8b: The Russian Revolution

Kagan p 854 – 858, 880 – 886
Spielvogel p 797 – 802, 833

I. Context (Russia in the 1800s Review)
   A. Alexander I (the Great) (1801 – 1825)
      1. Defeated Napoleon
      2. Initially open to reform influences, later more conservative
   B. Nicholas I (1825 – 1855) - reactionary
      1. Autocracy, Orthodoxy and Nationality doctrine
      2. “Policeman of Europe” helps maintain conservative order
      3. Crimean War
   C. Alexander II (The “Czar Liberator”) (1855 – 1881)
      1. Loss in Crimea convinced him to free the serfs in 1861
         a. Serfs made to pay for land, owe huge debt to state
         b. Emancipation seen as falling short
      2. Institutes zemstvo system of local rule
      3. Later rule is more conservative, not receptive to criticism
      4. Assassinated in 1881 by anarchists
   D. Alexander III (1881 – 1894) = reactionary
      1. No foreign wars
      2. Pogroms against Jewish population
      3. Russification (Poles and Finns)
   E. Nicholas II (1894 – 1917) = last czar
      1. Details to follow

II. Russian modernization
   A. Sergei Witte oversaw Russian industrialization in the 1890s.
      1. Finance minister under both Alexander III and Nicholas II.
      2. Aggressively courted western capital and advanced technology to
         build factories.
         a. Resulted in rise of a small Russian middle-class.
      3. Gov’t-built state-owned railroads 2x to 35,000 miles by 1900.
         a. Construction of Trans-Siberian Railway helped to modernize
            Russia; it connected Moscow with Vladivostok—5,000 miles.
      4. Russia placed on gold standard to strengthen govt. finances
         a. By 1900, Russia 4th in steel production (behind the U.S.,
            Germany and Britain).
         b. By 1900, Russia exported half the world’s refined petroleum.
      5. As in western Europe, industrialization in Russia contributed to the
         spread of Marxist thought and the transformation of the Russian
         revolutionary movement after 1890 (as industrial workers felt
         exploited).
   B. Despite economic and social reforms, Russia's economic problems
      were still staggering by 1900.
      1. One-third of Russian farmland was not utilized; food production
         could not keep pace with the increasing population.
         a. Russia had become the most populous nation in Europe by
            the late-nineteenth century.
      2. The depression of 1899 wiped out gains since 1890 resulting in
         tremendous unemployment.
      3. 60% of the population was illiterate, although literacy was
         growing in urban areas like Moscow and St. Petersburg.
   C. Russia’s plight was aggravated by the Russo-Japanese War of 1905.
II. Tsar Nicholas II (r. 1894-1917)
   A. Last of the Romanov tsars
   B. Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905)
      1. Russia had established a sphere of influence in Manchuria and
         now sought Korea (which had just been acquired by Japan in the
         Sino-Japanese War).
      2. Sought a railroad through Manchuria to Vladivostok on the Pacific
         Ocean
      3. The Russian fleet was destroyed by Japan in 1905 and Russian
         losses were heavy at the bloody land battle at Mukden.
      4. Treaty of Portsmouth (1905) •
         a. Russia accepted Japanese control of Korea and gave
            concessions to Japan in Manchuria
         b. The Russian government now turned its attention away from
            east Asia and focused instead on expanding Russian control
            in the Balkans.
         c. Russia's dismal showing in the war became a major cause of
            the Revolution of 1905.
         • Many Russians were angry that soldiers were dying in a
           faraway location for a losing cause.
   C. Revolution of 1905
      1. Liberalism had gradually grown in certain segments of the
         Russian population over the previous 50 years.
         a. A professional middle class emerged due to increased educ.
            opportunities, increased gov't jobs, and industrialization
         b. Liberals incl. some nobles and some leaders of the Zemstvos.
      2. The poor economy and strains of war led peasants, the growing
         urban proletariat, and the middle class to demand reforms.
         a. Some reforms included reduction of the work day (1897) and
            a factory insurance law (1903).
         a. 200,000 workers and peasants marched peacefully to the
            "Winter Palace" asking the tsar for reforms.
         b. Tsar Nicholas II was not in town.
         c. The army fired on marchers in cold blood, killing about 300
            and wounding an additional 1,000. C
      4. A general strike, peasant revolts, and troop mutinies paralyzed
         Russia by October and Nicholas was forced to make concessions
         in the October Manifesto.
         a. creation of a national parliament—the Duma.
         • Universal male suffrage
         • Granted free speech, assembly and press
         • Advisory to tsar, tsar retained absolute veto
         b. Serfs no longer had to make payments to the state for lands
            received due to emancipation
         c. Poles and Lithuanians allowed to use their own languages.
         d. Religious toleration was allowed in Poland.
         e. Political trials were returned to regular courts.
         f. Some restrictions on Jews were abolished.
   D. Nicholas dissolved the Duma 2x in 1906 after he disagreed w/reforms.
      1. A third Duma was created in 1907 that was more conservative and
         sympathetic to the tsar.
      2. Repression was used successfully by the regime to weaken politica
         opponents or sympathetic critics of the regime.
      3. Overall the reforms due to Rev. of 1905 were limited and
         did not satisfy those seeking real change in Russian govt. and society
4. **Peter Stolypin**: new minister pushed thru important reforms to break down collective village ownership of land and encourage the more enterprising peasants (kulaks)
   a. Much land transferred from communes to private owners.
   b. Stolypin was assassinated in 1911 (perhaps at the request of nobles who saw him as too liberal).
   c. Between 1911 - 1914 industrial strikes and peasant violence occurred as dissatisfaction with the tsar’s regime grew.

