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Karl D. Qualls

## The Russian Revolutions: The Impact and Limitations of Western Influence

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, historians have again turned their attention to the birth of the first Communist state in hopes of understanding the place of the Soviet period in the longer sweep of Russian history. Was the USSR an aberration from or a consequence of Russian culture? Did the Soviet Union represent a retreat from westernizing trends in Russian history, or was the Bolshevik revolution a product of westernization? These are vexing questions that generate a great deal of debate. Some have argued that in the late nineteenth century Russia was developing a middle class, representative institutions, and an industrial economy that, while although not as advanced as those in Western Europe, were indications of potential movement in the direction of more open government, rule of law, free market capitalism. Only the Bolsheviks, influenced by an ideology imported, paradoxically, from the West, interrupted this path of Russian political and economic westernization. Others, in contrast, suggest that the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 developed squarely out of Russian traditions of invasive state practices, violent protest and repression, and autocratic rule with little or no public representation. These are not merely academic considerations. If one views the Soviet period as an aberration in Russian history, then Russia's post-Soviet future may be less turbulent and it may promise cooperation and integration with the West. However, if the Soviet period was inherently "Russian" then the twenty-first century might promise further repression and hardship and continued tension and isolation from the West?

This chapter synthesizes these two interpretations. On the one hand, the Bolshevik revolution was based on a foundation of Western philosophy (Marxism). Rooted in the

Enlightenment's emphasis on reason and progress, Marxism predicted and sought the transformation of state and society. In Western Europe, this led less to the violent revolutions that Marx had anticipated than to the gradual evolution of the centralized Western European welfare state. In Russia, in contrast, the Bolsheviks were following a trend in Russian history of inorganic development started by Vladimir the Great's 988 decision to adopt the foreign Byzantine religion into Kievan Rus'. This means that rather than allowing society to grow and change at its own rate, as was generally the case in the rest of Europe, Russian leaders sought to accelerate the process by quickly adopting and adapting western norms that had developed over centuries elsewhere. In doing so, drastic policy shifts ran ahead of the population's ability to understand and adapt to them. This left the Bolsheviks, for example, in the awkward position of building an ideal, utopian state of freedom and liberty by force with little popular support.

The Soviet Union's creation of an ideocracy—a state built on ideas (in this case the ideas of Karl Marx which were developed out of another economic and political culture)—led to numerous contradictions. The central canon of Marxism does not elaborate on how the new ideal state should be created because Marx argued that the development had to be organic. The stages of development that are at the center of Marxism (see Chapter 1), and which the Bolsheviks skipped, would have prepared society, according to Marx, for the transformation. By creating the revolution in October/November 1917 rather than waiting for it to occur on its own, the Bolsheviks undermined one of the central tenets of Marxism and once again sought rapid inorganic development rather than a gradualist approach. The problems of inorganic development through a highly centralized leadership with an ambiguous relationship to the West and to Russia's own traditions will be the focus of this chapter.

### **Before 1917: Adopting, Adapting, and Rejecting the West**

During the two centuries prior to the Bolsheviks' seizure of power in Petrograd (as St. Petersburg was renamed during World War I), tsars and tsarinas attempted numerous reforms that brought European ideas and practices to Russia, but none of them managed to liberate Russians fully from the yoke of their own "backwardness" and create a state and society that worked in relative concert. The eighteenth century in Europe, especially Central Europe, was a period of enlightened absolutism in which strong monarchs took up the challenge of improving the power and prosperity of their states often with more attention to the needs of their subjects and not merely by enriching the sovereign, although this continued as well. The Enlightenment, which slowly made its way into European courts, brought reason, science, and planning to take the place of arbitrary rule, and some Russian rulers followed suit.

