COMMUNIST STATES in the twentieth century

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Theme 1 Communist government in the USSR, 1917–85

The Big Picture

The story of Communist government in Russia is one of rise, transformation and decline.

Lenin

At first, under Lenin, the new government was radical, uncompromising and revolutionary. Lenin overthrew the existing government, fought a bitter civil war, and created wholly new type of government. Lenin claimed he was establishing a government of the workers. However, Lenin’s Russia was a mix of a utopian vision and skilful political compromise. Therefore, in order to ensure the survival of the new government at all costs, Lenin’s government was based much more on administrators and bureaucrats than it was on working people. Fundamentally, Lenin’s government was based on the Communist Party. In fact Lenin established a one-party state which guaranteed the supremacy of the Communist Party within Russian government.

Stalin

Stalin started a revolution of his own. His ‘revolution from above’ was designed to build on Lenin’s achievement. Lenin had ended capitalism, but Stalin would begin the world’s first serious attempt to create a socialist society. Stalin’s revolution made Russia an economic giant. But it also created a totalitarian state: a government based on terror, propaganda and a cult of personality.

Khrushchev and Brezhnev

After Stalin’s death Khrushchev attempted to reform the Russian government. Communism in Russia became more humane – people were no longer sent to labour camps or executed in such large numbers. After the horrors of Stalinism, Khrushchev wanted to revive popular faith in Communism. But Khrushchev’s reforms had the potential to destabilise Communist rule in Russia. Consequently, in order to protect the power of the Party, Khrushchev was replaced by Brezhnev: a leader that the Communist Party could rely on to protect its position. Under Brezhnev, Communism in Russia lost its revolutionary energy and finally completed its journey from revolutionary movement to party of government. Brezhnev’s greatest strength was also his greatest weakness: his ability to guarantee stability meant that he was unable to reform. Between 1982 and 1985, Russia’s final leaders struggled with the same problems that had faced Khrushchev and Brezhnev: how could the Communist Party reform without abandoning the one-party state created by Lenin?
In this theme you will consider the following.

➜ How Lenin and the Communist Party won and consolidated power, 1917–24: The changing nature of Lenin’s government from the October Revolution, through the Civil War to Lenin’s death.

➜ Russia under Stalin, 1928–53: The elimination of Stalin’s opponents, the Great Terror and the creation of a personal dictatorship.

➜ Communist government, 1953–85: Khrushchev’s attempts to reform Communist government, Brezhnev’s attempts to stabilise Communist rule, and the growing political difficulties of the Communist government under Andropov and Chernenko.

**Timeline**

1917 February The February Revolution overthrows the Tsar, a Provisional Government is established

October The October Revolution overthrows the Provisional Government

1918–1921 Increasing political centralisation during the Russian Civil War

1921 Opposition political parties banned, Russia becomes a one-party state

1924 February Lenin dies

1928 Stalin emerges as leader of Russia

1934 January Private criticism of Stalin expressed at the Congress of Victors

December Kirov is murdered in Leningrad

1935 The Great Terror begins with a purge of the Leningrad Communist Party

1936 August Stalin removes high profile opponents in the First of Moscow show trials

September Yezhov becomes head of the secret police, The Great Terror intensifies.

1953 March Stalin dies

1956 February Khrushchev’s secret speech – beginning of widespread de-Stalinisation

1957 July Greater freedom of expression is permitted following the World Festival of Youth and Students.

1964 October Khrushchev removed from office; Brezhnev begins to reverse Khrushchev’s reforms

1966 December New criminal code tightens laws on political dissent

1975 Brezhnev becomes increasingly ill and unable to govern effectively

1976 February Brezhnev fails to introduce reforms at the Twenty-Fifth Party Congress, in spite of growing economic, social and political problems

1982 November Andropov initiates reforms to tackle corruption

1984 February Andropov dies and is replaced by Chernenko before his reforms had taken effect.
Overview

Russia experienced two revolutions in 1917. The first led to the downfall of the Tsar – the head of the royal family. The second led to the creation of a radical new form of government which promised freedom and equality for Russia’s working people. In order to achieve this, revolutionary leader Lenin constructed a new government. At first, Lenin promised a democratic government, which would be based on the support of all working people. Lenin’s first actions were truly popular, reflecting long-standing desires of Russia’s workers, peasants and soldiers. However, Lenin’s new government was also ruthless, and from the very start it terrorised its opponents. Moreover, for Lenin, democracy was less important than his desire to maintain control. Therefore, when his party lost elections Lenin disregarded the results.