III. **The Revolution**

A. **Rise of socialism in Russia**

1. The **Russian Social Democratic Workers Party** formed in Minsk in 1898 with **Vladimir Lenin** as one of its leaders.
2. Lenin became the heir to Marx in socialist thought.
   a. Lenin was exiled to Switzerland by the Russian government.
   b. Three *central ideas* to Lenin’s philosophy (Marxism-Leninism)
      - Capitalism could be destroyed only by violent revolution; he denounced revisionism.
      - Socialist revolution was possible under non-industrial conditions, even in relatively backward Russia.
        - Peasants were poor and thus potential revolutionaries
      - Hence “The hammer AND the sickle”
      - Necessity of a highly disciplined workers’ party, strictly controlled by a *dedicated elite* of intellectuals and full-time revolutionaries *(the “vanguard”)*
        - This constituted a major difference with Marx who believed in a revolution controlled by the workers.
3. In 1903, the **Social** Democrats split into two factions:
   a. Mensheviks: wanted to await the evolution of capitalism and proletariat; sought more mass membership.
   b. **Bolsheviks**: Followed Lenin’s ideas
      - Lenin and **Leon Trotsky** formed workers’ Soviets councils of workers, soldiers and intellectuals.

B. **February** (aka “March” due to Eastern Orthodox calendar) **Rev.**, 1917

1. Causes for the overthrow of Nicholas II
   a. Russo-Japanese War had damaged the regime’s credibility.
   b. discontent due to lack of reforms after Revolution of 1905.
   c. the tremendous human/economic toll of World War I
      - Massive military casualties and food shortages
      - tsar’s leadership increasingly seen as incompetent.
2. With tsar off at war, his widely hated wife—Tsarina Alexandra (a German)—and court were unduly influenced by the notorious mystic, **Rasputin**.
   a. The tsarina believed Rasputin had mystically saved her son (and heir to the throne), Alexei, from death due to hemophilia.
   b. Gov’t ministers were frustrated Rasputin’s influence and by Rasputin’s hold on the royal family
   c. Aristocratic conspirators eventually killed him.
   a. women rioted and were supported by workers and soldiers.
   b. Demonstrators demanded the overthrow of the tsar and the creation of a provisional government.
   c. Thousands of soldiers, who had been ordered to suppress the strikes, now gave the support to the protestors.
4. Nicholas II abdicated his throne on March 2.
   a. royal family was placed under house arrest.
   b. about 1,000 Russians had died in the revolution.
   c. The Duma declared a provisional gov’t in March 1917
C. The **Provisional Government**
1. The Provisional Gov't consisted of Constitutional Democrats and liberals, many of whom wanted to continue the war.
2. **Alexander Kerensky** became leader of the government
   a. participation of Kerensky and other socialists in the new government gave the govt. more legitimacy.
   b. **Did not take Russia out of war (fateful decision).**
   c. Implemented a liberal program
      - rejected outright social revolution.
      - He didn't want to immediately confiscate large landholdings and give them to peasants.
3. The Allies recognized the Provisional Government hoping it would continue the war on the Eastern Front.
4. Anarchy plagued Russia by the summer of 1917.
   a. collapse of army discipline/defections
   b. Numerous nationalities and local governments took matters into their own hands
   c. Russian peasants began to take lands from the landowners, often violently (similar the Great Fear of 1789 in France).

