Your notes

GCSE History: revision notes

Russia, 1894–1945: Tsardom and communism

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Tsarist Russia, 1894–1914

- Nicholas II ruled from 1894 as an autocrat (a ruler with total power), claiming his power came from God. Most Russians were poor peasants, and factory workers lived in terrible conditions.
- Opposition grew: the Socialist Revolutionaries (supported by peasants), the Social Democrats (Marxists, who split in 1903 into Lenin's **Bolsheviks** and the Mensheviks) and the liberal Kadets.
- Defeat in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05) and Bloody Sunday (January 1905), when troops fired on peaceful marchers, led to the 1905 Revolution. Nicholas survived by issuing the October Manifesto, which promised an elected parliament (the **Duma**), but later he reduced the **Duma**'s powers.
- Stolypin, Prime Minister from 1906 to 1911, combined harsh repression (the hangman's noose became known as 'Stolypin's necktie') with land reforms to create a class of richer peasants. He was assassinated in 1911.

The First World War and the revolutions of 1917

- The war went badly: heavy defeats (such as Tannenberg, 1914), millions of casualties, food and fuel shortages, and rising prices. In 1915 Nicholas took personal command of the army, leaving the Tsarina and the mystic Rasputin influential in the government. Rasputin was murdered in December 1916.
- The February Revolution (1917): strikes and bread riots in Petrograd, soldiers joined the protesters, and Nicholas abdicated. A **Provisional Government** took over, but shared power with the Petrograd **Soviet** ('dual power').
- The **Provisional Government** kept fighting the war and delayed giving land to the peasants. Lenin returned in April 1917 with the April Theses: 'Peace, Land and Bread' and 'All power to the **Soviets**'. Bolshevik support grew, especially after the Kornilov affair (August 1917).

- The October Revolution (1917): the **Bolsheviks**, organised by Trotsky and the Military Revolutionary Committee, seized key buildings in Petrograd and took power. (Russia's old calendar was 13 days behind, so these revolutions were in March and November by today's calendar.)

Lenin's Russia, 1917–1924

- Lenin's decrees gave land to the peasants and promised peace. The Cheka (secret police) crushed opponents. The elected Constituent Assembly was closed down in January 1918, after the **Bolsheviks** failed to win a majority.
- The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (March 1918) ended the war with Germany, but Russia gave up huge areas of land, people and industry.
- In the Civil War (1918–21), the Reds (**Bolsheviks**) beat the Whites, helped by Trotsky's Red Army, control of the central railways and cities, and the Whites' divisions. The **Tsar** and his family were murdered in July 1918.
- **War Communism** (seizing grain and state control of industry) caused famine and revolts. After the Kronstadt Mutiny (March 1921), Lenin introduced the **New Economic Policy** (NEP), which allowed some private trade.

Stalin's USSR, 1924–1945

- After Lenin died in January 1924, Stalin used his position as General Secretary to defeat Trotsky and other rivals. Trotsky was exiled in 1929 and murdered in Mexico in 1940.
- The **Five-Year Plans** (from 1928) industrialised the USSR at great speed, building coal mines, steelworks, power stations and new cities such as Magnitogorsk, using harsh targets and forced labour.
- **Collectivisation** joined small farms into large collective farms. **Kulaks** (richer peasants) were persecuted, and a terrible famine in 1932–33 killed millions, especially in Ukraine.
- The Great Terror (1936–38) brought show trials of old **Bolsheviks**, **purges** of the army and the Communist Party, and millions of people sent to Gulag labour camps. A cult of personality presented Stalin as a hero.
- Germany invaded in June 1941. After the siege of Leningrad and victory at Stalingrad (1943), **Soviet** forces reached Berlin in 1945.

Key terms

Autocracy	Rule by one person with total power.
Tsar	The emperor of Russia.
Duma	The Russian parliament set up after the 1905 Revolution.
Bolsheviks	Lenin's revolutionary communist party.
Provisional Government	The temporary government that ruled Russia between February and October 1917.
Soviet	An elected council of workers and soldiers.

Your notes

War Communism	Lenin's harsh economic policy during the Civil War.
New Economic Policy	Lenin's 1921 policy allowing some private trade.
Collectivisation	Joining small farms into large, state-controlled farms.
Kulak	A richer peasant.
Five-Year Plan	Stalin's targets for rapid industrial growth.
Purges	Stalin's removal of suspected enemies by arrest, imprisonment or execution.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. What is an autocrat?
2. What happened on Bloody Sunday in January 1905?
3. What did the October Manifesto (1905) promise?
4. Who was Rasputin?
5. What slogan did Lenin use in the April Theses?
6. Who organised the Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917?
7. What did the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (1918) do?
8. Why did Lenin introduce the New Economic Policy in 1921?

Answers

1. A ruler with total power
2. Troops fired on peaceful marchers in St Petersburg
3. An elected parliament, the Duma
4. A mystic with great influence over the Tsarina
5. Peace, Land and Bread
6. Leon Trotsky
7. Ended Russia's war with Germany, giving up large areas of land
8. War Communism had caused famine and revolts

What to do next

Practise 12 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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