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~~HISTORICAL INFORMATION~~



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Russia is a huge land and its history is, by American standards, at least, a long one. Through the study of the Russian chronicles, it is possible to trace its development from a loosely organized league of city states in the middle of the 9th century A.D., to the beginnings of the National State under Ivan the Terrible in the late 16th century. From this point, then, by the study of more thoroughly documented sources of history, one can trace the growth of the national state through its alternate contractions and expansions to the West and South, as Russia fought almost continually with Poland, Sweden, Lithuania, and Turkey, and through its continuing expansion to the East as Russia thrust its dominion steadily eastward beyond the Urals over the sparsely settled plain of Siberia. And, finally, we arrive at the threatening Colossus of today - territory which is forty times the size of France or three times the size of the United States, and which extends over one-sixth the land area of the globe. In this expansion, Russia has absorbed a multitude of different peoples - or, to use contemporary jargon, a variety of ethnic groups. All in all, the present USSR - excluding the satellites, embraces upwards of one hundred and fifty languages and dialects.

Chief of these ethnic groups is the Great Russians, the Slavic people who live in the heart of Russia, fanning out from Moscow. Then next in importance are two other Slavic groups - the White Russians, who dwell in the territory bordering on Poland, and the Ukrainians, who live to the southwest of Moscow. The minor nationalities include Poles, Rumanians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Finns and Estonians to the West, Mohammedan Tartars in the South along the Volga and in the Crimea (though most of these were deported en masse to Siberia for collaborating with the Germans in World

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War II,) Georgians and Armenians in the Caucasus and a whole host of racial groups in Siberia.

I mention these only to show that the USSR has a host of different races. I would like to add to this the fact that these groups are kept rather separately, mostly for geographic reasons, and that the USSR does not yet show signs of becoming a racial melting pot such as we have here in the United States.

Ivan the Terrible started Russia on its way and its way then was that of an Oriental country, divorced from Western Europe in both culture and economy. As a result, though Russia became strong in manpower and in territory, compared to Western Europe it was far behind in all practical elements of warfare and economy, a state of affairs that was continually impressed upon it in a series of wars with its Polish and Swedish neighbors. This is a position that was very similar to the Russian situation in 1914, as we shall see.

Tsar Peter the Great (Tsar is a Russian derivative from the Latin for Caesar - synonymous with emperor) who reigned from 1682 - 1725, tried to Westernize Russia in one fell swoop. More exactly, he attempted to graft Western culture and economy on the existing Russian culture and economy. He modernized the army, he instituted Western customs in the court, and he introduced industrial methods, factory and mining methods particularly, from the more advanced European countries. However, at the same time, he strengthened the concept of complete obedience of all classes of peoples to the state, and to the Tsar as the representative of the State, a concept opposed to the rising currents of liberal thought in 18th century Western Europe. In addition, he fastened the institution of

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serfdom so completely onto the economic system that it endured to 1861 in law, and perhaps even beyond 1900 in practice.

He gave, also, a case of schizophrenia to his people, a case so violent that it showed no signs of diminishing during the course of the Tsardom and perhaps even today. On the one hand, he established in some of the Russians a desire to absorb and emulate European manners and morals almost to the point of slavishness - a very dangerous thing for a people who had skipped the Renaissance and had not been culturally prepared for too much enlightenment at one time. On the other, he drove many of his people to turn their backs on European ways and to seek Russia's solution in the perpetuation of the old Slavic morals and customs. There has existed since his time a struggle between the two - between the Westerners, those who eyed Europe for leadership - and the Slavophiles - those who delighted in Russian customs and thought. The balance of power varied between these two groups. It is safe to say that from 1900 - 1917, the Westerners were more influential. Since the Revolution, the doctrine of the Slavophiles have been in the ascendancy - bearing, however, the Western influence of Marx and Engels and the introduction of Western mechanics of industrialization.

Peter's system worked well - in fact, it worked too well. While Western lands progressed, undergoing the throes of increasing liberalism in politics, and of the industrial revolution, Russia remained tied to the system of Peter the Great. Territorial expansion under Catherine the Great and the defeat of Napoleon by Alexander I caused little more than a ripple in the landowner-serf relationship that was the backbone of Russian society. It

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was only after the stalemate of the Crimean War that Russian officialdom awoke to the fact that Russian society and economy was out-of-joint with the times.

An enlightened monarch, enlightened by Russian standards, that is - Tsar Alexander II, in 1861 - 1864 promulgated a series of reforms that was intended to liberalize the slave (or more exactly - serf) economy of the times. In 1861, he emancipated the serfs - and not only emancipated them but made provisions for their obtaining property. However, these provisions were scarcely enough for a land-hungry people. In the first place, the land was not given to the peasants outright - it was given to a communal society called the 'mir' - the village community. The 'mir' then allotted land among the families in proportion to the number of persons in each family. Since the land was redistributed each year - there was no incentive on the part of the individual farmer to tend for the land - rather, it was to the advantage of each to exploit it for his own immediate profit.