Peter the Great (reign 1682/96-1725), like the revolutionary leadership 200 years later, sought to create an ideal society for Russia with western ideas and institutions as the foundation. Peter tried to reform Russia by importing a number of European innovations into a land that was oftentimes unwilling and unable to change because much of the West had organically grown into the reforms after long periods of political, economic, and social development. This was not a consultative process in Russia and for many, if not most, in the Russian Empire, Peter's reforms were an unwelcome change that brought international recognition at the cost of great hardship. Some reforms were adopted without change from Europe, yet Peter and his successors attempted to adapt other advances to Russia's conditions.

Peter and Catherine the Great (reign 1762-96) were representative of the new enlightened absolutism in Europe. Order, planning, law, and the restructuring of society were central, but representative institutions failed to limit the sovereignty, power, and authority of the monarch. The pace, scale, and harsh method of change, for example, separated Peter from most of his

western contemporaries as he tried to impose European models on Russia. His reforms attempted to bring order and progress to a society that he viewed as “backward” and chaotic. He began the process of secularizing Russia and creating a meritocracy based less on privilege. Catherine furthered these reforms until the Pugachev revolt against the growing reach and power of the state forced her to abandon plans to eliminate serfdom. Instead, she restored noble privilege and reordered society hierarchically.

Although the reforms themselves alienated much of the population, the arbitrary and coercive implementation created even further unrest. Peter, with threat of strict punishment, forced men to cut their beards (a sign of their faith), couriers to adopt western dress, and nobles to build stone homes in his new capital of St. Petersburg. Likewise, Catherine’s reforms proscribed and prescribed how one could dress and what kind of carriage could be owned.<sup>2</sup> Despite her voluminous correspondence with the great Enlightenment philosophers of her day on questions of capital punishment and serfdom, Emelian Pugachev was brutally executed and serfdom was extended into parts of the Empire where it had not been before. Both Peter and Catherine, in an effort to bring Russia out of its “backwardness” and create what historian Marc Raeff has called a “well-ordered police state,” imposed reform from above with little popular participation and often violently enforced inorganic change against the opposition it created.<sup>3</sup>

In the nineteenth century intellectuals, much more so than monarchs, sought to understand better Russia’s future vis-à-vis the West’s development, but many carried on the tradition of trying to reform Russia without popular participation in the process. Some intellectuals turned to violence as a means to an end, and many of the intellectual reforms suffered violent retribution from the state. In 1825 the Decembrists, many of whom had lived in Europe, planned to replace the monarchy with a constitutional system that gave representation to

a broader segment of the population.<sup>4</sup> The failed revolt led to a crackdown on dissent that created a movement of intellectuals and “enlightened bureaucrats”<sup>5</sup> who sought to change the system. Meeting in salons to discuss philosophy, art, politics, religion, and more, groups of intellectuals eventually formed “circles” of like-minded people. One of Russia’s most prominent early social philosophers, Alexander Herzen, noted a stark difference, however, between his circle and its rival: “They [the Stankevich circle] disliked our almost exclusively political orientation; we disliked their almost exclusively speculative outlook.”<sup>6</sup> This pointed to a trend that continued in Russian intellectual circles between those who patiently considered what a new ideal future should look like and those, like Herzen, who sought to animate thought to bring about needed reform as quickly as possible. A division between the “word” and the “deed” became central to the Russian revolutionary movement through the Westernizer/Slavophile debates to the 1917 revolutions.

As many European intellectuals and some workers began to contemplate Karl Marx’s version of socialism in the 1850s, Populism, a movement based on the Russian folk (*narod*), remained Russia’s particular expression of European socialism. <<TEXT BOX 3.1 NEAR HERE>> The Populist movement of the 1860s and 1870s, realizing that Alexander II’s 1861 emancipation of serfs failed to improve the lives of most peasants, sought Russia’s redemption by connecting to the peasantry and their communal form of organization. Populists saw that peasants were paying dearly for Russia’s development and that the country as a whole was far behind the West. However, their attempts in 1874 to “Go to the People” and to enlighten or to incite the peasantry failed miserably because many peasants saw the students and intellectuals arriving from the city in their western fashion with spectacles and pocket watches as alien to their traditional rural culture. The connection to the people was exposed as a myth. In the second

