

Module 8: World War I and the Interwar Period

Topic 3 Content: Russian Revolution

Introduction

Russian Revolution

Introduction

While the rest of Europe was fighting against their neighbors in World War I, revolution in Russia led to the overthrow of Russia's absolute monarchy and its replacement with the world's first communist government.



Background Revolutions of 1917 Soviet Union

Narration Script

N/A

Background

Brief History

Russian Revolution

Brief History

Peter the Great (1682-1725)
- Westernized Russia

Tsar Alexander II (1855-1881)
- Reformed land ownership

Revolutionary Roots
- Class tensions increase
- Rich richer and poor poorer
- Lenin and the Bolsheviks

Peter the Great Alexander II

Bolsheviks

Brief History

Background Revolutions of 1917 Soviet Union

Narration Script

Peter Romanov [roman off], also known as Peter the Great, was the greatest ruler of the Romanov dynasty in Russia. As tsar during the late 1600s and early 1700s, he made strides in Westernizing Russia, a step that would help increase Russia's power in Europe and Asia under its later Romanov rulers. At this time, Russia had not reformed its political structure and remained an autocracy, ruled by an absolute leader.

Although some cities were Westernized and fairly wealthy, most of Russia's population lived as poor serfs in conditions not much different from slavery. Ruling from 1855 until 1881, Tsar Alexander II initiated some reforms to try and change this situation. In 1861, he freed the serfs and divided the farmable land in Russia, giving half to the nobles, who were few, and half to the former serfs, who were many. The land wasn't free, however, and the former serfs had to pay the government for their share.

While many welcomed the reforms, others complained that the reforms did not go far enough to bring real social change to Russia. The tsars that followed Alexander II were not as eager to reform Russia and wanted to preserve their autocratic rule, which meant that they did not have to answer to anyone. They even began to censor many parts of Russian society. As time went on, the gap between the rich and the poor remained the same. Poor peasants resented the wealthy nobility, and class tensions increased. Russians felt that they were still oppressed compared to the rest of Europe.

During this period of turmoil, a key leader of the working class, Vladimir Lenin, gained popularity. Lenin had studied the communist writer Karl Marx and planned to overthrow the tsar and start a worldwide Marxist revolution. In 1900, Lenin was exiled from Russia for revolutionary activities, but led a group, known as the Bolsheviks, from afar. Lenin and the Bolsheviks believed that a small group of Marxists could overthrow the government and rule Russia as a dictatorship in the interest of the people.

Background

Causes of the Revolution

Russian Revolution

Causes of the Revolution

- The Russo-Japanese War 1905
 - Russia loses
- Revolution of 1905
 - Bloody Sunday
- Landless Peasants
- Incompetence of Nicholas II
- World War I
 - Military defeats
 - High casualties

Retreat of the Russian Army after the Battle of Mukden during the Russo-Japanese War

Causes of the Revolution

Background Revolutions of 1917 Soviet Union

Narration Script

In early 1905, thousands of workers marched peacefully towards Tsar Nicholas II's winter palace in St. Petersburg to stage a protest outside the gates. The tsar fled the palace leaving orders to stop the march. Palace guards fired on the crowd, killing hundreds of people in an event known as "Bloody Sunday." Angered by the killings, people staged strikes all over the country.

