secret trial in December 1953, on absurd charges of being a traitor and spy in the pay of British intelligence.



Nikita S. Khrushchev (1894-1971)

Lavrenti P. Beria 1899-1953)

Under Khrushchev, a gradual de-Stalinization started, both internally and in the Soviet international policy. Already in July 1953, a Korean-war armistice agreement was signed, ending the hostilities of the Korean war, which started in June 1950 by the invasion of South Korea by the Communist regime in the North, installed by the Soviet occupation following the Soviet declaration of war against Japan in August 1945, three days after the US atomic bombs had been dropped in Japan. In 1955, the Soviet Army left Austria, which until then had been under an occupation regime, with Vienna like Berlin divided into Soviet and Allied sectors, and Austria was allowed, almost miraculously, to become a neutral country with a treaty of friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union like Finland. In Russia itself, the prisoners of the Gulag camps started to be released quietly already in mid-1953. But a real bombshell was Khrushchev's speech denouncing the cult of Stalin's personality and his crimes at the 20th Party Congress in February 1956. In a hush-shocked silence, the Congress delegates listened in an unscheduled secret session to a several-hours-long speech of Khrushchev, in which he denounced Stalin's dictatorship and crime against the Party. But according to Khrushchev, the victim was only the Party, whose strength enabled it and the Soviet Union to survive. The horrors of collectivization and industrialization were not to be regretted. Still, it was a tremendous shock to faithful communists in Russia and the rest of the world to hear from the Soviet leadership that all those "bourgeois and fascist" slanders were in fact true.

In Poland and Hungary, the rehabilitation of the party victims of Stalinism led to great upheavals. In October 1956, only the skillful management of the crisis by the rehabilitated Party Leader Wladyslaw Gomulka

averted a Soviet military intervention in October 1956, but in Hungary the crisis grew quickly into a nationwide uprising, in which the new government declared neutrality and withdrawal from the Soviet-led Warsaw Military Pact. The Russians were able to suppress the uprising only by a full-scale military intervention in November 1956. As in the revolutions of 1848, the Czechs and Slovaks were out of sync with the Poles and the Hungarians (their turn would come rather later in the Prague Spring of 1968).

Khrushchev managed to defeat fully the remaining Stalinists in the Party leadership only at the 22nd Party Congress in October 1961. After the Congress, all visible marks of Stalinism were removed: Stalin's body was taken from the Mausoleum on the Red Square, cremated and laid to rest in the Kremlin Wall along other Party leaders; Stalin's statues and monuments were removed; Stalingrad and other places bearing Stalin's name were renamed.

Khrushchev was not a Stalin-style dictator, but his personal leadership style rankled many in the party leadership who wanted a more collective leadership. He was deposed from his positions of the First Party Secretary and the Prime Minister in a meeting of the CC in 1964, when he was on vacation. Perhaps what rankled most the Party leadership was his "But adventurist" handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, when he agreed to remove the Soviet missiles from the Communist-ruled island after first wanting to confront USA with them. But, unlike in Stalin's times, he was allowed to retire peacefully.

The new Party leader, Leonid Brezhnev remained at the helm until his death in 1982. Under his leadership, the Soviet Union put stop to the Czechoslovak reforms of 1968 by a military invasion, with a token participation of the Warsaw-Pact countries Poland and Hungary, in August 1968. This extinguished any challenge to the Soviet domination of the Central/Eastern Europe until the advent of the Polish trade-union movement Solidarity in 1980. The Polish Communist regime managed to suppress Solidarity by itself, in 1981 by instituting Martial Law. In the early 1970s, Brezhnev negotiated with the US President Nixon major détente treaties, which reduced nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missiles. In 1976 the Helsinki accord was signed, in which all European countries except Albania, USA and Canada pledged to respect human rights and improve their relations. A major gain for the Communist side was the recognition of the German Democratic Republic, which was established in the Soviet-occupied part of Germany, as a fully sovereign European state.