Additionally, the land was not even given outright to the 'mir.' Since it had to be acquired from someone in the first place, it was appropriated from the landowners - the gentry. It was necessary, therefore, that the gentry be reimbursed. The government issued bonds, paid the landowners with these bonds, and levied a tax upon the 'mir' which was supposed, if everything went well, to be paid in 49 years. This heavy tax, which was in addition to other indirect taxes, served to keep the peasants and the mir in a continued state of financial collapse. The unrest which finally culminated in the Revolution of 1917 began, if we can ever say there is a definite beginning to a thing of this kind - in the disappointment of

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everyone in the Emancipation Proclamation -- in the disappointment of the peasant because he did not receive the land outright and in the disappointment of the gentry because it was the first overt weakening of a pleasant and assured way of life that had endured for centuries.

Other reforms were notable, though more in their intent than in their accomplishments. There was the establishing of a judicial system embracing trial by jury, of an educational system, and -- to a small extent -- of a legislative system containing the rudiments of self-government. This latter consisted of provincial and district Zemstva (the singular is Zemstvo), councils elected locally to supervise the administration of such things as public health, education, roads, tax-gathering, such things as are done by the county commissioner in America today and are far removed from any purely legislative systems. Indeed, since everything the Zemstva did was subject to the will -- one almost might say whim of the Tsar -- their powers were so hedged and restricted that they amounted in the end to almost nothing. Besides, the elections were so rigged that the majority of representation came from the gentry. But, limited as they were, they represented the first elective bodies in Russia since the time of Ivan the Terrible and are therefore worthy of note.

Tsar Alexander II, the Emperor who had liberated the serfs and shown the first strong indication of enlightenment in any Russian Tsar, was assassinated in 1881 -- the victim of revolutionists who were disappointed that his reforms had stopped short of complete liberty. It is ironic that, at the time of his assassination, he was engaged in plans to present a limited constitution to his country.

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His successor, Alexander III, had no such liberal tendencies. He burdened the land with a censorship and a police rule so stringent that Russia, in the years 1881 - 1905, entered on a period in which freedom of speech and movement were no less circumscribed than they are now under its present day rulers. The Okhrana (OKHRANA), the Russian police force attained the skill and power that caused it to become the model for the Soviet Cheka, the forerunner of the present MVD. Its skill in penetrating all revolutionary parties, its powers of extra-legal arrest and administrative punishment -- that is, of sentencing persons to imprisonment or exile on its own initiative and without recourse to or threat of redress from the courts, made the OKHRANA the most efficient abettor of reaction.

Yet, with all the restrictions imposed upon the country, in the midst of the strong flood tide of reaction, there grew an increasingly strong countercurrent of bitterness and incipient revolution. The peasants, except when led to revolt by leaders from outside their group -- the Cossacks, for instance -- had for all practical purposes lain passive. But Alexander II, in freeing them from serfdom, severed their ties to their masters and their bonds. And Alexander III, hostile as he was to any sort of progress toward individual liberty, granted them the economic motives for leaving the land and gathering in the cities. The subsidies and tariffs he bestowed upon industry, the great network of railroads he constructed, called into being large concentration of workmen. In brief, under his rule, a proletariat was formed. The restrictions upon liberty, the low scale of living that this proletariat underwent, made it restive and inasmuch as this newly formed proletariat still possessed close ties to the villages, this restiveness was communicated as never before to the countryside. For the first time the

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peasants showed signs of throwing off their passiveness. So Russia by the turn of the century had reached the point where a strong enough spark had some chance of igniting the entire empire.

If I may retrogress for a moment, I would like briefly to trace the history of revolution in Russia. In the 17th century, a Cossack adventurer, Stenka Razin, had collected a following of peasants and Cossacks and set up a short lived empire on the lower reaches of the Volga. In the 18th century, a revolt led by another Cossack, Emelian Pugachev, carried almost to the gates of Moscow before Catherine the Great could subdue it.

Besides these bona fide revolutions, there was a plethora of palace revolutions during the period between the reigns of Peter the Great and Catherine, a state of affairs that is not surprising when one considers that the throne was occupied successively by a woman, a twelve-year old boy, another woman, a one-year old infant, a woman dipsomaniac and a madman. Then in December 1825, there was a combination of palace and bona fide revolutions when a group of officers tried to overthrow the emperor by a coup d'etat in order to supplant his autocratic rule with a constitution. It came to nothing, except for the execution of the conspirators.

The Revolutionary seed which eventually culminated in the overthrow of the Czar was planted in the 1870's when a group of young intellectuals — or to use a Russian term — intelligentsia, left the Universities in St. Petersburg and Moscow to carry the ideas of liberty and equality and revolution to the people. The group, called themselves 'V NAROD' - 'To the People'. These young intellectuals went to live with the people, filling jobs as minor administrators or teachers for their livelihood. Unfortunately, the

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peasants distrusted them and turned them over to the police. In itself, the movement ended in a total fiasco.

But from the survivors emerged a new party, the "Land and Freedom" Party, in which the technique of assassination first appeared. This split into two groups: a terrorist group which desired to overthrow the government called the "People's Will," and a group that wished to seize political power not by abolishing the government but by winning the support of the masses and thus taking over the government. This second group was called "Black Partition."

