*These notes analyse the key events of 1917. As you revise,* ***you should incorporate your notes from class / other reading to expand this document****.*

*The previous guides / learning have essentially been condensed here to help focus your thinking on analysing the events of 1917. However, you may wish to refer back to get more detail when you are planning your essays.*

**A. THE FEBRUARY REVOLUTION**

**Key dates:**  
1891- Famine  
1904- Defeat in Russo-Japanese war  
1905- Bloody Sunday and revolution

1911- Assassination of Stolypin

1912- Lena Goldfield strike

1914- Outbreak of WW1

1915- Nicholas II assumes direct control of army  
1917, February 23rd- International Women's Day + worker's revolt

1917, February 25th-26th – soldiers join protests

1917, 2nd March – Nicholas II abdicates – Duma take control as the ‘Provisional Government’  
  
**Long term causes:**

The Russian People and Russification:

* Large parts of the Empire added to Russia only in the 19th century- for example Caucasus 1864.
* Russia therefore contained a **vast amounts of different nationalities**- Russians only half the population.
* These nationalities had their own language, culture and traditions which made it very difficult to keep under one rule especially since the Tsar had little, if not none, control over these vast areas of the empire.
* Many nationalities resented Russian control- especially the policy of **Russification** which was intensified by Alexander III and kept during Nicholas II's reign.
* This policy aimed to suppress other nationalities and minorities than the Russian- use Russian language instead of their own and adapt to Russian customs. Key example in Poland where it became forbidden to teach Polish in schools.
* National minorities saw this as discrimination and during the late 19th century, there was an increasing amount of uprisings and strikes for these minorities, seeking greater autonomy.

The social structure of Tsarist Russia:

* **Middle classes / ‘intelligentsia’**: Small but growing (as a result of industrialisation and consequent expansion of urban life) number of merchants, bankers and factory owners/managers. The professional class (lawyers, doctors) was increasing and beginning to play a significant role in local governments- growing intellectual class who sought more participation in politics
* **Peasants**: Life difficult as most owned only small patches of land and working on the states of the nobility. Years of bad harvest there would be widespread starvation; in 1891 400,000 died. Most poor, illiterate and uneducated. Stolypin’s reforms incomplete.
* **Land and agriculture**: Methods were inefficient and backwards- still used wooden ploughs and very few animals and tools. Not enough land to go around, vast expansion of peasant population in the later half of the 19th century led to overcrowding and competition for land.
* **Urban workers and industry:** Around 58% were literate (twice the national average) which meant that they could articulate their grievances and were receptive to revolutionary ideas. Wages were generally low and high number of deaths from accidents and work related health issues. The industry production was very low in the start of the 19th century but increased fast and by 1914, Russia was the fourth largest producer of iron, steel and coal.

**Mid-term causes, 1914 - 1917**  
Modernization and its contradictions:

* At the beginning of the 20th century, Russia was still a very backwards country and the Tsar wanted Russia to become a world power- Russia had to modernize.
* Russia was poor, agriculture hopelessly inefficient and thousands of peasants starved when the harvest was poor.
* There were often peasant unrest and uprisings which made the regime unstable and it was essential to modernize agriculture and industry to take the surplus of people from the land into the cities.
* However, modernization meant a serious threat to the regime - it was difficult to maintain Tsarist autocracy as most modern industrial countries had democracies and parliaments in which the middle class was featured.
* Social tensions were created when millions moved from land to cities and growing discontent among the workers led to instability.
* The need for an educated workforce made people a larger challenge to the government the growth of the middle class created pressure for political change and more representative governments.
* Difficult to modernize within the framework of autocracy!

The First World War *(previous guide):*

* The majority of historians acknowledge that the First World War played a major role in bringing about the February Revolution.
* **Military failures:** There were heavy defeats and huge number of Russians were killed in 1914 and 1915- led to anger about the way the Tsar and the government were conducting war. In September 1917 the **Tsar went to the front to take personal charge**; he was from then on held personally responsible for the defeats!
* **Difficult living conditions:** The war caused acute distress in the cities, especially Petrograd and Moscow. The war meant that food, goods and raw materials were in short supply and hundreds of factories closed and thousands of workers put out of work. Led to inflation and lack of fuel meant that most were cold as well as hungry- urban workers became were hostile towards the Tsarist government. In the countryside, peasants became increasingly angry about the conscription of all young men who seldom returned from the Front.
* **Role of the Tsarina and Rasputin**: The Tsar made a huge mistake in leaving his wife and the monk Rasputin in charge of the government while he was at the Front. Ministers were changed frequently in favour of friends or people who performed poorly and as a result, the situation in the cities deteriorated quickly with food and fuel in short supply. They became totally discredited and were ridiculed by cartoon etc. The Tsar was also blamed for putting them in charge and the higher intelligentsia of the society and army generals became disenchanted with the tsar's leadership and no longer supported him- by beginning of 1917, very few people were prepared to defend him.
* **Failure to make political reforms:** During the war, the Tsar had the chance to make some concessions which could have saved his rule- for example a constitutional monarchy which would have taken away the pressure from the Tsar personally. The Duma was fully behind the Tsar in fighting the war. The "Progressive Bloc" emerged who suggested that the tsar establish a "government of public confidence" (letting them rule the country) but the tsar rejected their approach and any other concessions.