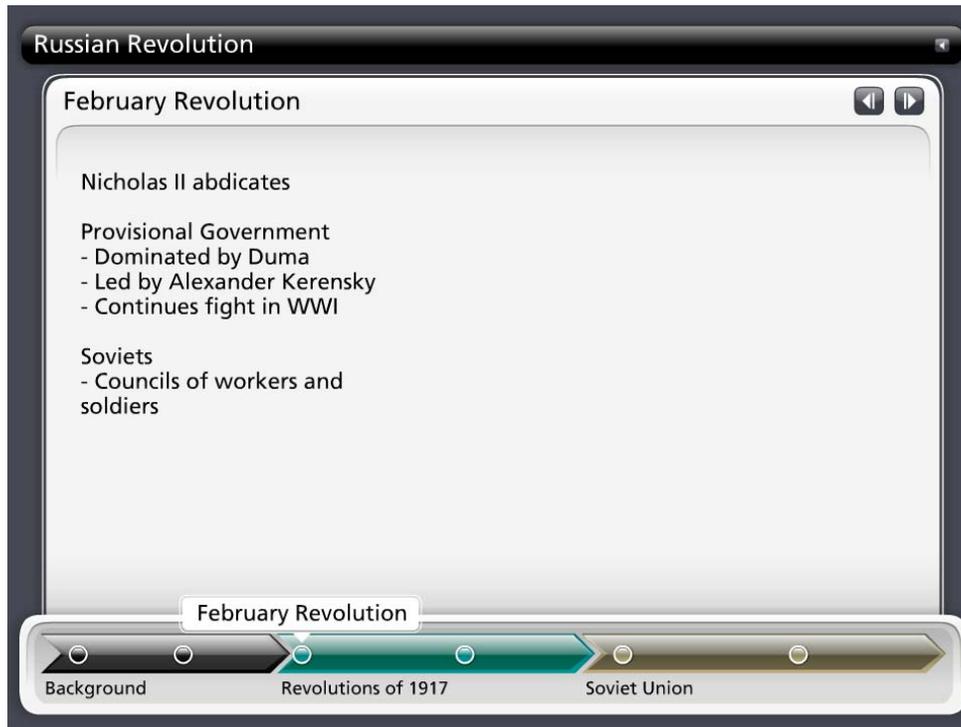
In order to try and ease tensions by the end of 1905, Tsar Nicholas II agreed to establish the Duma [doo ma], which was a legislative body that represented the Russian people. The Duma's role was limited, however, and peasants did not gain any new rights, leaving them resentful of the government.

Meanwhile, Russia's imperialist goals led to a war with Japan. By the 1890s, Russia and Japan were both trying to expand their influence over parts of Asia and China. Russia broke treaties that it had signed with Japan, and the two sides went to war in 1904 for control over Korea and Manchuria. By 1905, Japan had defeated Russia and destroyed the Russian navy. This military defeat led to lost prestige for the government and unrest among the Russian people.

When Russia entered World War I in support of the Slavic peoples living in Serbia, Russia was ill-prepared to fight, and lost 12 million soldiers in just three years. As the war continued, many Russians began to doubt Tsar Nicholas' leadership. When a strange holy man named Rasputin [ras SPEW tin] became a close advisor to the royal family, this didn't help remove people's doubts. Many thought that Rasputin had too much power and he was hated by many Russians, especially the nobility. Eventually, he was murdered by Russian aristocracy. In addition, the Tsarina, Alexandra, was a German princess, and many accused her of spying for the Germans during World War I.

Revolutions of 1917

February Revolution



Narration Script

As the death toll in World War I increased, the Russian people's discontent with the tsar led to revolt. In February of 1917, a bread shortage caused riots in St. Petersburg. The riots escalated to the point where Nicolas II had to give up his throne. Dominated by members of the Duma [doo ma], a provisional government took over ruling the country. Workers and soldiers formed different councils throughout the country known as Soviets. In many places, the Soviets were seen as the legitimate rulers.

Alexander Kerensky [ker wren ski], a man who appealed to both the Duma and the Soviets, was chosen to lead the government, however, this did little to blunt criticism of the provisional government, since it was poorly managed and ineffective at ruling. The provisional government continued to be involved in World War I, but most of the Russian people wanted leave the war. They were angry that the provisional government kept the troops fighting against Germany.

Revolutions of 1917

October Revolution



Narration Script

In April 1917, Vladimir Lenin returned to Russia and plotted to overthrow the provisional government with his Bolshevik supporters. Russia faced further hardships in World War I, and people increased their support for the Bolsheviks since they were one of the only groups calling to end the war. The Bolsheviks also wanted to redistribute land and wealth among the Russian people. Lenin became more popular with his calls for “peace, land, and bread” for Russia.