half of the decade the Populist movement restructured itself and eventually split into two groups: Black Partition, led by Georgii Plekhanov and Pavel Akselrod, which sought a long period of struggle and organization to give land back to the peasants; and People's Will, which relied on terror, violence, and conspiracy for immediate solutions. These competing tendencies—patience and organization versus immediate change through violence—remained parts of the Russian intellectual movement for the rest of the century. Those hoping to change society gravitated to two extremes: immediate change by violent deeds versus preparing for change by spreading the word of revolution. The latter group felt that organizing and thinking would bring about the desired change while the former believed that only action could transform the world. Word and deed had not yet become one.

The influence of French utopian socialists Charles Fourier and the Comte de Saint-Simon began to give way in the last quarter of the nineteenth century to Marxism. Many intellectuals again sought inspiration in the West after the peasantry showed little revolutionary zeal. Marxism, which viewed workers as the catalyst for the new ruling system, began to supplant Populism. The latter generally wanted to jettison foreign institutions and instead to embrace peasant communal structures as a faster way to socialism.

Georgii Plekhanov, one of the leaders of Black Partition, became the father of Russian Marxism when he founded the Liberation of Labor Group in 1883, and from this point Russian Marxism began to take on a unique perspective. Plekhanov brought a tradition of concern for the peasantry and leadership by the *intelligentsia* from Populism and combined it with a greater concern for theory and patience based on the historical inevitability promised by Karl Marx's "scientific" theory. This combination of Russian and western political, social, and economic thought became the foundation for the Bolsheviks. For the next three decades, Russian Marxists

were generally content to work underground in clandestine organizations to plan and to teach, but still without broad participation or support.

Economic, or material, explanations for how people and society behaved appeared to many to be predictive. Angelica Balabanoff noted in her memoir that she “found in [Marxism] exactly what I needed at the time, a philosophy of method that gave continuity and logic to the processes of history and that endowed my own ethical aspirations, as well as the revolutionary movement itself, with the force and dignity of an historical imperative.”<sup>7</sup> As Balabanoff and others like her noted, Marx set out a vision of the past and future in which changes in the economic system led to a clash between oppressed and oppressor to such a degree that a new system emerged. The next clash would bring the final liberation of Russia from its monarch. In short, Marxism viewed all relations as based on exploitation. One’s relationship to the means of production (e.g. factory owner or shop floor worker) determined one’s political outlook. Marx believed that this relationship of workers to workers (the proletariat) and owners to owners (the bourgeoisie) was more important than any other relationship based on gender, nationality, religion, and more. Capitalism, the present economic system in Marx’s Europe, pitted owners against workers. To simplify it, as workers’ wages and conditions decreased due to the greed of the owners and the competition inherent in capitalism, Marx believed that workers would band together and overthrow the system, thus creating a workers’ state (socialism). During socialism, new economic, political, and social relations would take hold and be perfected to such a degree that a new utopia (communism) would emerge in which there was equality and no need for oppressive state institutions like the secret police, military, and bureaucracy.

Marx was a product of the Enlightenment’s search for universal truths that could be applied to all of society. Much of Marx’s concern with reason, justice, liberty, and equality were

direct descendents of eighteenth century Enlightenment thought. However, Marx was clear on Russia's ability to become socialist in the near future. In general terms, he attacked what he viewed an "Asiatic despotism" in which "the political state is nothing but the personal caprice of a single individual."<sup>8</sup> Friedrich Engels, Marx's collaborator and frequent co-author, noted that Russia was clearly an "oriental despotism" in the 1870s and that Populist attempts to achieve socialism through the peasantry were bound to fail.<sup>9</sup> Thus, Marx and Engels realized that Russia at the end of the nineteenth century was still too autocratic and rural to become modern soon. In no way was Russia ready for the revolution espoused by these two German philosophers, but that did not deter Russia's revolutionaries.