**Short-term causes, 1917**  
Impact of the war! - Support for the Tsar by the end of 1916 was practically inexistent. The generals told the Tsar that they would no longer support him! (key contrast to revolution in 1905).  
  
International Women's Day:

* Frustrations from the workers after the cold and harsh winter of 1916 exploded in the streets of the main cities.
* Shortages of food, fuel and other materials- caused by the war- had driven up the prices and strikes and riots had caused high levels of tension in the capital, Petrograd.
* When news of bread rationing hit the streets towards the end of February 1917, the queues and scuffles over the remaining bread stocks turned into riots.
* 23rd of February- International Women's Day- the discontent became more focused and women took the lead in politicising a march through Petrograd.
* By the afternoon, women had persuaded the men from factories to join them and the protest started to gather momentum.
* Over the next three days, the demonstrations grew and the demands for bread were accompanied by demands for the end of the war and an end to the Tsar!

The mutiny of the soldiers:

* By 25th and 26th of February, the soldiers joined the demonstrations and most of them were desperate not to be sent to the front line where the Russian army were facing huge losses.
* As the Tsar heard of the trouble in Petrograd, he ordered troops to put down the disorder- on Sunday 26th of February some regiments opened fire on the crowds.
* The crowds became more hostile and one by one, the regiments moved over to the side of the people and as Orlando Figes states; "The mutiny of the Petrograd garrison turned the disorders of the last four days into a full-scale revolution".
* The main struggle took place between the soldiers and police and the revolution had officially begun!  
    
  **Nature of the revolution (i.e. how planned and organised was it? Who made up the bulk of those carrying out the revolution? Popular?)**
* There seemed to be no general organisation of the events as no political party was in charge- all main leaders of the revolutionary parties were abroad or on exile.
* However, socialist cells, particularly from the Bolshevik revolutionary party were active in spreading the protest and getting workers out on the streets with their red flags and banners.

**Effects of revolution?**

* After the mutiny of the soldiers and the full-scale outbreak of the revolution, most people looked to the duma, the Russian parliament, to control the situation.
* However, the socialists were already forming their own organisation to represent the interest of the workers- the Soviet!
* When the Tsar realised that the situation in Petrograd had gone out of control, he had ordered troops to march to the capital to restore order. He had also suspended the Duma however the Duma members remained in the Tauride Palace and meanwhile people milled outside demanding that the Duma take control over the situation- on 2nd of March the tsar abdicated for himself and his son in favour of his brother Michael; but Michael realising that the people would not want another autocratic government, refused and the Romanov dynasty came to a swift end!
* The Duma started forming a new government- the Provisional Government.

**Historiography**

Even though the February Revolution of 1917 is, to a degree, less controversial in nature than that of October, historians have nevertheless differed in their explanation as to why tsarism collapsed. A number of explanations have been put forward but the relative importance of different factors is an area of dispute amongst historians of all schools of thought:

The inherent weaknesses in the institutions and ideologies that the Old Regime used to maintain its authority were fundamentally to blame: tsarism was facing a ‘crisis of modernisation’. The tsars wanted all the success and power of a modern economic society, but unlike the West, were unwilling to grant the social freedoms that generally went along with such developments.

1. Unmet class expectations and perceived social inequality created the revolutionary situation.

2. The government failed to adjust to changing circumstances, as exemplified by the failure of liberal reform in Russia after the 1905 revolution.

3. The individual character of Nicholas II; he was simply ill-suited to being an autocrat.

4. The economic, social, political and military impact of the First World War simply created unbearable strains upon the Tsarist regime.