The assassination of Alexander II by the terrorist Grinevetsky, a member of the "People's Will," brought a sudden end to both these groups. The Czar executed and exiled the leaders and the organizations withered away. From now on, revolutionary parties did not consist wholly of the intelligentsia but of an alliance of the intelligentsia with the proletariat and the peasantry. But the tradition of revolution was kept very much alive.

We will return to revolutionary parties later when we trace the rise of the Bolshevik party.

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So much by way of preface, At the beginning of the 20th century, we find Russia a sleeping giant of a country on the eve of its awakening. The proletariat, having increased more than seven-fold in fifty years — from 318,000 in 1850 to 2,374,000 in 1900 — had become a group of substantial numerical proportions and furthermore had begun experimenting with the strike as a weapon to obtain better living and working conditions. The peasants, inert since the accession of Alexander III, were beginning to mutter against the hard conditions of their lives. Sporadic uprisings of the peasants against the landlords in the country attested to the beginnings of a less subservient spirit.

The Tsar was Nicholas II, perhaps as ill-fitted a man to rule an Empire in changing times as had existed since Louis XVI of France. He was stubborn, narrow minded, a worshipper at the shrine of his reactionary father in all matters pertaining to the internal management of his country. But where Alexander III had been strong, simple and determined in his acts of suppression, Nicholas II was confused, weak, and vacillating. Subservient to the strong will of an equally narrow minded wife, he ruled with avowed purpose of turning over to his hemophilic son, the Tsarovitch Alexis, an empire changed as little as possible from the one which he had inherited. Which, of course, he didn't. He turned away from the advisors who served best and most wisely and put his trust in those like Rasputin, an illiterate and debauched peasant monk who gained an ascendancy over the Empress by his ability through hypnosis to quiet the sufferings of the Tsarovitch, who assured him that the office of the Czar was sacred and would endure forever.

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Finally, he was forced to abdicate on March 15, 1917, was arrested by the Provisional Government on March 20th, and confined in a palace near Petrograd, and was later imprisoned, with his family in a house in Ekaterinburg in the Urals. On the night of 16 - 17 July 1918, when the anti-Bolshevik troops approached Ekaterinburg, he and his family were taken to the cellar of the house and shot. The bodies were cremated so that there could be no 'holy relics' for the anti-Bolsheviks to rally around.

To return from this slight depression, Russia in 1904 was suffering conditions of unrest. The Tsar's chief minister thought that the glory of a 'short successful war' might have a calming effect upon the populace and, with this in mind, he provoked a war with Japan. It was short enough as wars go nowadays, lasting from February 8, 1904, when the Japanese attacked Port Arthur until August 1905, when a peace treaty was signed at Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Definitely, it was not successful, since the war consisted of a series of defeats to Russian armies that to a nation smaller in territory would have been catastrophic. Treachery and incompetence on the part of Russian commanders played a large part in the outcome but chiefly the defeat demonstrated that Russia was still far behind the times -- militarily speaking -- that the Russian military system, and the economy to support this system, was outmoded. The crowning blow occurred when the Baltic fleet steamed from St. Petersburg halfway around the world and, on engaging the Japanese fleet, at Tsushima, was completely and utterly destroyed.

As I said before, in my rather long preamble, Russia was in such a situation internally that a spark of sufficient intensity would be able to ignite a serious conflagration. The inglorious conduct of this extremely

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unpopular war with Japan — and, even more, the sacrifices attendant in supporting the war — provided this spark. The result of this was the Revolution of 1905, an event which Lenin later characterized as the dress rehearsal for the 'Revolution of 1917'. Although it was not planned, in fact, it erupted almost spontaneously, and for the most part was both sporadic and unguided, and although it was eventually put down by Tsarist troops, it did succeed in wresting a Constitution of sorts from the Tsar and in laying the foundation for a more liberal form of government. Unfortunately, the structure above the foundations never arose.

The year of Revolution began with a massacre and ended with the shelling, by the Tsar's Army, of a good part of Moscow. The Massacre took place on a Sunday in January — January 22, a day that was immediately labelled "Bloody Sunday."

There was a very curious development in Russian internal affairs which led to this. The police, in order to control the organization of the workmen more easily, had encouraged workmen to band into Societies, Unions almost, which were under police supervision and protection. These are analagous to the 'company unions' of our capitalist social structure.

The society in St. Petersburg was led by Father Gapon, an Orthodox priest. In January, it got a little out of hand, and on January 22nd, Father Gapon led his workers, and their wives and their children, on a peaceable march to the Czar's winter palace. The purpose was to ask for certain concessions to the workers and the people of Russia.

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The troops guarding the palace first ordered the crowd -- which numbered between 150,000 and 200,000 to disperse. When it did not, they fired. The number of those reported killed varies from 200 to 1500 according to whether one follows the Tsarist or the Revolutionists' accounts. But more important, than the slaughter of the marchers was the death of an old Russian idea that existed throughout the period of the Empire until this moment; namely, that the Tsar was the little Father of Russia and that the people could always go to him with their troubles and he heard.

There followed a period of strikes in the cities, local uprisings against the landlords in the country, and mutinies in the Navy and Army, the most serious of which occurred in the Black Sea fleet where the cruiser 'Poteskin' upped anchor and sailed away to Rumania.