### **Russia in Revolution: 1905 and 1917**

By the early twentieth century, the social problems Marx and Engels first addressed a half-century earlier seemed to be coming to fruition in Russia. Lenin, in his *"Left-Wing" Communism—An Infantile Disorder*, called Russia's first major political revolution in 1905 a "dress rehearsal."<sup>10</sup> Urbanization and industrial growth, necessities for a truly Marxist working-class revolution, marked the years before 1905. Peasants flooded major cities where they found low pay, dangerous working conditions, abysmal housing, and a government unresponsive to their needs. Poor living standards in combination with increased anxiety from Russia's failings in the 1904-05 Russo-Japanese War led a group of workers, headed by the priest Georgii Gapon, to petition Tsar Nicholas II. The January 1905 appeal enumerated the grievances against the arbitrariness of public officials and the economic exploitation from factory bosses. Many at the turn of the century perceived the bureaucracy to be a western institution imported by Peter the Great 200 years earlier, and Gapon's petition argued that the bureaucracy was destroying Russia. "Wouldn't it be better for all of us," Gapon queried:

<<BEGINEXT>>

if we, the toiling people of all Russia died? Let the capitalist-exploiters of the working class, the bureaucratic embezzlers of public funds, and the pillagers of the Russian people live and enjoy themselves. Sovereign, these are the problems that we face and these are the reasons that we have gathered before the walls of your palace....Do not refuse to come to the aid of your people; lead them out of the grave of disfranchisement, poverty, and ignorance; grant them an opportunity to determine their own destiny, and remove from them the unbearable yoke of bureaucrats.<sup>11</sup>

<<ENDEXT>>

While on the one hand it urges that government be representative, which the current Russian system clearly was not, it also appealed to the “Sovereign,” thus recognizing the absolute authority of Nicholas. The petition also urged greater care for workers, a central tenet of socialism, yet it also appealed to social hierarchy. Immediately before a list of demands critical of the new industrial system and bureaucracy, the petition directed the grievances “as to our father,” which invoked a traditional patriarchal and hierarchical notion of authority. While the criticism of “capitalist-exploiters” directly betrayed the influence of socialism, the petition presented in a religious procession clearly separated it from the atheism of Marxism. A workers’ movement had emerged, but it was far from a class-conscious group as Marx dictated. Socialism, borrowed from Europe, had been adapted to fit Russia’s social and political culture and the spark for the 1905 revolution was born of two traditions—western and Russian.

The long year of political turmoil in 1905 resulted in the creation of a quasi-parliament (*Duma*), which had little power. The Duma, beyond restrictions on controlling finance and ministers, could be prorogued at the tsar’s will. Problems, often a result of the inability to meet popular and liberal demands for change and reform, plagued the four Dumas between the 1905 and 1917 revolutions. The first two Dumas were too reformist and met with strong opposition from Nicholas II, but the next two, much more conservative and pro-monarch thanks to an arbitrary change in election laws, were unable or unwilling to initiate the change voiced by

growing opposition groups. This combination of representative (although limited) government and autocratic authority was horribly ineffectual. Trying to assuage the opposition by taking parts of a western-style model of parliamentary rule while maintaining an autocrat who could prorogue the Duma at will failed to meet the needs of a rapidly changing populace and world. Once again, the grafting of western models onto Russian society failed.

Could it have evolved into an effective and stable form of government had not World War I and the 1917 revolutions intervened? It is an impossible question to answer, but the fact that the system collapsed shows that it was not able to adapt to catastrophic change. Russian society at the beginning of the twentieth century slowly began to resemble its West European counterparts. One's status was no longer strictly hereditary. Money and lineage became markers of power and status, which provided opportunities for a growing middle group of merchants and professionals. The urban workforce, although still small in number, grew rapidly and in miserable living and working conditions with virtually no protections from the state. All these groups were limited in their ability to gather and lobby as social and political bodies by a traditional monarchy unwilling or unable to change with the same rapidity.