Lenin abandoned democracy altogether during Russia’s Civil War, and the new government became increasingly centralised and authoritarian. Lenin’s victory in the Civil War did not lead to the restoration of democracy. Rather, Lenin outlawed rival political parties and by 1921 had created a radically new kind of government: a one-party state. However, it was highly centralised and authoritarian, and therefore nothing like the free and democratic society that he had promised in 1917.

This chapter examines the creation of the Communist one-party state through the following sections:
1. Background to the Bolshevik Revolution
2. Lenin’s state, 1917–18
3. The impact of the Civil War, 1918–21
4. 1921: Crisis and reform
5. Conclusion: Lenin’s legacy

Timeline

1914 August Russia enters the First World War
1917 February The February Revolution overthrows the Tsar
March A Provisional Government is established
October The October Revolution overthrows the Provisional Government
October Lenin establishes Sovnarkom, a new revolutionary government
1918 January Lenin disbands the Constituent Assembly
Outbreak of the Russian Civil War
1921 The Communists triumph in the Civil War
Widespread rebellions against Communist rule
Creation of a one-party-state
March Party Congress bans factions
1924 February Lenin dies
1 Background to the Bolshevik Revolution

Before the revolutions of 1917 Russia was ruled by a series of all-powerful emperors. Tsar Nicholas II, Russian Emperor from 1894 until 1917, was widely regarded as the harshest dictator in Europe. Repression was widespread and the vast majority of the Tsar's subjects were impoverished and had no political rights. For example, hundreds of miners who protested for higher wages at the Lena goldmine in 1912 were brutally massacred by the Tsar's troops. The Tsar's empire extended beyond Russia, and included the Ukraine, Georgia, Finland and Estonia.

While the government was strong, the economy was weak compared to that of Britain, Germany, America and other major powers. Russia had very little modern industry. Indeed, by 1913 only 2.4 million of Russia's 140 million people worked in large factories. Nicholas II's government tried to encourage economic growth, but it was only partly successful. What is more, even in periods of economic growth, the population as a whole remained extremely poor.

Political repression and massive economic inequality led to the growth of underground opposition to the Tsar. Around 1900 the two largest opposition parties were the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) and the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs), both of which were committed to overthrowing the Tsar, liberating the people of the Russian Empire and ending poverty. However, neither group were able to organise effectively due to the Tsar's political police, who routinely spied on these groups and arrested and exiled their leaders. Therefore, while the government was unpopular, there was little prospect of a successful revolution in the years prior to the First World War.

The First World War

Russia entered the First World War in 1914. Russia's economy was incapable of providing the food and equipment necessary to fight the war. Additionally, the Tsar was an incompetent wartime leader. By early 1917 economic chaos, military defeat and political mismanagement led to the February Revolution: a popular uprising in Russia's capital city that overthrew the Tsar and set up a Provisional Government.

The Provisional Government

Following the February Revolution, the Provisional Government introduced a series of reforms. The Tsar's despotism was replaced by a liberal system, which included freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and freedom of religion. Additionally, the Provisional Government promised democratic elections to form a new government. However, the Provisional Government continued to fight the First World War.

Lenin, a radical member of the RSDLP, argued for a second revolution. Following his return from exile in April 1917, he demanded an immediate end to the First World War and the redistribution of land to the peasants. These demands were summarised in the slogan ‘Peace, Land and Bread’. As the Provisional Government continued to fight in the war and Russia's economic problems grew worse, Lenin's message became increasingly popular.

