Your notes

GCSE History: revision notes

Russia and the Soviet Union, 1917–41

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The revolutions of 1917

- In February 1917, strikes and mutinies forced Tsar Nicholas II to abdicate. A **Provisional Government** took over but carried on the unpopular war.
- In October 1917, the **Bolsheviks**, led by Lenin and organised by Trotsky, seized power. They took Russia out of the war at **Brest-Litovsk** (March 1918), giving up huge areas of land.

The Civil War and Lenin's Russia, 1918–24

- The Reds (**Bolsheviks**) beat the Whites in the Civil War (1918–21), helped by Trotsky's Red Army and the Cheka (secret police). **War Communism** took grain by force.
- After the Kronstadt mutiny (1921), Lenin brought in the New Economic Policy (NEP), allowing some private trade. Lenin died in 1924.

Stalin's rise and the economy

- Stalin defeated Trotsky and other rivals and was in control by 1928. The **Five-Year Plans** (from 1928) built heavy industry fast, helped by propaganda heroes such as Alexei Stakhanov.
- **Collectivisation** forced peasants into collective farms. **Kulaks** (richer peasants) were persecuted, and millions died in the famine of 1932–33, especially in Ukraine.

Terror and control, 1934–41

- After the murder of Kirov (1934), Stalin's **Great Terror** (1936–38) used the NKVD, show trials and labour camps (gulags) to remove enemies. The army was purged.

- A **cult of personality**, censorship and socialist realism in the arts controlled people's minds. The 1936 Constitution promised rights that did not exist in practice.

Your notes

Key terms

Provisional Government	The government that ruled Russia between February and October 1917.
Bolsheviks	Lenin's communist party.
Brest-Litovsk	The 1918 treaty taking Russia out of the war.
War Communism	Bolshevik policy in the Civil War, taking grain by force.
NEP	The New Economic Policy (1921), allowing some private trade.
Five-Year Plans	Stalin's plans to industrialise rapidly.
Collectivisation	Merging farms into large state-controlled farms.
Kulak	A richer peasant, persecuted under Stalin.
Great Terror	Stalin's purges of 1936–38.
Cult of personality	Propaganda presenting the leader as a hero.

Quick questions

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

1. What happened to the Tsar in February 1917?
2. Who led the Bolsheviks in October 1917?
3. What did the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (1918) do?
4. Who won the Russian Civil War?
5. Why did Lenin introduce the NEP (1921)?
6. What were the Five-Year Plans?
7. Who were the kulaks?
8. Whose murder in 1934 led to the Great Terror?

Answers

1. He abdicated
2. Lenin
3. Took Russia out of the First World War
4. The Reds (Bolsheviks)
5. War Communism had caused hunger and revolt, such as the Kronstadt mutiny
6. Plans to build heavy industry fast
7. Richer peasants persecuted under collectivisation
8. Sergei Kirov

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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