Until October, there was no concerted action. However, in October, a strike of the printers in St. Petersburg spread quickly throughout the whole of the city and from there throughout the entire country. All classes of people joined in the strike, including workmen and middleclass professional men. Employers of liberal views aided the strikers, granting them half or even full pay while they were absent from their work. For three days, no trains ran, telegraph communication to the army in Siberia were cut off (the government had to get in touch with its armies by way of London and Peking), government clerks, cab drivers, house servants, even the Russian ballet struck.

On October 30th, the Tsar issued his October Manifesto, the nearest thing to a constitution in Russia until the Bolsheviks issued one in 1918.

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Two things in this are worthy of note. First, it granted individual rights such as freedom of speech, assembly and knowledge. (Trotzky said - Freedom of Assembly...but the assemblies are surrounded by the military. Freedom of speech...but the censorship exists. Freedom of knowledge...but the Universities are occupied by troops. Inviolability of person...but the prisons are overflowing.) And secondly, it provided for the national legislature, the ~~Duma~~ -- by election in which all the people should take part.

The Manifesto had the effect, desired by the government, of splitting the revolutionists. The strike fever abated and on October 31, Moscow called off its strike. November 3 was set as the date for the end of the St. Petersburg strike and, on that day, everyone went back to work.

Two weeks later, a second general strike was called. This time it was not supported by the liberal employers nor the professional men and white collar workers, and the government took vigorous measures to put it down. Abandoned in St. Petersburg after five days, it was a mere shadow of its successful predecessor.

In Moscow, a December strike began peaceably enough but ended in armed resistance to the authorities. Finally a Czarist regiment was summoned from St. Petersburg to subdue it. The commander shelled a quarter of the city at long range, killing the loyal and the rebellious indiscriminately. By this means, he brought Moscow to heel and wrote the end to the Revolution proper.

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Particularly in the beginning, the Revolution was a leaderless series of uncoordinated uprisings. Father Gapon's leadership was confined to his group and served as an incentive to unrest and not as a point of centralized leadership.

Gradually, however, there developed in the towns and cities revolutionary councils known as soviets, 'Soviet' being the Russian word for council. These councils began as local factory soviets — that is, each factory would appoint members to decide whether to call strikes and, to manage the conduct of the strikes when called. Later came the idea of having a soviet for several factories and finally the 'Soviet' represented the workingmen of an entire city. Some two hundred cities of European Russia and Siberia adopted the Soviet plan during this period.

The most important soviet, as is logical in a country that possessed a highly centralized government, was The Soviet of Workers Deputies in St. Petersburg. It was formed during the first general strike and immediately assumed responsibility for managing the strike. It was not the brainchild of any special revolutionary party — Bolsheviki, Mensheviki, Social Revolutionaries and independent workers were indiscriminately represented. Trotsky, not the presiding officer but the leading spirit of the St. Petersburg Soviet, became, in the absence of the more established revolutionary leaders of the day, the guiding spirit of the resistance to the Czar.

Through loose communication with the Soviets of other towns, the St. Petersburg Soviet became the focal point for the revolution in the entire nation, except for the countryside. The uprisings of the peasants were not

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coordinated into the centralized revolutionary picture and the Soviets lost a source of strength which they might well have had.

The Soviets vanished immediately after the Moscow uprising, vanished under pressure, one might say. The leaders were arrested, thrown into prison, and exiled and the rank and file drifted back to their jobs.

Thus, work of the Soviets came to an end when the Revolution ceased. However, in their short existence, they had shown their worth as possible guiding forces in any subsequent revolution. Lenin noted their power and, when they were reestablished in 1917, immediately upon the outbreak of Revolution in St. Petersburg, Lenin planned to take over the Soviet on the first step in taking over the government.

The period, 1906 - 1914, that is from the end of the Revolution of 1905 to the outbreak of the war with Germany -- was one of pause -- ostensibly one in which Russia made long strides toward liberalization and economic well-being, but actually one in which nothing was basically changed.

The first Duma met immediately after the end of the Revolution, at a time when the police forces and allied reactionary bodies of a semi-official nature were reducing the last vestiges of rebellion in the country and in the cities. So heavy was the voting among people of all classes that a liberal majority was chosen. The party which sought to liberalize the government in accordance with Western Parliamentary procedures, the Constitutional Democrats -- Cadets for short -- took the lead in initiating legislation. A program was presented that would so circumscribe the Tsar's power that its adoption was unthinkable and its formation almost an act of treason.

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Actually the Duma had no right under the provisions of the October Manifesto to initiate legislation, but only to pass on that initiated by the Tsar. Since the program which the first Duma presented was far too radical for the Tsar to approve and since the Duma, in turn, would not approve the Tsar's legislation, a stalemate developed. The Tsar had no alternative according to his rights; he dissolved the Duma after two months.

The second Duma was elected in March 1907 and, for the same reason, dissolved in June. The Tsar, then weighted the voting laws so heavily on the side of the landlords that the third Duma was composed almost entirely of conservatives and moderates chosen from the landowners and the wealthy classes. It lived out its term, from 1907 - 1912 and, in fact, worked very well with the Tsar's Ministers.