Leonid Brezhnev (1906-1982)

By Brezhnev's death in 1982, the Soviet Union was going through a period of economic and social stagnation. The hold of the Communist ideology over the population markedly declined, and the need for reforms was increasingly apparent. After Brezhnev's death, a brief period of interregnum of old and ailing

Party leaders (dubbed as “gerontocracy”) followed before the dynamic and relatively young Mikhail Gorbachev assumed the office of the Party General Secretary in 1985.

9. GORBACHEV, COLLAPSE OF THE SOVIET UNION

M. Gorbachev launched an extensive program of reforms of the stagnating Soviet system. These became to be known as Glasnost and Perestroika. Glasnost (“openness”) entailed marked easing of censorship and the state control of the media going. Not only the past Stalinist “deformations” (euphemism used during Khrushchev’s thaw), but also its horrors of the collectivization, the Great Terror and the Gulag started to be openly talked about. Moreover, the social and economic deficiencies of the Brezhnev were now open to criticism and discussion. Perestroika (“re-building”) aimed at re-structuring of the whole system of the Soviet rule and command economy, ostensibly preserving its “socialist” essence.

Gorbachev presented perestroika as a ‘revolution’ in socialist thinking, justifying it in terms of Lenin’s writing --- in his own idealized reading or simply because that was the only way of securing the support of the Party leadership for his reforms. Be it as it may, it quickly opened the gates of a process over which the Party began to lose control. The totalitarian rule of the Party began to crumble. All over Russia, the mass meetings, rallies and demonstrations started to resemble the revolutionary atmosphere of 1917. Some reformists, among them the Politburo members Alexander Yakovlev and most notably Boris Yeltsin, started to sound more like social democrats than Bolsheviks. Yeltsin even resigned from the Politburo and began to rally popular support against those in the Party leadership who resisted the reforms. Even Gorbachev himself began to evolve slowly from a Leninist position towards something like social democracy. By 1988, he supported the idea of contested elections, checks and balances, and separation of state powers. The one-party state established by Lenin started to fall apart from the top.



Mikhail Gorbachev (1931-)

The collapse began in the outer reaches of the Soviet Empire with the Revolutions in Central/Eastern Europe in 1989, where the Communist governments there started to lose confidence and resolve when the signals from Moscow indicated clearly that they were not going to be propped up anymore by the military might

of the Soviet Union. The chain of these events started in Poland, where the Communists were forced by mass strikes and protests into round-table talks with Solidarity, leading to semi-free elections in June, in which Solidarity won in every seat they were permitted to compete. Thus a first non-Communist-led government in Eastern Europe for 40 years came into existence in September 1989. Then, Hungary followed the suit shortly, and after it opened its border to Austria to fleeing East Germans, the East German guards opened the Berlin Wall, apparently in panic without clear instructions from the government, on November 9, 1989. The Wall came down.

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=mr+gorbachev+tear+down+this+wall&view=detail&mid=28E9E1DE12446DC7C9E528E9E1DE12446DC7C9E5&FORM=VIRE> (198, Tear down this wall!)

Czechoslovakia's "Velvet Revolution", led by the Civic Forum organized by the dissident playwright Vaclav Havel, started after a brutal police suppression of a student demonstration in Prague on November 17, 1989. In face of massive country-wide demonstrations, the communist government was forced to resign, and by the end of year, Vaclav Havel was elected unanimously President of Czechoslovakia by the still old Parliament (!). Only in Romania, the overthrow of the Communist regime was not without bloodshed. The army leadership there rebelled, and a fleeing President Ceausescu and his wife were summarily executed on Christmas Day 1989, following a hastily set-up martial court after their capture.