By October 1917 Lenin and his followers the Bolsheviks had enough support to overthrow the Provisional Government. Lenin and Trotsky (see page 26) seized the moment and organised a coup d'état, which allowed the Bolsheviks to take power.
Lenin’s ideology

Lenin seized power because he believed that a global revolution was necessary to replace capitalism and imperialism with socialism: a new social system that would allow all people to be genuinely free and equal. This view was based on a Marxist view of history. Karl Marx was a German philosopher and revolutionary, who lived in the nineteenth century. He became famous for arguing that the workers should rise up and destroy capitalism in a revolution. Marx’s view of revolution was based on his theory of history. He argued that history had progressed through a series of stages (see Table 1).

Table 1: Marx’s four stages of history

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primitive Communism</td>
<td>Humans lived in a simple society where they hunted and gathered. There was no government and all people were essentially equal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classical Slavery</td>
<td>In ancient Greece and Rome, society was divided into masters and slaves. Society became more sophisticated, but was deeply unequal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feudalism</td>
<td>During the Middle Ages, society was controlled by noble families who owned the land, and controlled the lives of the peasants who worked for them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitalism</td>
<td>Following the Industrial Revolution, power passed to people who owned the new factories. Workers, the proletariat, were essentially powerless due to their extreme poverty.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Marx argued that progress from one stage to another occurred due to class conflict. For example, at the end of feudalism the new capitalist class overthrew the old feudal lords and established a new kind of society based on industry rather than on the control of land. Marx argued that the English, American and French Revolutions were examples of the victory of capitalism over feudalism.

Marx believed that capitalism would also come to an end. He argued that, following a workers’ revolution, capitalism would be replaced by socialism in Europe’s most advanced economies. Lenin believed that the chaos produced by the First World War provided an opportunity to overthrow capitalism across Europe.

The state and revolution
Marx’s writings did not contain a clear indication of how a revolution would be carried out, or what socialism would look like. Indeed, Marx’s writings were contradictory. In some places, Marx argued that a revolutionary government would be more democratic than a capitalist government; however, he also famously wrote about the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, which would use its power ruthlessly to destroy the power of capitalists. Lenin seems to have taken both of these ideas seriously.

## 2 Lenin’s state, 1917–18

Lenin’s new state changed over time. Initially, he embraced a radically democratic state. However, by the summer of 1918, the revolutionary state was much more authoritarian.

Creating a ‘soviet-state’
In October 1917, Lenin seized power on behalf of the soviets – small democratic councils that had emerged spontaneously in every town and village across Russia after the February Revolution. Between February and October 1917, the soviets played a key role in governing Russia. Additionally, the local soviets sent representatives to the All-Russian Congress of Soviets, which met in June 1917 to discuss Russia’s future. Lenin and other senior Bolsheviks argued that the All-Russian Congress of Soviets, which met for a second time in October, should become the basis of the new Russian government. Indeed, the October Revolution formally handed power to the All-Russian Congress. However, as the All-Russian Congress was too big to meet regularly they elected the Council of People’s Commissars (Sovnarkom) to govern Russia on a day-to-day basis.

Sovnarkom
Sovnarkom was essentially the new Russian cabinet. The first Sovnarkom was made up of thirteen People’s Commissars. Lenin was elected Chairman of Sovnarkom, and other Commissars included Leon Trotsky (see page 26), who was head of the People’s Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, and Joseph Stalin, who was head of the People’s Commissariat of Nationality Affairs. All of the new Commissars were revolutionaries. The vast majority had supported Lenin since 1903. Many had worked with him in exile, and all had supported the Bolshevik seizure of power.
Immediately following the October Revolution, Lenin gave a speech to the All-Russian Congress of Soviets. He proposed **decrees** that were genuinely popular and which the Congress of Soviets voted to approve:

- The Decree on Land (October 1917), which gave peasants the right to seize land from the nobility and the Church.
- The Decree of Peace (October 1917), which committed the new government to withdrawing from the First World War and seeking peace.

Lenin continued to publish popular decrees for the first few months of the government, including:

- Workers’ Decrees (November 1917), which established an eight-hour maximum working day and a minimum wage.
- The Decree of Workers’ Control (April 1918), which allowed workers to elect committees to run factories.