In the first years of the twentieth century, the future father of the Soviet Union, Vladimir Lenin, began to further link Marxist socialism with the Russian revolutionary heritage. Lenin's 1902 tract *What is To Be Done*<sup>12</sup>, inspired by Nikolai Cherneshevsky's novel of the same name, set forth his vision of the revolutionary movement. Lenin's ideal was a disciplined, conspiratorial, small, hierarchical party, borrowing heavily from organizations like "Hell," a violent subgroup of the Populist movement. <<TEXT BOX 3.2 NEAR HERE>> Moreover, Lenin and his party were to be the intellectuals leading workers to revolution much like his Populist predecessors. Two years later his *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*<sup>13</sup> expounded on

his goals for hierarchy and discipline. However, this work brought criticism from some European socialists, most notably the Polish-German Rosa Luxemburg in her *Leninism or Marxism* (also known as *Organizational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy*).<sup>14</sup> Luxemburg accused Lenin of taking the form of conspiratorial circles as the structure for his party. She chided Lenin for urging obedience over participation, and much of her criticism of extremism and perpetuating the old system of intellectual politics was well founded. For Luxemburg and others, Lenin appeared to be perverting Marxist socialism by combining its ideas with radical Russian Populist methods of conspiracy led by intellectuals in the name of the oppressed, this time workers instead of peasants. However, Lenin was merely adapting to the Russian political environment. Socialist parties were strictly illegal in Russia, unlike Rosa Luxemburg's Germany where working in underground groups was less necessary. Yet, when Lenin called the 1905 Revolution a "dress rehearsal," he noted as a proper Marxist that Russian workers needed more capitalism to develop the appropriate class-consciousness for a true socialist revolution. Thus, Lenin recognized at this stage that Russia needed the West's capitalism to precede the ideal revolution; however, the process of getting there through underground organization was adapted to and adopted from Russia's own revolutionary heritage. The participation of society in politics that was fundamental to western governance, and even Marx argued for full participation by the non-exploiting classes, never emerged in Russia before or after 1917. Lenin and the Bolsheviks were part of the culture in which they lived and were unable or unwilling to broaden participation, despite Luxemburg's condemnations.

While maintaining a Marxist hostility toward religion, Lenin was actually positing a system quite familiar to turn-of-the-century Russian intellectuals and religious philosophers. Lev Tolstoy, Nikolai Fedorov, Vladimir Soloviev, and others all advanced comprehensive religious

utopian systems. In these, humans often take on the job of God in the search for perfection in which total unity replaces individual egoism, which is often associated with the West. Unity closely resembled the communality and collective action prominent both in the Populist movement's principles and in the party structure that Lenin advocated. For all—whether Populist, religious, or Marxist socialist—the quest for the ideal society dominated. Russian cosmism, millenarianism, and apocalyptic thinking merged well with Marx's vision of an ideal society in communism. All that remained was the union of word and deed that would usher in this new era.

Western influence on Russia emerged clearly as *the* revolution of 1917, the one that occurred in October/November and brought Lenin and his Bolsheviks to power, approached. First and foremost, between 1914 and 1918 Russia was engaged in World War I with Germany, Austria-Hungary, and others and suffered horrible losses. Lost battles, dead and wounded soldiers, and labor starved fields and factories all helped to undermine an autocracy that had been called into question in 1905. As living standards declined and Tsar Nicholas II lost further legitimacy, various socialist parties increased their activities. While they remained tiny minority groups, the two main Marxist factions (Mensheviks and Lenin's Bolsheviks) gained strength among soldiers and workers. The Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs) were a predominately populist-socialist group that catered to a mostly agrarian and itinerant constituency. All three groups, and others besides, saw the need to change the current state of affairs in Russia in order to save the country and improve the standards of living for the Russian population.