**B. THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION**

**Key dates and events in 1917:**  
  
**March**  
**2 Provisional government formed (Tsar abdicates)**  
**June**  
**16 June offensive**  
**July**  
**3-4 July days**  
**August**  
**26-30 Kornilov affair**  
**October**  
**25-26 Bolshevik seizure of power**   
  
**1) NOTE: for LONG and MID-TERM causes - Social, Political, Economic - see**[**causes of February Revolution**](https://rudbeck-ib-history-revision.wikispaces.com/February+Revolution%2C+1917)**, as these issues which caused the abdication of the Tsar are still present in October 1917 and form the foundation for the ongoing crisis in Russia which Lenin and the Bolsheviks are able to exploit.**  
  
**Social & Political problems**

* Middle classes: Small number but growing number of merchants, bankers and industrialists as the industry developed. The intelligentsia sought more participation in politics!
* Land and agriculture: Methods were inefficient and backwards- still used wooden ploughs and very few animals and tools. Not enough land to go around, vast expansion of peasant population in the latter half of the 19th century led to overcrowding and competition for land. Peasants wanted social change!
* Urban workers and industry: Around 58% were literate, twice the national average which meant that they could articulate their grievances and were receptive to revolutionary ideas. Wages were generally low and high number of deaths from accidents and work related health issues. The industry production was very low in the start of the 19th century but increased fast and by 1914, Russia was the fourth largest producer of iron, steel and coal. Instability in cities and the misery of the workers led to social + political instability in the towns.

**Economic problems:**  
**Inflation:**From 1914-1917 inflation increased by 400 percent  
  
**Crisis in cities** : Overcrowded + poor housing + poor living and working conditions (created by economic problems in Russia) led to social tension in Cities   
  
**2) Continued impact of WW1 (*social and economic problems)*:**  
  
The war caused acute distress in the cities, especially Petrograd and Moscow. The war meant that food, goods and raw materials were in short supply and hundreds of factories closed and thousands of workers put out of work. Led to inflation and lack of fuel meant that most were cold as well as hungry- urban workers became increasingly hostile towards the Provisional Government. In the countryside, peasants became increasingly angry about the conscription of all young men who seldom returned from the Front.   
  
**3) Weaknesses and failures of the Provisional Government (*political problems, interrelated with social and economic problems):***  
  
The political failures of the government undermined their power and authority, which created the circumstances for Lenin's rise to power:  
 **1) Nature of the ‘Provisional’ Government**– it was not elected by the people, therefore seeing itself as a temporary body. It planned to arrange elections for a national parliament (Constituent Assembly) and then dissolve itself – Kerensky and other Provisional Government leaders (as liberals and believers in democracy) therefore would not make any big, long term decisions (e.g. to end the war) until the elections had been held. This meant their ability to resolve the burning issues was limited.  
  
**2) Divisions in Provisional Government helped Lenin to power.** There were divisions in the Provisional Government between socialists and liberals who often blocked each other’s decisions (remember, they operated as the Duma, voting to make decisions). This internal weakness of the Provisional Government crippled their ability to enforce control over the country.   
  
**3) Provisional Government power ‘illusory’.** The Provisional Government only really had power over government affairs, real power ‘on the street’ lay in the hands of the soviets (worker's councils). These Soviets had all the practical power in Petrograd such as the control over factories and railways – therefore there was a ‘dual government’ in operation that significantly limited authority.  
  
**4) Provisional Government’s own Liberalism.** In its rush to implement liberal ideas of freedom etc, the Provisional Government passed legislation that allowed freedom of speech, press as well as the dismantling of the secret police. Now political parties could mobilize publically and attract members more easily. The opposition to the Provisional Government were not therefore suppressed –indeed, as the Provisional Government had dismantled the secret police, they could not systematically crush revolutionary opposition.   
  
The four above factors made the October Bolshevik Revolution possible by ensuring that the Provisional Government were in no fit state to stand up to determined and violent revolution.  
  
**5) The Provisional Government also committed several blunders** during the months leading up to the October revolution, which benefitted the Bolsheviks directly:

i) **June offensive**  
In June Provisional Government launched an all-out offensive on Germany to put the country in a better position in the war (WW1) – the hope being that Germany would then be in a weaker bargaining position in any peace deal. The offensive (called the June offensive) ended in disaster and the Provisional Government was deeply discredited. As a result, the Bolsheviks and other political parties got increased support.   
  