These early measures allowed Lenin to establish control over Russia in two main ways. First, the decrees won popular support for the regime from workers, peasants and soldiers. Second, ending the First World War gave the revolution what Lenin called ‘breathing space’ in which to begin to rebuild the economy and to start constructing a new government.

For the first few months, Sovnarkom had little real power. The October Revolution had occurred in Russia’s capital city, Petrograd. At first, it did not give Lenin control of Russia’s other major cities or the vast rural areas that made up the majority of Russia’s territory. Therefore, senior figures from the former government still had a great deal of power and refused to recognise Bolshevik authority. For example, in late November General Dukhonin, Chief of Staff of the Russian army, refused a direct order from Lenin to stop fighting and begin peace negotiations. Equally, the Russian State Bank and State Treasury went on strike immediately after the revolution, denying Lenin’s new government the funds that it needed to operate.

Initially, Sovnarkom was also extremely disorganised. This is evident from Lenin’s early appointments of People’s Commissars. For example, in the first few days of the new government, Stalin’s Commissariat for Nationalities was, in reality, just a desk in the corner of a room at the Smolny Institute, the building where Sovnarkom was originally based.

Equally, Vyacheslav Menzhinsky’s Commissariat of Finance was initially nothing more than a sofa with a large piece of paper pinned to it bearing the words ‘Commissariat of Finance’. Lenin’s government would need to fight a civil war before it had genuine control of the whole of Russia.

**How democratic was Russia in 1918?**

Lenin and the Bolsheviks claimed that the new government was truly democratic. Lenin argued that the new state was based on committees of working people who participated in government on a day-to-day basis. Therefore, he claimed the soviet-state was more democratic than the systems in Britain, America and France where people merely voted once every four or five years. This commitment to people power was also reflected in the title of the new leaders, who were known as People’s Commissars. Trotsky suggested this title in order to demonstrate the revolutionary nature of the new government. In so doing, he deliberately used the terms that were associated with the government that took power after the French Revolution.
Broad-based support
There is clear evidence that the new government was genuinely democratic. For example, the first decrees were genuinely popular and reflected what the majority of the workers, peasants and soldiers wanted. Equally, in 1918 Russia was not yet a one-party state. According to the Constitution of 1918, Sovnarkom was responsible to the Congress of Soviets – which contained representatives for many political parties, including the Bolshevik’s main rivals, the Mensheviks, and the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs). What is more, a faction of the SRs supported the new government and some SRs initially had junior roles in the new government.

One of the reasons that there was broad-based support for the new government in Petrograd and Moscow was the belief that it would become a coalition government representing all of Russia’s main socialist parties. Indeed, moderates within the Bolshevik Party, such as Zinoviev and Kamenev, argued that Lenin should form a coalition government and work with other political parties. However, when Bolshevik moderates were unable to persuade Lenin to compromise they resigned in protest. As a result, by November, Lenin’s new government was dominated by people who wanted the Bolshevik Party to govern alone.

Additionally, there was genuine support for a Bolshevik-dominated government among the workers of Petrograd in the early days of the revolution. For example, the Petrograd Trade Union Council, which met on 31 October, and the First Conference of Female Factory Workers, which met on 5 November 1917, both gave their full support to the new Bolshevik Government. They supported Lenin’s early decrees and the courage the Bolsheviks had shown by overthrowing the Provisional Government in the October Revolution.

The Constituent Assembly
In January 1918, there was a clear indication that Lenin was turning against democracy. Specifically, Lenin refused to recognise the results of a nationwide election held in November 1917. The election created a Constituent Assembly with a Bolshevik minority, which met for the first time in January 1918. Lenin closed the Constituent Assembly by force after only one day, claiming that it posed a threat to the power of the soviets.

Lenin was also willing to disregard the soviets. In March 1918, Lenin approved the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which gave away a significant proportion of Russian territory to the Central Powers in order to end Russia’s involvement in the First World War. The treaty was extremely unpopular and therefore the Bolsheviks lost the elections to the soviets across Russia in April and May 1918. In order to retain power, Lenin refused to recognise the results, arguing that the elections had not been fair. Moreover, Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries were expelled from the soviets. Lenin demanded new elections, but quickly postponed them due to the outbreak of the Civil War. Nikolai Bukharin, the official Bolshevik Party theorist, argued that ‘formal democracy’, by which he meant elections to the soviets, had to be abandoned in order to win the Civil War.