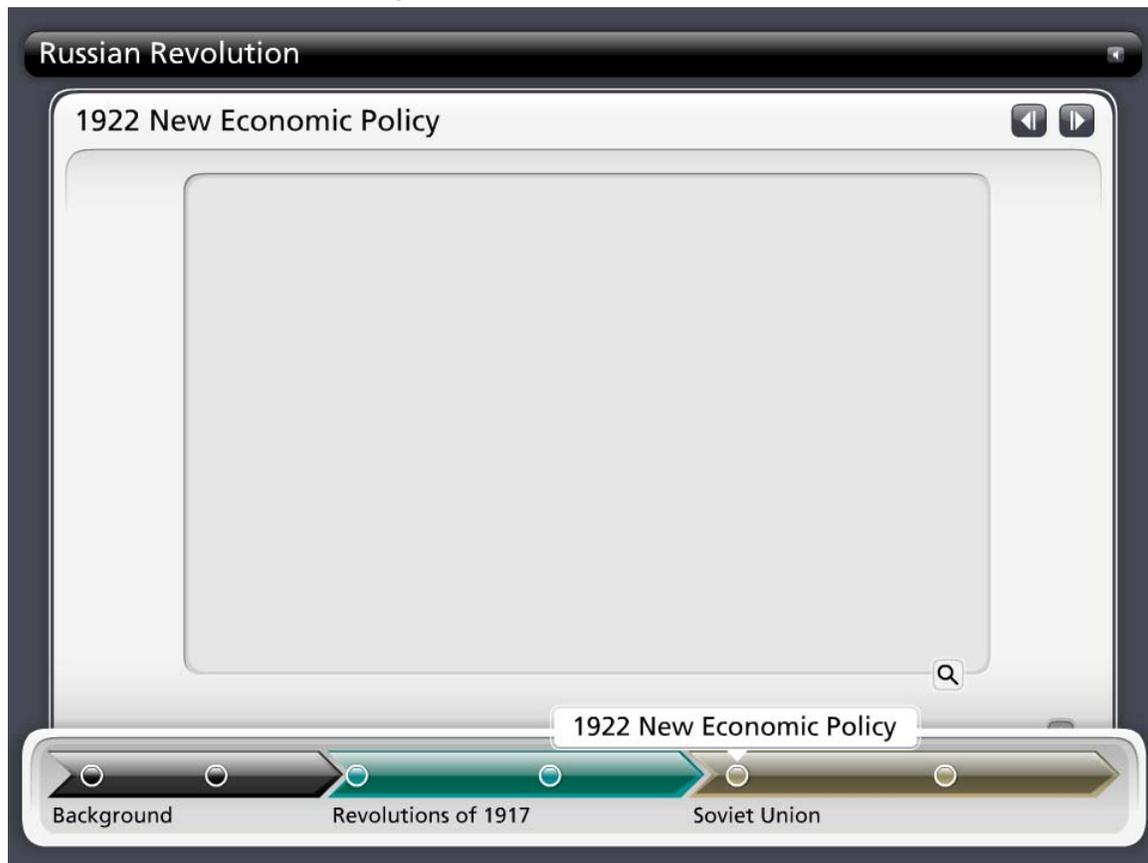
In October of 1917, the Bolsheviks ousted the provisional government establishing a “socialist order” based on three main objectives. Almost immediately, the Bolsheviks signed a peace treaty, ending the war with Germany. Next, the government took over all of the major industries within Russia. Then, the Bolsheviks focused on redistributing the wealth and farmland among the peasants.

Elections were held in November of 1917 for an assembly. When non-Bolshevik groups won a majority of seats, Lenin eliminated the assembly. He only wanted Bolsheviks to rule Russia as a “dictatorship of the proletariat”.

Many of Lenin’s opponents didn’t accept his rule. By the summer of 1918, his opponents formed the White Army with the goal of removing the Bolsheviks from power. The White Army was supported by a number of European countries and the U.S. Leon Trotsky led the Bolsheviks’ Red Army against the White Army. From 1918 to 1920, the two sides fought a bloody war. The Bolsheviks eventually won as a result of Trotsky’s leadership and because the White Army was not unified in its goals.