In 1912, a fourth Duma was elected, made up of the same class of representatives as the third. It lasted until March 1917, when it was officially dissolved by the Tsar but, in view of the circumstances, continued to meet.

One event during this time is worthy of mention — an effort by the Tsar's Prime Minister, Stolypin, to win the support of the peasantry for the government.

The peasantry had its own party, the Social Revolutionary Party, whose program was to bring about a new government in Russia, based on the communal peasant body — the 'mir.' Of all the revolutionary parties, the Social Revolutionary was the largest but its lack of central organization made it, at the same time, the weakest.

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The Bolshevik party also was making a play for peasant control, in keeping with Lenin's belief that revolution depended upon an alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry.

Stolypin hoped to forestall these maneuvers and to gain the leadership of the peasants by building them into a conservative, property owning class. By decree, the back taxes for the land -- the taxes which were established in 1861 to pay for the land taken from the landowners and given to the peasants -- were abolished and many of the peasants received land as inviolate private property. By 1914, approximately two million of the peasants had become landowners and consequently were in process of losing their revolutionist tendency. Unfortunately, from the point of view of the Tsar, this reform began too late and in the end the Bolshevik and the Social Revolutionary parties won the greater support of the peasants. It was from these landowning peasants that the 'Bukhars,' whom we will meet later in the 1920's sprung.

Before we go into the first World War, it would be well to trace the history of the Bolshevik party.

The first Marxist party in Russian history was the 'Liberation of Labor' party, formed in 1883 by Georgii V. Plekhanov, a former member of the 'Peoples' Will!' Plekhanov, in exile, translated Marx into Russian and organized the smuggling of these works into Russia. Many of the later revolutionists -- Lenin, Martov, Trotsky learned their doctrine from Plekhanov and for a long time acknowledged him as their master.

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In 1898, at Minsk in White Russia — a district of Russia the inhabitants of which are not to be confused with the White Russians who fought in the Civil War — there met the first Congress of the Social Democratic Labor Party. The leaders of the Marxist movement were in exile so that it was a purely second string congress but it dates the origin of the party.

In 1903, the second Congress was held. It began in Brussels but was so hemmed around and infiltrated by members of the Belgian and Russian police that the delegates betook themselves to London.

On this conference occurred the split of the party into the Bolshevik and Menshevik wings. Lenin, who led the Bolshevik faction, put forward the concept of the vanguard of the party, of a hard core of revolutionaries. It was his proposal that all who joined the party should participate actively in one of the organizations. Martov, his fellow editor on the newspaper 'Iskita,' the Social Democratic propaganda organ, desired a looser party, which would be naturally much larger. In other words, Lenin wanted a thoroughly disciplined group to serve as leaders to the non-participating masses, while Martov wanted the masses to join and to set a revolution in force by sheer weight of numbers. This, I must admit is a very capsulated summary of the main point of difference between the two groups.

Martov won on this point but on other points of difference, Lenin's proposals were carried and the Central Committee elected by the delegates held a majority of Lenin's men. From this result, Lenin adapted the name of 'Bolsheviks' (the Majority) for his wing and saddled his opponents with that of 'Mensheviks' — the minority, an early insight into his familiarity with the use of propaganda.

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In the revolution of 1905, the Bolsheviks were relatively inconspicuous. Lenin arrived on the scene very late in the day. After the year was over, he came to the conclusion that the only hope of successful revolution lay in an alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry and that from this would develop the Socialist Revolution which he desired. The Mensheviks continued in their belief that the bourgeois revolution was a necessary first step.

After 1905, the Bolsheviks opposed the liberalizing program of the Dumas and, because they were inimical to the Cadets and other Liberal parties, enjoyed for a time, special favor from the Ochrana. However, after 1907, the party was driven underground. From then on, it engaged in clandestine operations in Russia, in spreading propaganda, in keeping the party alive in small, isolated packets, and in obtaining, through armed robbery, money to finance Lenin and his work. Joseph Stalin, a native of Georgia, gained his first notoriety as the organizer of armed robbery in his homeland.

In 1912, after continued attempts of the Mensheviks to heal the breach, the Social Democratic split resolved into a permanent break and the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks became separate parties rather than separate factions within one party. By the time the war began, all revolutionary parties — including the Bolsheviks — were subdued. The leaders were in exile and the rank-and-file members were engrossed in the mechanics of living. In 1914, it seemed as if the Tsar's autocracy — in its somewhat liberalized form — had survived all revolutionary threats and was in firm control of the country.

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The first World War immediately brought Russia's weaknesses to light. An early offensive, launched to lessen the pressure on the Western allies, succeeded in this aim but brought immediate and devastating defeat to the Russian armies. At Tannenberg and the Marusian Lakes, the Germans inflicted losses that were terrible both in the number of Russian soldiers slaughtered and in the amount of material captured and destroyed. It is estimated that the Russians lost more than a third of their artillery — the artillery of the entire Russian army, that is — in these battles. After that — disregarding an abortive offensive in 1916 — the Russian armies were continually in retreat. The morale of the Army rapidly disintegrated and — from 1916 on — desertions began to mount until they reached a total of two million by 1918.