As a result of the abolition of the Constituent Assembly, and Lenin’s refusal to recognise the results of new Soviet elections, Lenin was able to consolidate Bolshevik power. However, it became more difficult to argue that the new government was democratic.

How democratic were the early decrees?
Many of Lenin’s early decrees were extremely popular. However, it could be argued that Lenin was forced to be democratic, because, in the early days, the new government had very limited power. Therefore, Lenin was forced to allow the peasants to seize land, and workers to take control of their factories. In this sense, rather than extending the rights of Russian people, the early decrees merely authorised what was already taking place.
3 The impact of the Civil War, 1918–21

The Russian Civil War (1918–21) allowed Lenin to establish Communist control over the whole of Russia. Moreover, it radically changed the nature of the Bolshevik Party (renamed the Communist Party in 1918), and the new government. The Civil War led to the creation of a ‘party state’ and, as a result of the Civil War, the state became increasingly authoritarian and centralised.

The Russian Civil War

From the start, Lenin’s revolutionary government faced serious opposition. The Bolsheviks had opponents on all sides. Senior members of the Russian army wanted to re-establish Tsarist rule, others wanted a military dictatorship, or a democratic system like France or America. The new government had radical opponents too. The SRs and Mensheviks wanted a more democratic type of socialist government, and anarchists wanted to abolish government altogether. Britain, France, the US and Japan also sent troops to fight the new government. Some countries feared that a successful revolution might spread, while others wanted to gain territory.

The first signs of military conflict emerged in January 1918, as General Kornilov organised an anti-Bolshevik army in the Don region. SRs and Liberals set up a rival government in Omsk, Siberia, while other SRs based in the city of Ufa tried to revive the Constituent Assembly. A full-scale civil war broke out in the summer of 1918, with the enemies of the Bolsheviks gaining significant ground in the first six months of 1919. Following the failure of anti-Bolshevik forces to capture Petrograd and Moscow in the summer of 1919, the Red Army began to win the war.

The Red Army extended Communist power by winning victories against Nestor Makhno’s anarchist army in the Ukraine, against Alexander Kolchak’s authoritarian government in Siberia, and Anton Denikin’s army in the Crimea.

▲ Map of the Civil War, 1918–21
Government during the Civil War

Lenin’s primary objective during the Civil War was to ensure the survival of the new government. Lenin was willing to do whatever was necessary in order to win. As a result of the Civil War government changed in two ways:

- Lenin’s government became increasingly centralised.
- The Communist Party became increasingly powerful.

Lenin’s prime method of ensuring victory was to centralise power.

- He centralised control of the economy with the policy of War Communism (see page 80).
- He relied on political centralisation, working through the loyal Party *nomenklatura* rather than the more democratic soviets.
- He also used terror to suppress opposition.
- Trotsky made the Red Army more authoritarian. He introduced conscription, harsh punishments and relied on former Tsarist generals to lead the army.

Centralisation ensured that the government, the economy and the army were able to win the war. However, it also took power away from the workers, peasants and soldiers that the Communists claimed to represent.

The emergence of a ‘party state’

At first, the new regime described itself as a ‘soviet-state’ (see page 21); however, during the Civil War the government increasingly became a party state, based on the Communist Party.

Civil war meant that the new government often had to act quickly to achieve victory. Consequently, Lenin tended to rely on the Politburo. Lenin preferred working with the Politburo to Sovnarkom as it was smaller – between five and seven members – and therefore could reach decisions more quickly. Additionally, he preferred working with the Politburo because it contained his most loyal supporters, people such as Stalin, Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev.

Lenin did not abolish Sovnarkom. Rather, it simply ceased to function as the main centre of government. From 1920, the Politburo effectively became the government of Russia. Sovnarkom played a much smaller role, merely approving the decisions that had already been made by the Politburo. The Politburo clearly provided clear and effective leadership during the Civil War. However, the rise of the Politburo indicated that the new government was based on the Communist Party rather than the soviets.