D. **October Revolution (aka Nov.)** resulted in a **communist** dictatorship
1. Rise of **Vladimir I. Lenin**
   a. Germany arranged for Lenin to be transported back to Russia in a sealed railroad car in April 1917.
      - They hoped to get Russia out of the war by fomenting a more radical revolution that demanded peace.
   b. Lenin rejected all cooperation with the “bourgeois” Provisional Government.
   c. called for "Socialist revolution" and est. of a Soviet republic.
   d. He sought nationalization of banks and landed estates.
   e. Slogans: "**All Power to the Soviets**"; "**All Land to the Peasants**"; "**Stop the War Now**"
2. Fall of the Provisional Government
   a. Fear of a right-wing counter-revolution played into the Bolsheviks’ hands as they were able to cast themselves as the defenders of the revolution.
   b. Kerensky's refusal to end the war and prevent anarchy led to the fall of Provisional Gov't.
   c. On November 7, **Leon Trotsky**, leader of the Petrograd Soviet (the **Red Army**), led the Soviet to overthrow and arrest the Provisional Government.
      - Trotsky = 2nd most important figure in October Rev.
      - The Provisional Government collapsed with relatively little bloodshed (compared to February Revolution).
      - **Ten Days That Shook the World** – John Reed US Communist
      - On November 8, the Bolsheviks, who controlled the Central Committee of the Congress of Soviets, officially took control of the government.
3. The **Politburo** was formed to organize the state: included Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin
   a. Opponents of the Bolsheviks were arrested.
      - The **Cheka**, the secret police, was created in December to eliminate opponents.
         - became a much-feared org w/virtually absolute power.
   b. Lenin's campaign: "**Peace, Land, Bread**"
      - Bolsheviks renamed themselves the **Communist Party.**
4. Lenin’s reforms
   a. **Decree on Land**: Lenin gave land to peasants (although peasants already had taken much of it).
      - shrewd in that Lenin had no real control over rural lands but was now perceived as a friend of the peasantry.
      - Lenin gave direct control of individual factories to local workers’ committees (soviets).
   b. **Decree on Peace**: Lenin carried through on his promise to take Russia out of the war.
      - He was willing to achieve peace at any price.
      - The **Treaty of Brest-Litovsk** (March 1918).
         - Russia lost 1/3 of pop. and ¼ of its European lands to Germany.
         - Lost territories included the Baltic states, Poland, Ukraine and Finland.
         - Germany’s defeat in November nullified the treaty
   c. Lenin moved the gov’t from Petrograd to Moscow.
   d. Trotsky reorganized the army.

E. **Russian Civil War** (1918-1920)
   1. “**Reds**” (Bolsheviks) vs. “**Whites**” (included officers of old army, and 18 groups proclaiming themselves the real gov’t of Russia—had no leader to unify them)
      a. Many peasants feared the Whites and thus supported the Reds.
      b. Both sides proved to be extremely brutal.
      c. The Allies sent troops to help the “Whites,” hoping to get Russia back into the war.
         - The U.S. contributed about 5,000 troops.
         - **The Russian communists never forgot the fact they had been invaded by the U.S. and the Allies.**
   2. “**War Communism**”: the Bolsheviks mobilized the home front for the civil war.
      a. Earliest form of socialism in the Soviet Union
      b. Applied a “total war” concept to the civil war
         - Declared that all land was nationalized
         - State took control of heavy industries/ended private trade.
         - Resulted in huge decline in production
         - They forced peasants to deliver food to towns
      c. The Cheka hunted down and executed thousands of opponents, such as the **tsar and his family were executed** and other enemies of the proletariat.
   3. By 1921, the Reds were victorious.
      a. Communists were well organized and highly disciplined.
         - The Red Army prevailed under Trotsky’s leadership.
      b. The Whites were divided and poorly organized.
IV. The **Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)** was created in 1922.

A. **NEP – New Economic Policy, 1921-28**

1. sought to eliminate the harsh aspects of war communism.
2. Lenin’s response to peasant revolts, military mutiny, and economic damaged caused by war communism
3. Some capitalist measures were allowed (Lenin saw it as a temporary, "necessary step backwards").
   a. gov’t would not seize surplus grain; peasants could sell grain on the open market.
   b. Small manufacturers could run their own businesses.
   c. gov’t was still in control of heavy industry, banks

B. **Women**

1. The Russian Revolution immediately proclaimed complete equality of rights for women.
2. In the 1920s divorce-abortion were made easily available.
3. Women were urged by the state to work outside home.
4. Many women worked as professionals and in universities.
   a. Women were still expected to do household chores in their non-working hours as Soviet men considered home and children women’s responsibility.
   b. Men continued to monopolize the best jobs.

C. **Comintern** (Third International of European Socialists): 1919

1. “Bolsheviks should be model of international socialism”
   a. Socialist parties must acknowledge Moscow’s leadership
   b. Reject revisionism
   c. Adopt “Communist” party name
2. Splits socialist movements in Western Europe
3. Communists parties viewed as threats by Western European populations due to Russian influence
   a. Communist presence used to instill fear by right-wing ideologies

D. **Lenin’s impact**

1. The old social structure was abolished – nobility eliminated.
2. Loss of influence for the Russian Orthodox Church
4. Russians had a greater expectation of freedom than they had during the tsar’s regime (although expectations were later crushed by Stalin).

D. **After Lenin**

1. A power struggle ensued after Lenin’s death in 1924.
   a. Lenin left no chosen successor.
   b. **Joseph Stalin** was more of a realist and believed in "Socialism in one Country."
      - First, Russia had to be strong internally and should put off efforts for an international communist revolution.
      - He sought the establishment of a Socialist economy without the aid of the West.
   c. **Leon Trotsky** was more the Marxist ideologue who believed in "permanent revolution"—a continuation of a global communist revolution.
      - Party leaders believed Trotsky was too idealistic; Russia first had to survive.
2. Stalin gained effective control of the gov’t in 1927 and had total control by 1929.
3. Trotsky was exiled and eventually assassinated by Stalin’s agents in Mexico City in 1940