Not only the army but the entire nation began to come apart at the seams. The Tsar had been warned by his advisers that the Russian economy would not withstand a war and the truth of the warning was soon evident. The corruption and inefficiency of the government were overwhelming; the internal transport system of the nation soon broke down, the cost of living rose, the public health degenerated. The requisition of grain and horses for the army left the countryside barren and the peasants in a sorry condition indeed.

The Tsar meanwhile, had taken active command of the army in the field and had left St. Petersburg. The Tsarina assumed the position of ruler of the country and, under the influence of Rasputin, replaced ministers of ability with figureheads subservient to her will.

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In this situation, the Duma became the sounding board of opposition to the government late in 1916. To realize how bad things had become, it is sufficient to remember that the Duma consisted, for the most part, of representatives of conservative Russia, completely loyal to the state. You may remember, too, that they were elected by laws rigged to give the Tsar's supporters an absolute majority.

The Duma called upon the Tsar in November to replace the government with one in which the country might have confidence. When this was ignored, the last chance for the salvation of the Tsardom disappeared. The murder of Rasputin by conservative noblemen served only to heighten the tension. And in March (or February according to the old calendar) revolution broke out.

I would like to say something here about dates. During the entire history of Imperial Russia, the Caesarian or, old style, calendar was used. After the second Revolution, the one in which the Bolsheviks assumed power, the Gregorian (or new style) calendar took its place. There is a difference of about 12 days between them. Consequently, the first revolution is called either the Revolution of March 1917, (new style) or of February 1917, (old style). In this, we will use the new style calendar.

The Revolution of March 1917, was one of the most leaderless, spontaneous, and anonymous revolutions of all time. The prominent revolutionists were either abroad or in Siberia and none of these had anticipated any sudden uprising.

It began on March 8, when crowds of women demonstrated in the streets demanding food. This was followed by a succession of strikes and some 200,000 strikers poured out into the streets.

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On March 10, the Tsar ordered the garrison commander to suppress the disorder. Everything then depended on whether the troops would obey their officers. They didn't. They mutinied and threw in their lot with the strikers and so, after three hundred and four years of rule by one family, the Romanovs, the empire came to an end.

On March 12, the Duma, in lieu of any other authority at St. Petersburg, took over what control of the government there was left. On the same day, the St. Petersburg Soviet was formed. Finally, on March 15, with the concurrence of both the Duma and the Soviet, a Provisional Government was formed from members of the Duma — this government to rule until a duly elected Constituent Assembly should decide on the future form of the Russian state.

From this point until November 1917, there was a duality of rule in the country. The actual power resided in the Soviet since it was, to some extent, representative of the people. However, the Soviets, particularly since the members were new to the mechanics of politics,, agreed to abide by the decisions of the Provisional Government. In practice, a working arrangement grew up between the two bodies — the members of the Provisional Government supplying experience in policy formulation and the Soviet, through its control of the masses, seeing that the Provisional Government's edicts were enforced. At this time, the Soviet was controlled by Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries.

The period between the Revolution of March and November can be divided into four distinct periods.

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The first was the 'honeymoon' period. This began soon after the first revolution and lasted roughly until July. It was characterized by harmonious relations between the Provisional Government and the Soviet.

Two things foreshadowed the end of the honeymoon, the opposition of the Bolsheviks and the determination of the Provisional Government to carry on the war. The first began in April, when Lenin, who had been living in exile in Switzerland, arrived in Petrograd (literally, Peter's City, - the name St. Petersburg had been changed immediately after the Revolution). Later, it became Leningrad. He had come after a trip through Germany arranged by the German general staff, in a sealed railroad car. He was met by leaders of the Soviet with a plea for unity. Lenin answered that it was a time for revolution. Henceforth the Bolsheviks, who had been cooperating with the government, became an outright revolutionary party with the avowed purpose of seizing power. They repeatedly shouted the slogans - 'Peace, Bread, and Land' - that is, Peace for the country, bread for the workers, and land for the peasants - and 'All Power to the Soviets.' Since the war was unpopular, the workers starved and the peasants hungry for land - as a matter of fact, they had already begun appropriating many of the estates in the country. The Bolsheviks could be said to have gauged the feelings of the country far better than the other parties. Consequently, they were assuming the actual leadership of the country - somewhat in the fashion of the man who becomes leader by finding out where the crowd is going and running a little faster than the rest in that direction.

The second, as I mentioned, was the determination of the Provisional Government to carry on the war.

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Any discipline had been steadily deteriorating since 1914 and the deterioration had been given a tremendous boost by "Order No. One" of the Soviet, issued in March and published in Izvestia. In this order, many of the duties of the officers, such as issuing arms, were taken from officers and given over to soldiers' committees. Off duty, officers had no power over soldiers and, on or off, saluting and standing at attention were abolished.

The abolishing of military discipline, the general war-weariness, and the effectiveness of increasing Bolshevik propaganda among the troops — all these combined to reduce the Russian army to the least eager fighting force in history. The people of Russia were equally sick of war. Consequently, the determination of the Provincial Government to continue the fighting was suicidal.