This pattern of Communist Party dominance also emerged at a local level. Senior Communists preferred to work through the Communist Party, which had branches all over the country. They did not trust the local soviets, as SRs and Mensheviks were still present on many of them. Therefore, the soviets were often bypassed in favour of the Communist *nomenklatura*: party officials that senior officials trusted to implement government policy without question.
By 1921, the new government was based on two parallel structures: the Communist Party and the soviet-state. As the Civil War continued and other political parties were increasingly excluded from the government, the soviet-state lost power to the Communist Party. Due to increasing Party dominance the new form of government became known as the ‘party state’.

Red Terror
In December 1917 Lenin created the All-Russian Emergency Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage (Cheka), a political police force tasked with defending the revolution. During the Civil War Chekists were responsible for raiding anarchist organisations, closing down opposition newspapers and expelling Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries from the soviets. The Cheka was willing to imprison, torture or kill anyone that the Communists viewed as a threat. For example, in Kremenchuk in the Ukraine, Church leaders were impaled on spikes, while in the city of Oryol victims were frozen and put on display as ice statues. Women captured by the Cheka were routinely raped. Lenin argued that during a revolution, civil war and terror were necessary to protect the new government from its enemies.

Building the Red Army
In order to fight and win the Civil War, Lenin reformed the army. Following the February Revolution, the Russian army had been democratised: soldiers’ committees were empowered to elect senior officers. Lenin abolished this system and Trotsky, the leader of the new army, put Tsarist generals back in charge of the army. This created outrage among idealists in the party, who accused Lenin and Trotsky of betraying the principles of the revolution. Nonetheless, abolishing democracy and putting highly trained experts in charge of the army paid off, and the Red Army became a disciplined and successful fighting force.

The changing nature of the Communist Party
By 1921, the Communist government was no longer a government of the workers, peasants and soldiers. While the soviets had been made up of working people, the Communist nomenklatura, who administered the policies of War Communism (see page 60), were largely educated members of the former middle class, economists, statisticians and engineers, who had worked for the pre-revolutionary government. The Communists needed their administrative and technical expertise to help run industries and supply the army during the war.
The Communists had won the Civil War due to their ability to control the whole Russian economy, and their willingness to dominate the government. However, this had made the new government extremely unpopular. The Crisis of 1921, which included rebellion among the peasants, workers’ strikes and military mutiny, showed the extent of opposition to Lenin’s government and therefore forced Lenin to reform.

**Popular unrest**

By early 1921, the Communists had won the Civil War. However, the Civil War had ruined Russia’s economy. Droughts in 1920 and 1921 made the situation worse, threatening famine. Peasants in Tambov, led by Aleksandr Antonov, began a rebellion against Communist *grain requisitioning* and Cheka brutality. By January 1921 Antonov had a force of 50,000 anti-communist fighters. Antonov’s revolt was not the only challenge to the Bolsheviks in the countryside. In March 1921 there were peasant attacks on government grain stores all along the Volga River.

In the major cities there were strikes against Communist policies in early 1921. In Petrograd the Red Army responded by opening fire on unarmed workers. Sailors at the Kronstadt naval base, horrified by the Communists’ suppression of the Petrograd strikes, rebelled. The Kronstadt sailors demanded a series of reforms, including:

- an immediate free and fair election of new soviets
- release of all anarchist, Menshevik and SR political prisoners
- a restoration of freedom of speech and the press
- the abolition of the Cheka
- an end to War Communism (see page 60).

In essence, the Kronstadt sailors wanted a return to soviet democracy. This demand was summed up in their slogan ‘Soviets without Communists’.

Even some Communists felt that Lenin had gone too far and that the time was right to revive soviet democracy. Lenin responded swiftly to these challenges. By mid-March the Red Army had crushed the Kronstadt uprising. The Red Army was equally ruthless in Tambov. In May they suppressed the rebellion by deporting 100,000 people to *labour camps* and attacking peasant villages with poisoned gas.

