

The Russian Revolution Reading Notes

In 1917, a group named the Bolsheviks overthrew the czar of Russia and took control of the country for themselves. This is often called the Russian Revolution or the Bolshevik Revolution.

Causes of the Russian Revolution

1. Most Russians lived as serfs: Russia did not industrialize during the Industrial Revolution – it remained an agricultural country. 20% of people owned the land and the other 80% were serfs who worked the land. Serfs were treated like slaves.
2. Russians were required to pay large taxes.
3. Russians were not allowed to move freely within their own country – that had to get government permission to move.
4. Serfs/peasants were subject to the death penalty more frequently than wealthy Russians.
5. Russia was defeated in the Russo-Japanese War – this caused great casualties and humiliated the Russians.
6. Bloody Sunday: In January of 1905, many Russians marched to the czar's palace and demanded better living conditions. The czar's army fired on the crowd and killed 1000 people.
7. The czar focused too much attention on WWI and not enough on the problems within his own country.
8. Many serfs/peasants were living in poverty so severe that they couldn't even afford a loaf of bread.

The Bolsheviks

The Bolsheviks were led by Vladimir Lenin. They overthrew the czar and Lenin became the leader of Russia. He did three things to restore order to Russia:

- He brutally crushed any group who tried to revolt against him – he created a climate of fear where no one dared to question him
- New Economic Policy: this allowed farmers to keep their surplus instead of giving it to the government. It allowed individuals to buy and sell goods for profit and it encouraged foreign trade.
- Gave Russia the name the United Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) which united all Russians together.

After Lenin died, Joseph Stalin became dictator (absolute ruler) of the USSR. Stalin made two major changes within the country:

- Five Year Plan: this was meant to develop the economy – it gave control of all economic decisions to the government. Production of consumer goods was stopped and production of resource goods was increased. The

government decided who worked, where they worked, when they worked and how much they got paid.

- Agricultural Revolution: all farms were forced to join together into collective farms (farms worked by hundreds of families and owned by the government). This took all of the land away from the people and forced them to work for the government. If you refused, you were imprisoned and starved.