In the face of this, an offensive was started in July. Initially, it was successful, but as soon as it met resistance — which is another way of saying that as soon as it met German instead of Austrian troops — the offensive collapsed and with it, the army. Desertions began mounting until the deserters were numbered in the tens of thousands rather than the thousands.

The second phase, which was called "July Days", and which put a definite end to the honeymoon period, dates from the unrest caused by this offensive. On July 16th, workers and soldiers in Petrograd, demonstrated against the government, demanding "All Power to the Soviets". The Bolsheviks, who did not want the demonstrations, thinking it premature, were forced into assuming the leadership in order to maintain their hold on the workers. When the Soviet refused to assume power, the demonstration collapsed. Lenin was forced to flee to Finland and the Bolsheviks were, for a time, discredited.

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On July 21, Alexander Kerensky became Premier, succeeding the ineffectual Prince George Lvov. Kerensky, formerly Minister for War, was a Social Revolutionary and acceptable to both the Soviet and the government. He immediately set the stage for the next phase by replacing the Commander-in-Chief of the Army with General Kornilov, at that time commander of the Petrograd garrison.

The third period was called the "Kornilov Affair." Kornilov, whom another general had characterized as having "the heart of a lion and the brain of a lamb," envisioned himself as the savior of conservative Russia. He dispatched an army against Petrograd, bent on ousting the Provisional Government and replacing it with military rule. His army was met by government troops and hordes of workers outside Petrograd, was completely won over from him, and melted peacefully away. The entire enterprise came to a bloodless and inglorious end.

The fourth phase was the swing to the left and the capture of the Soviet by Bolshevik delegates. The Kornilov Affair both put a decisive end to the army as a force to be reckoned with and also destroyed the confidence of the workers and peasants in the government. On October 8th, the Soviet delegates elected Leon Trotsky, now Lenin's right hand man, as President of the Petrograd Soviet. Other Soviets in the country returned Bolshevik majorities. The opposition parties based their hopes on the Constituent Assembly, which was in process of being elected, but, as we shall see later, their hopes were unjustified. Late in October, the Bolshevik-dominated Soviet took over the actual command of the troops in Petrograd.

The November Revolution began on November 5th. The Bolsheviks gained control of the arsenal of Fort Peter and Paul, armed 20,000 Red guards, as

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their fighting men were called, and by the November 8, with the soldiers either quiescent or actively aiding them, had subdued the city. The last act was the storming of the Winter Palace where the remnants of the government had fled. Kerensky had escaped to seek military aid but never returned. The defense was feeble, since only a handful of regular troops and a woman's battalion had remained loyal. Perhaps nothing could illustrate the isolation and futility of the Provisional Government more readily than the ease with which it was toppled from power.

On November 15th, Moscow fell to the Bolsheviks after a week long battle. A skin deep veneer of Bolshevism prevailed throughout the land. It took a three year Civil War to unite the country finally and completely under the Bolsheviks but the first step had been taken.

Before we go on into the history of Russia under Communist rule, it might be a good idea to mention some of the reasons for both revolutions.

Regarding the March Revolution, one might say it was not a revolution but a collapse. The simple fact is that, in the Imperial police state, the archaic structures of government, society, and economy were not able to support a war and control the people at the same time. That is about all that need be said. As for the success of the Bolsheviks, several items can be listed.

- (1) The success of Bolshevik propaganda - particularly the use of slogans like 'Peace, Bread, and Land' in stirring up the nation.
- (2) The decision of the Provisional Government to carry on the war.
- (3) Lenin's grasp of that fact that the way to seize Russia, with its tradition of centralized government, was to seize the central point of government, to bring about a coup d'etat. Other parties relied on elections to the Constituent

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Assembly to show what the people wanted; in other words, to ride to power on an upsurge from below. The Bolsheviks, as we shall see, never let this upsurge take place.

(4) The fact the Bolsheviks were a group trained for leadership whereas the other parties had always confined themselves to opposition movements.

(5) The gap between the Provisional Government and the people. The Provisional Government had no legal basis -- if anything, it was self-appointed. It had neither the support of tradition -- as the Tsar had -- nor was it representative of the people.

Perhaps we can sum it up by saying the Bolsheviks knew what they wanted and nobody else did. So, a party of 180,000 took over the government of the nation.

The first steps of the new government were firm and decisive. A Soviet of Peoples' Commissar was immediately formed to serve as the administrative head of the government. Lenin was chairman, Trotsky was Foreign Commissar and Stalin, Commissar of Nationalities.

Meanwhile, in late November, the Constituent Assembly on which so many hopes had been based for a democratic Russia convened in Petrograd. It returned a majority of Social Revolutionaries. Lenin, therefore, declared that the Soviets were more representative of the people than the Assembly and, using the armed forces in Petrograd, disbanded the Assembly. Shortly thereafter, all political parties except the Bolsheviks, now officially called Communists, were outlawed.

A peace treaty with Germany signed in March, 1918 -- the peace of Brest-Litovsk -- though it cost Russia a large slice of territory, seemed definite proof to the people, that the Communist was a peace party. It brought great support to the Communists from the war weary populace.