**One-party state**

Lenin responded to the unrest by suppressing opposition political parties. In so doing he created a one-party state. During the Civil War, opposition political parties were often persecuted by the Cheka. In spite of this they had survived the Civil War and, therefore, they were able to play a key role in strikes of early 1921.

From February 1921 Lenin authorised the Cheka to destroy opposition political parties. At the end of February 1921, all Mensheviks in Petrograd and Moscow, including one of the Mensheviks’ leaders, Fyodor Dan, were arrested and sent to the Butyrka Prison. Similar steps were taken against the SRs. Twenty-two leading SRs were put on trial in early 1922 and sentenced to prison or exile. Consequently, between 1921 and 1922, the Communists’ dominance of Russia was consolidated by crushing opposition political parties.
The 1921 Party Congress

Lenin recognised that the unrest in Tambov, Petrograd and Kronstadt reflected the fact that Russian workers and peasants were deeply dissatisfied with the regime. As a result, Lenin pushed through a series of reforms in the 1921 Party Congress. The New Economic Policy (see page 64) liberalised the economy, while the ban on factions tightened Lenin’s political control.

Ban on factions

Lenin faced opposition from several factions within the Bolshevik Party, including:

- the Workers’ Opposition: a group who wanted to reintroduce workers’ control of industry
- the Democratic Centralists: a group who wanted to make the Communist Party more democratic.

Lenin introduced a resolution, entitled ‘On Party Unity’, which banned factions inside the Party. Party members found guilty of forming factions could be expelled from the Party as punishment. The ban on factions helped strengthen Lenin’s position within the party by making opposition to his policies more difficult to organise.

5 Conclusion: Lenin’s legacy

Between 1917 and the time of Lenin’s death in 1924, Russia was transformed. Lenin succeeded in creating a Dictatorship of the Proletariat to defend the October Revolution. However, he destroyed soviet democracy and replaced it with a one-party state. The original institutions that had been created after the October Revolution had lost their power to Party institutions that had emerged during the Civil War. For example, Sovnarkom ceased to play an important role in government, while the Politburo made all of the important decisions that affected Russia.

During the Civil War, Russia became extremely centralised. The New Economic Policy reversed the economic centralisation of War Communism (see pages 60–64), but the creation of a one-party state and the ban on factions meant that political centralisation increased after the Civil War.

Lenin argued that the ban on factions, the ban on other parties and the decreased role of the soviets were both temporary. However, there was no sign before Lenin’s death that the government had plans to make Russia more democratic.

Lenin also created a system in which the political police played a significant role. Again, the Cheka were introduced in 1917 as a temporary measure. But after the Civil War they still played a significant role, persecuting opposition political parties. In this sense, Lenin created a system in which individuals had no rights as the Cheka were free to persecute anyone that the government perceived as a threat. Indeed, Lenin established the principle that violence was justified in order to protect the revolution.

Finally, Lenin replaced a workers’ government with a highly bureaucratic one. Soviets full of workers, peasants and soldiers were replaced by specialists and administrators, few of whom were from the working class.
Chapter summary

- Lenin seized power in Russia in the October Revolution of 1917, proclaiming ‘All power to the Soviets’.
- Initially, Lenin’s government was based on the soviets.
- Bolshevik popularity declined between October 1917 and April 1918.
- Lenin refused to recognise the results of new elections to the soviets in mid-1918.
- During the Russian Civil War, 1918–21, the Russian government became increasingly centralised and dominated by the Communists.
- During the Civil War the Politburo replaced Sovnarkom as the effective government of Russia.

- The Communists won the Civil War using a combination of political and economic centralisation, military discipline and terror.
- Following the Civil War Lenin banned opposition political parties and created a one-party state.
- Following the Civil War Lenin banned factions within the Communist Party, further centralising the Party.
- The Communist government continued to use political centralisation and terror to govern Russia after the Civil War.

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Recommended reading


R.G. Suny (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Russia, Volume III* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), especially Chapter 4 which deals with the revolutionary period of 1917–18.
Paper structure

The Paper 1 examination paper is divided into three parts: Section A, Section B and Section C. The different sections will test different aspects of the history you have studied.