The Soviet Empire in Europe, which for Moscow had been their most valued "booty" of WW2. The Soviet Union was the only Empire that managed to survive WW 1, unlike the German, Austro-Hungarian and Turkish Empires; and the British Empire was dissolved for all purposes shortly after WW2. The Communists of course had always argued that the reason for the Soviet Union existence in the borders of old Imperial Russia was that it was not an Empire, but a new socialist union of sovereign nations, devoid of any imperialist dominance. But now the ethnically non-Russian republics demanded real sovereignty. Gorbachev proposed to negotiate a new union treaty with the republics, if they approved this in a referendum vote, By now, six republics (Georgia, Armenia, Moldavia and the 3 Baltic republics) were to break free completely and refused to vote in the referendum of March 17, 1991. A draft treaty was approved by the remaining 9 republics in August. The treaty would have converted the Soviet Union into a federation of independent states, akin to the European Union, to be named the Union of Soviet Sovereign Republics, but with a single president, foreign policy and military force.

Gorbachev left Moscow on August 4 for a holiday in the Crimea, and the Party hardliners decided to strike at this 11th hour for the preservation of the old Union. When their delegation failed to persuade Gorbachev to accept their ultimatum, they placed him under a house arrest. In Moscow a self-appointed State Committee of the State of Emergency, whose members included the head of the KGB and the Minister of Defense) declared itself in power. But the putschists proved to be inept and, most importantly, lacked in the end effective means exercising real power (not unlike the Provisional Government in 1917; it was Marx who famously said that history repeats itself, "first as tragedy, then as farce"). They failed to arrest Yeltsin, then the President of the Russian Republic, organized the defense of the people of Moscow of democracy against the coup. Moscow's army garrison declared allegiance to Yeltsin. The putschists had no stomach for a bloody struggle, and the coup collapsed, its leaders were arrested.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-zXChf5tEMI> (Yeltsin on tank)

Boris Yeltsin (1931 -2007)

Gorbachev returned to the capital, but like Kerensky after the Kornilov plot of August 1917, with his position undermined gravely. On August 23, Yeltsin issued a decree suspending in Russia the Communist Party, pending an investigation of its role in the coup. Late that night, a crowd toppled the statue of Dzerzhinsky, the founder of Cheka, outside the KGB headquarters. The next day, Gorbachev resigned as the Party's General Secretary, remaining though in his post as the President of the Soviet Union. When the union talks restarted in November, Yeltsin and the Ukrainian Leader Kravchuk demanded more concessions, which would now convert the USSR into a Union of Sovereign States (no "Soviet" in the title anymore). But the Ukrainian referendum vote on December 1 for a full independence sank the Soviet ship. Yeltsin, Kravchuk and the Belorussian leader Shushkevich (the leaders of the Slavic republics in the Soviet Union) met and announced the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which Gorbachev denounced since it was not ratified in a constitutional way but could do nothing to against it. On December 26, 1991, the last Soviet flag was lowered from a Kremlin tower. The white, blue and red flag (the old colors of Imperial Russia) replaced it in the Russian Federation. The Soviet Union ceased to exist. On the midnight of December 31, 1991, the Soviet Union ceased to exist. The gigantic Soviet experiment of 74 years came to a close.

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=lowering+of+the+last+soviet+flag+youtube&view=detail&mid=D70E8F3AD8CC6E130BB1D70E8F3AD8CC6E130BB1&FORM=VIRE> (lowering of the Soviet flag)

10. POST-COMMUNIST RUSSIA, YELTSIN, PUTIN

Gorbachev failed to reform the Soviet Union from the totalitarian state created by Lenin and Stalin into something new: a democratic, non-capitalist, multinational country. Perhaps he aimed at the impossible. As all the other pre-WW1 empires, the Soviet Union collapsed. History has proved wrong the Communist argument that the Soviet Union was immune to this fate because it was not an empire.