Soviet Union

1922 New Economic Policy



Narration Script

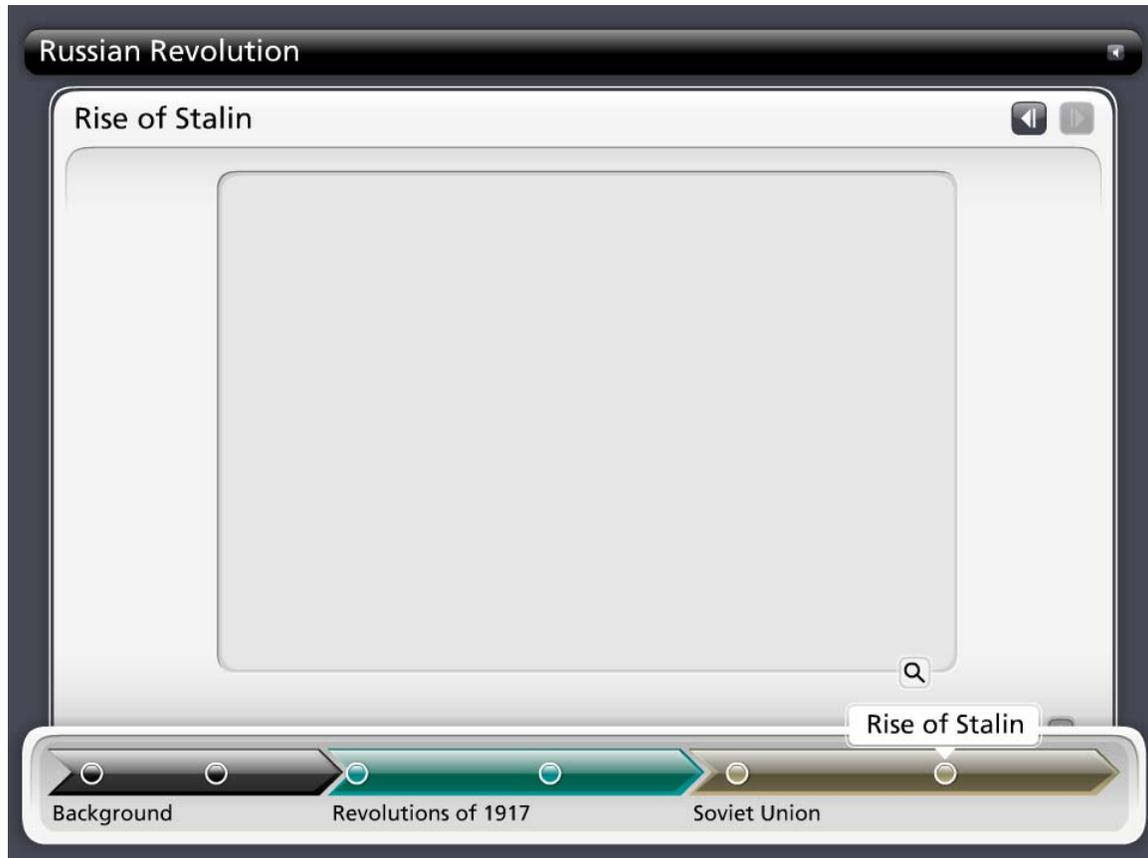
Stretching all the way from Europe to the Far East, the Russian Empire contained a number of peoples who spoke many languages and had different historical experiences. Lenin set up different “self-governing republics” for some of these regions, such as the Ukraine and Georgia. The new name for the country, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R), or the Soviet Union, reflected this political structure. Lenin changed the name of the Bolsheviks to the Communist Party to show its connection to Karl Marx’s writings, and its commitment to communism. The Communist Party dominated all aspects in the country.

As economic conditions in the country worsened, Lenin introduced his New Economic Policy in order to stimulate economic growth and food production. This policy allowed some aspects of capitalism to exist. The state maintained control of banks, foreign trade, and large industries, but people could open small businesses for private profit.

In the countryside, peasants maintained private ownership of their small farms, but could now freely sell their surplus crops for profit. Eventually, the economy recovered to prewar levels. Lenin saw the New Economic Policy as a temporary retreat from communism to restore stability in Russia.

Soviet Union

Rise of Stalin



Narration Script

Lenin suffered a series of strokes in 1922 which slowly compelled him to retire from politics, and he eventually died in 1924. Lenin's body was embalmed and placed in a mausoleum in Red Square in Moscow. He is still there today, and thousands of people visit his tomb each year.

After Lenin's death, Leon Trotsky and Joseph Stalin vied to become leader of the country. Trotsky was the leader of the army during the Russian Civil War. Under his leadership, the Red Army eventually defeated the White Army. Stalin was from Georgia, which borders with Turkey along the Black Sea. He was a tough man who had worked his way up through the ranks of the Communist Party. After he succeeded in replacing Lenin as ruler, Stalin had Trotsky exiled from the country in 1929. In 1940, it is believed that Stalin had his rival assassinated while Trotsky was living in Mexico. As leader of the Soviet Union, Stalin oversaw the country as it developed into one of the world's two superpowers.