Sections A and B test your knowledge of the period 1917–1985. The questions test your breadth of knowledge of four key themes:

- Communist government in the USSR, 1917–1985
- Industrial and agricultural change, 1917–1985
- Control of the people, 1917–1985
- Social developments, 1917–1985

Section C tests your depth of knowledge regarding a key historical debate: What explains the fall of the USSR c.1985–1991?

Questions in Section A, B and C are all worth 20 marks, therefore, your answers should be approximately the same length.

For advice on Section C of the exam see page 80.

Timing

The exam lasts for 2 hours and 15 minutes. Therefore you have around 40 minutes to write each question, and 15 minutes to read and plan.

If you have extra time, seek advice from your teacher on how best to divide it between, reading, planning and writing.

Sections A and B

Sections A and B test the breadth of your knowledge, and each section requires you to write a full essay.

Section A of the exam paper contains two questions, of which you are required to answer one. Questions in Section A will test the breadth of your knowledge by focusing on at least ten years, and possibly focusing on more than one of the four key themes.

Section B of the exam paper also contains two questions, of which you are required to complete one. Questions in Section B will test the breadth of your knowledge by focusing on at least one third of the period you have studied: 23 years. Section B questions may also focus on more than one of the four key themes.

Neither Section A nor B requires you to read or analyse either sources or extracts from the work of historians.
Skills

Section A and B questions require you to deploy a variety of skills. The most important are focus on the question, selection and deployment of relevant detail, analysis, and, at the highest level, prioritisation.

Questions in Section A and B will focus one of the following concepts:

- cause
- consequence
- change/continuity

- similarity/difference
- significance

Therefore, the questions will typically begin with one of the following stems:

- How far…
- How significant…
- How successful…
- How accurate…
- To what extent…

Understanding the question

In order to answer the question successfully you must understand how the question works. Below is a typical Section A question:

The question is written precisely in order to make sure that you understand the task. Each part of the question has a specific meaning:

'How far', like other stems such as 'How accurate' or 'To what extent', indicates that you are required to evaluate the extent of something, rather than giving a yes or no answer.

How far did the survival of the Russian government depend on terror in the years 1917–1928?

The dates define the period that you should consider.

This sets out the subject that you must address.

Overall, all Section A and B questions ask you to make a judgement about the extent of something, in a specific period. In order to focus on the question you must address all three elements. The most common mistakes come from misunderstanding, or ignoring one of these three elements.

Question practice

Having read the advice on Section A and B Questions complete the following activity:

1. Make a bullet point list of the skills that you need to do well in this type of essay.
2. Number the skills in order of their difficulty, with the easiest skill to demonstrate being 1.
3. Make a note of the amount of time you have to complete the essay.
4. Now try and work out what a good Section A and B essay would look like. Specifically note down your thoughts about:
   - Roughly, how many paragraphs should the essay have?
   - Which skills should you deploy in which sections of the essay?
   - How should you structure the different types of paragraphs?

TIP: don’t just guess, use the advice in this section to try and figure out what a good essay should look like.
Focus on AS

In many ways Section A and B of the AS exam are similar to Section A and B of the A-level exam. Like the A-level exam:
- Section A and B in the AS exam are both designed to assess the breadth of your knowledge.
- Section A and B both contain two questions of which you must complete one.
- Section A questions will look at a period of at least ten years, and may refer to two or more themes.
- Section B questions will cover at least a third of the chronology and years, and may refer to two or more themes. Section B questions can focus on all of the same concepts: cause, consequence, change/continuity, similarity/difference, and significance.

**Key difference**
The major difference relates to the kind of questions that can be asked in Section A. In AS, Section A questions can only focus on cause and consequence. Therefore, you will not get questions that focus on change over time, the significance of historical events or similarity between periods.

Therefore, the most common questions in Section A will ask either:
- How far was one thing the main cause of another
- Or
- How far was one thing the main consequence of another

**AS exam technique**
In spite of this difference the exam technique for Sections A and B is basically the same. Answers in the AS exam will deploy the same skills and require similar structures.

For advice on Section C of the AS exam see page 160.
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