Whether it was Gorbachev's intention or not, credit must be given to him for enabling the liberation of the captive nations from Soviet domination peacefully, something that had seemed unimaginable without the nuclear holocaust of a WW3. The post-WW2 division Europe, the heart of which was the division of Germany, was finally over, with Germany re-united as a peaceful democratic country. The Cold War lasting more than 50 years ended without a shot fired across the Iron Curtain. We should be eternally grateful for the fact that the cities on both sides of the divide are no longer targeted day and night by nuclear intercontinental ballistic missiles.

To be fully successful, a revolution must replace the political elites. By and large, the revolutions in Eastern Europe achieved that. But in Russia this did not and perhaps could not happen. A mature civic society, which is a pre-condition for a well-functioning modern free-market democracy, did not exist there in 1991, as it did not in 1917. The great majority of politicians and successful businessmen in Yeltsin's Russia had been part of the Soviet nomenklatura (Party leaders, regional leaders, factory bosses, etc.). Such people were able to grab the Soviet economic assets in a "fire-sale"-like privatization, which created the billionaire oligarchs, who have thrown Russia from a state socialism to a 3rd-world crony capitalism. The collapse of the Soviet system did not democratize the distribution of wealth and power. After the heady days of new freedoms came the chaos, corruption and deprivations that came soon to mark the Yeltsin days. Russia suffered inflation and came close to economic collapse. Deep disillusionment followed the unfulfilled. Under enormous internal pressure, Yeltsin resigned on December 31, 1999, leaving the presidency in hands of chosen successor, then Prime Minister Putin.



Vladimir V. Putin (1952 -)

After the Yeltsin's years, the ground in Russia was ready for a traditional authoritative style of leadership, and Putin has fitted this role more than well. His background as a KGB officer is often stressed, and his experience of witnessing at close hand the collapse of the Communist rule in East Germany, where he was then stationed in Dresden, was undoubtedly formative. Also, we are often reminded of his statement that the breakup of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the 20th century. But Putin's goals are not to revive the Communist ideology and rule --- he wants Russia be a Great Power again, as the Imperial Russia was in the 19th century. Instead the Communist ideology, he uses unashamedly the traditional Russian patriotism and nationalism. The Russian State coat of arms is the imperial double-headed eagle, and the Russian Orthodox Church is now almost as a close power partner as it was in the tsarist Russia. Any foreign visitor to Russia cannot fail to notice not only the lavishly renovated orthodox churches, but also many new churches being built.

During Putin first presidency, 2000-2008, the Russian economy grew. Its GDP as measured by purchasing power, increasing by more than 70%. This was largely a result of the 2000s commodity boom, which profited Russia with its vast oil, gas, and other mineral reserves. Putin's popularity grew steadily, with approval rating now over 80%, but the media are now under firm government control and political opposition persecuted; a number Putin's critics were killed under mysterious circumstances. Putin's rule relies increasingly on a circle of oligarchs close to him.

Putin was able to crush the secessionist movement in Muslim Chechnya, started under Yeltsin and the terrorist act of which spread into Russia itself, by a ruthlessly conducted war. An important part of Putin's agenda of making Russia great again became he securing of the "Near Abroad", which are the newly independent countries that were part of the Soviet Union, into Russia's sphere of influence. After the fall in oil and gas prices, which affected the Russian economy very badly, Putin has been using the specter of a NATO encirclement of Russia as his rallying point. In Georgia, a strongly pro-Western government came to power in 2003, aiming at NATO and European Union memberships. In 2008, the rising Russo-Georgian tension escalated in a brief war, which resulted in a Russian military presence in the Georgian region of South Ossetia. In 2014, a similar crisis in Ukraine led to a Russian annexation of Crimea, a Black Sea peninsula populated predominantly by ethnic Russians, and a Russian military presence in East Ukraine, where the population is also mostly Russian. The EU and the USA responded to the annexation of Crimea, which blatantly violated the agreements Russia was supposed to adhere to, by imposing sanctions against Russia. All this has led increasing tensions if not hostility between Russia and the West. The post-Cold War promise of a harmonious cooperation between the West and Russia is sadly over, for now.