**ii) July days**  
In July a spontaneous uprising occurred, which consisted of 500 000 soldiers, workers and sailors (who again rebelled in Kronstadt). Lenin, assumed a leading role in this movement, encouraging a march to Petrograd to demand the overthrow of the Provisional Government. However, the rebellion was dismantled as the government still retained control of some loyal Russian troops. The July Days did damage the reputation of the Provisional Government further, but it also brought into question the competence of the Bolsheviks as revolutionary leaders.   
Fitzpatrick argues that ***"the whole affair damaged Bolshevik morale and Lenin's credibility as a revolutionary leader"***  
  
**iii) Kornilov affair**  
In August 1917, general Kornilov took his army and marched to Petrograd to overthrow the Provisional Government. He was unhappy with the way they were handling politics and WW1. **Alexander Kerensky** (leader of Provisional Government), was panicked because he was unable to put up an adequate defence with his limited loyal forces, decided to arm the Bolsheviks so that they could help him against Kornilov.

However, Kornilov's army did not reach Petrograd as some of his soldiers mutinied and railway workers sabotaged the only effective way of transporting his army. Now the Provisional Government’s reputation was shattered and the government started to disintegrate. Meanwhile, the Bolsheviks got more support because they were perceived as the defenders of Petrograd – they were also now better armed than rival revolutionary groups such as the Mensheviks.  
  
**4) Ideological appeal of Lenin and Bolshevism, and role of Lenin** (*appeal of radical alternative, charismatic and dynamic leader, taking advantage of crisis situation in Russia in 1917 with all the problems listed above)*  
Lenin's political ideas attracted widespread support among the Russian people. On 16th of April 1917, Lenin gave a speech called the **April Theses**. The speech called for a 1) World-wide socialist revolution 2) Land reform to peasants 3) Immediate end to WW1 3) Immediate end to cooperation with PG 4) Urged Soviets to take power.   
  
The ideas in the speech were made into simple but effective and radical slogans such as **"all power to the soviets**" or "**bread, peace and land".** These slogans attracted a lot of support for the Bolsheviks, as they appealed to the workers. They provided the workers with a radical solution to the problems in Russia.   
  
The speech also made the Bolshevik party standout since no other political party wanted an immediate end to the war. The uniqueness of the Bolshevik party attracted them a lot of support among the workers.   
  
In the April Theses Lenin also revised Karl Marx ideas, which claimed that Russia was not ready for a revolution. Lenin however proclaimed that Russia was, in fact, ready and that revolution had to happen now because the Provisional Government would never be weaker. Lenin succeeded in persuading the party; by the end of April the revolution was being planned. Without Lenin and his speech / personal influence, the Bolshevik revolution would never have taken place.   
  
Lenin's leadership also inspired the masses to join the party and revolution. Lenin held many speeches during 1917, and his rhetorical skills attracted enormous amounts of public support. Lenin was also a practical leader and could adapt his policies to the wants and needs of the workers. Thus he gained even more support.   
  
**5) Role of Trotsky in executing the revolution (*ruthlessly efficient organiser*)**

Trotsky was elected Chairman of Petrograd Soviets in 1917, which gave him immense practical power over the city (control of bridges, railways etc.), which was a valuable asset to Bolsheviks. Trotsky also used his position as Chairman to claim that the Bolsheviks were seizing power in the name of the Soviets, and hence workers accepted that it would be the Bolsheviks who conducted the revolution on everyone’s behalf. It was not until Lenin closed down the new Constituent Assembly (see next booklet) that workers realized that they had been fooled.   
  
Trotsky also played a key role in setting up and organizing the red army, as well as the actual take-over of power. Trotsky also persuaded Lenin to wait until October to conduct the revolution, when Bolsheviks had firmly established their power within the Soviets.   
  
Trotsky was as also an excellent orator and helped to inspire the masses.   
  
**Historiography of the October Revolution and Lenin's Rise to Power - minority coup d’état vs popular revolution?**  
  
**Communist view Party's view of October revolution:**  
-Inevitable result of class struggle  
-Lenin's leadership was vital  
-Popular revolution, inspired + organized by Bolsheviks and in particular Lenin  
  
**Liberal view of October revolution (e.g. Robert Conquest, Richard Pipes)**  
-Coup d’état, Bolshevik used the weaknesses of the Provisional Government to seize power   
-Bolsheviks had only limited popular support  
-Bolsheviks were successful because of the leadership of Trotsky + Lenin   
  
**Revisionist view of October revolution (e.g. Orlando Figes)**   
-Emphasizes importance of revolution from below (i.e. popular revolution)   
-However, Bolsheviks "hijacked" popular revolution and ruthlessly betrayed the people by imposing a single-party dictatorship, suppressing the Soviets