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Other methods than persuasion were used on those who opposed the regime. Lenin maintained that one of the chief mistakes the Provisional Government had made was in not creating a political police force to use in a country which was accustomed to one. He made no such error. In December, 1917 he ordered the establishment of the Extraordinary Commission for the suppression of Counter-Revolution, the Cheka. So thoroughly and in so unscrupulous and bloodthirsty a manner did the Cheka do its work of suppression that by early 1918, the government machinery had been entirely subjected to Communist control.

The Cheka used torture, mass slaughter, imprisonment and a system of hostages to gain its ends. During the course of the Civil War, its ability to subdue the territory behind the army lines was one of the great factors in the Communist victory. In contrast, the troops of the Counter Revolutionary forces were never able to govern the territory which they had conquered, one of the prime reasons for the failure of the counter revolution being this lack of administrative control, allowing for continued unrest behind the lines.

Because the Cheka was the forerunner of the later Soviet police systems, the GPU, the NKVD, the MVD, and the MVD, I would like to mention one instance that illustrates its ruthlessness, its entire abandonment of human values. This can be multiplied ad infinitum during the years of the Civil War and, for that matter, during the 1920's when we come to the periods of forced collectivization and industrialization and during the 1930's, in the great purges.

At a meeting of the government, Lenin sent a note to Felix Dzerzhinsky (the head of the Cheka) asking how many vicious counter-revolutionaries were in the prisons. Dzerzhinsky wrote back, "About 1500." Lenin put an X by the number and returned the note.

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Dzerzhinsky rose and left without a word. The next day, it was learned that all 1500 had been shot. He had taken Lenin's X for a collective death sentence.

It was not intended that way. Lenin used an X on memoranda to show that he had read and noted the contents. It was a slight mistake.

Still, as Lenin said, "No dictatorship of the proletariat is to be thought of without terror and violence." And Dzerzhinsky was the man to put this into effect.

In March 1918, the government moved to Moscow where it has remained ever since.

The Civil War proper, began in May 1918, when a group of Czech soldiers who were being given safe-conduct across Siberia to Vladivostak so that they might be shipped to fight on the Western Front in France, rose against the Bolsheviks and very easily liberated Siberia. Anti-Bolshevik Russians, called White Russians to distinguish them from the Communist Red Russian, rallied in Siberia and the South and soon opposed seemingly formidable armies to the Communists. Admiral Kalchak in Siberia, General Deniken (at the head of an army that had been formed by General Kornilov) in the South between the Black Sea and the Volga, and General Yudenich in the Baltic province of Estonia all commanded armies that, at one time or another, posed threats to the new government.

However, the armies were met and defeated individually. Deniken advanced toward Moscow, was defeated at Orel and driven back to the Crimea, Yudenich was defeated in front of Petrograd. Kalchak's army retreated under attack of the Reds and, when Kalchak himself was captured, the army disintegrated.

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In 1920, Poland invaded Russia. At first the Polish attack was successful but shortly the tide of battle changed and the Communist Army took the offensive. It drove to the gates of Warsaw, before it was defeated — partly by a brilliant maneuver of the Poles and partly because of confusion in the Russian battle plan. The war ended in a stalemate.

This success of the Red Armies in the Civil War was due largely to the efforts of Trotsky, a man who combined a flair for oratory and a revolutionary temperament with a genius for administration and a considerable talent for directing military operations. Before the Revolution, Trotsky had leaned to the Menshevik party but on his arrival from the United States in April, he had joined forces with Lenin and became the second only to the latter in the Bolshevik party.

Trotsky built the Red Army into a very efficient force, at least by comparison with the White armies. He made use of former Tsarist officers, believing that ability in warfare was somewhat more essential in commanding troops than purity in Purist belief.

The superior quality of the troops and the fact that the Communists controlled the lines of transport and of communication and were therefore able to shift troops from one front to another as the occasion demanded combined to give them military supremacy throughout the conflict.

Military supremacy was the prime reason why the Reds won. Other factors entering into their victory were:

1. The unity of the Communist leaders as opposed to the glaring disunity among the parties which made up the White forces among the supporters of the monarchy, the liberals, and the Social Revolutionaries. The Reds had a program for the country and the Whites did not. Or, to put it more exactly, the Whites had ten or fifteen programs and bickered among themselves as to which was best.

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2. The administration behind the lines. The Reds, through their popularity in the opening stages and later through the repressive activities of the Cheka were able to administer their territory with some degree of authority. The Whites never were able to control the territory behind their lines and a good portion of their troops was detached from the army to put down the rebellious countryside. The work of the Cheka in this regard cannot be underestimated.

3. Finally, war weariness on the part of the Western World. England, France, the United States and Japan all sent military units to support the White troops. However, the support was apathetic and meaningless and was withdrawn as soon as it was obvious that the Communists were winning. The Whites, who had set large store on foreign intervention, were greatly disheartened by the minuteness of this assistance. On the whole, foreign intervention, by falling so short of what was necessary, did the Reds more good than the Whites.

Summing up then, the four reasons for the success of the Communists were -

1. Military supremacy.
2. The administration behind the lines - particularly the work of the Cheka.
3. Unity of the Reds and division within the ranks of the Whites.
4. War weariness throughout the rest of the world.

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