

Name: _____

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Homeroom: _____

Reading 8

Crisis in Russia

Russia before the Revolution

(1) By 1917, most Russians had lost faith in the leadership ability of Czar Nicholas II. Government corruption was rampant, the Russian economy remained backward, and Nicholas repeatedly dissolved the *Duma*, the Russian parliament established after the 1905 revolution, when it opposed his will. The majority of its population still lived as peasant farmers, using outdated hand tools in a feudal-like system that denied them land ownership and kept them in poverty. Russia, as it is today, is comprised of dozens of ethnic groups that were far from united and added to the discord. However, the immediate cause of the February Revolution--the first phase of the Russian Revolution of 1917--was Russia's disastrous involvement in World War I (1914-18). Militarily, imperial Russia was no match for industrialized Germany, and Russian casualties were greater than those sustained by any nation in any previous war. Meanwhile, the economy was hopelessly disrupted by the costly war effort, and moderates joined Russian radical elements in calling for the overthrow of the czar.



February Revolution: 1917

(2) The February Revolution began on March 8, 1917 (or February 23 on the Julian calendar), when demonstrators clamoring for bread took to the streets in the Russian capital of Petrograd (now called St. Petersburg). Supported by huge crowds of striking industrial workers, the protesters clashed with police but refused to leave the streets. On March 10, the strike spread among all of Petrograd's workers, and irate mobs destroyed police stations. Several factories elected deputies to the Petrograd Soviet, or council of workers' committees, following the model devised during the 1905 revolution. On March 12, the revolution triumphed when the soldiers subsequently formed committees that elected deputies to the Petrograd Soviet.

(3) The imperial government was forced to resign, and the Duma formed a temporary government that peacefully sided with the Petrograd Soviet for control of the revolution. On March 15, Czar Nicholas II abdicated the throne in favor of his brother Michael (1878-1918), whose refusal of the crown brought an end to the czarist autocracy.

Bolshevik Revolution: 1917

(4) In the aftermath of the February Revolution, power was shared between the weak provisional government and the Petrograd Soviet. Then, on November 6 and 7, 1917 leftist revolutionaries led by Bolshevik Party leader Vladimir Lenin launched a nearly bloodless overthrow against the provisional government. The Bolsheviks and their allies occupied government buildings and other strategic locations in Petrograd, and soon formed a new government with Lenin as its head.

(5) Lenin became the virtual dictator of the first Marxist state in the world, and in 1922 the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was established.

Karl Marx and Marxism

(6) In short, Karl Marx was a man who developed a theory about the way people should live as a society or nation. His ideals were most famously studied and implemented by Lenin after the Russian Revolution. Although his theories are complex when applied to the ideas of how a government should run, they are often described as being the opposite of democracy. Democracy, for example runs on a capitalistic system. Capitalism is the economic system that runs on the buying and selling of goods. In theory capitalism helps those who work hard. In order to understand Marxism, one must first understand what Marx thought was wrong with capitalism. The capitalist society is divided into two social classes:

- the working class or proletariat: Marx defined this class as "those individuals who sell their labor and do not own the means of production" whom he believed were responsible for creating the wealth of a society (buildings, bridges and furniture, for example, are physically built by members of this class).
- the bourgeoisie : those who "own the means of production" and employ the proletariat. The bourgeoisie may be further subdivided into the very wealthy bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie: those who employ labor, but also work themselves. These may be small proprietors, land-holding peasants, or trade workers.

(7) Marx developed these ideas to in system that opposes capitalism called communism (a form of socialism). ***Communism would be a social form wherein Capitalism system would have ended and the working classes would be the sole beneficiary of the "fruits of their labour"***. Socialists often (or, in varying degrees) do not recognize an individual right to private property. At any rate, socialist philosophers have argued that there is not a specific right to private property, though it might be in the best interest of society in general for certain individuals to have exclusive control over certain goods, so long as this control does not lead to the class divisions and exploitation of the working class they seek to eliminate. Critics have said that "socialism is a system in which everyone is equally poor", arguing that because individuals are not rewarded more on the basis of supply and demand, there is less incentive for individual achievement, improving technology, and other factors that result in a higher standard of living.