In February/March 1917 with women and workers flooding the streets in protest, Nicholas abdicated to his brother Michael. The latter's refusal left authority to the Provisional Government as Nicholas left the throne, but the new government had little popular support. The

councils (*soviets*) of workers, soldiers, and others banded together with some socialist leadership that emerged spontaneously and simultaneously had no legal authority but a much higher level of support. This system became known as Dual Power. The Provisional Government deliberated the process of creating a western-style constitutional government while the soviets sought action to dramatically change the Russian social and political system. Throughout the spring, summer, and fall of 1917 this ineffective system limped from one crisis to the next solving little as the Provisional Government patiently awaited elections to the Constituent Assembly that would have decided Russia's fate as a western-style constitutional government. Most socialists also waited, but for them the goal was the inevitable revolution that Marx's history of "scientific socialism" dictated.

Vladimir Lenin was one of the few Marxists in Russia who called for a hastened revolution led by the intelligentsia in the name of the working class. Marx's "scientific socialism" claimed that history moved at its own inevitable pace and the people could do little to change its course or timing. Lenin, borrowing from Russian anarchist, Populist, and nihilist traditions believed that the revolution had to be made, not awaited, with deeds and words and that it was the intellectuals who had to lead the way. Lenin blended the two nineteenth-century intellectual traditions of violence and programmatic change, with the latter derived from western Marxism and one wing of Russian Populism.

Russia was still an overwhelmingly agrarian country in 1917, which was a situation that Marx believed eliminated any possibility for his kind of revolution. The working class, Marx's proletariat, was small in Russia, much smaller than the more industrialized nations of Germany and Great Britain, for example, because of Russia's relatively late entry into the industrial world. To make his revolution broader, Lenin included the peasants, one of the most conservative

elements according to Marx, in the proletarian revolution. By doing so he hoped to undermine support for the SRs but also connect with the Populist tradition in Russia by at least speaking to the needs of improving the lives of peasants. Moreover, Lenin's October/November revolution succeeded only with the significant aid of military units, another segment of society that Marx abhorred as too conservative in propping up the status quo. The rank and file military in 1917 Russia, however, was far from conservative because it was composed of men from fields and factories who had gone to battle under-trained and often unarmed and saw their friends and fellow villagers slaughtered. These people had grievances with the status quo as did the widows and families left on the home front. In many ways, Lenin's Bolsheviks adapted Marxism to fit local conditions and to gain more support in a predominately agricultural nation. Intellectuals led, not followed, the working class to revolution.

Was this a western Marxist or Russian revolution? This point is open for debate. The revolution clearly was made in the name of Marxism, but the Bolsheviks undermined or ignored many of the central tenets of the philosophy. The revolution was not spontaneous and organic; Lenin and his colleagues planned and carried out the revolution. Lenin's revolution was isolated to one country and not the international revolution that Marx had predicted. Although Marx spoke of a change by and for workers in Russia, intellectuals created change for themselves, workers, soldiers, peasants, and more. As the Bolsheviks seized power from the Provisional Government in October/November 1917, they began to create a strong, centralized, and interventionist state that looked much more like the tsarist autocracy than Marx's "stateless" society of equality. Rule of law, constitutional government, capitalist economics, and individualism that marked most European nations after World War I failed to materialize in Soviet Russia. But many of these markers of begin "western" also lapsed in Germany and Italy

between the world wars. Then was Russia's centralization of authority during the Soviet period a product of Russian tradition or part of the western process of state modernization?

### **Bolsheviks in Power: Whither Idealism?**

As revolution faded into civil war in Russia, many other Marxist principles faded away as well. The four-year civil war that started in 1918 is clear evidence of less than full popular support for a revolution created by a small minority party. Needing to maintain its tenuous control over the Russian Empire in the midst of vast opposition, the Bolshevik Party tightened its grip and moved further away from the egalitarian nature of communism that Marx had predicted. Making the revolution was easy; creating a socialist state and society was much more problematic, and the Bolshevik regime quickly began to retreat from idealism and instead recreated the authoritarian system that it had just overthrown. Marx stated that the state (including the military, secret police, and bureaucracy) would "wither away" as people came to understand that the ideal communal arrangement was one in which people would give their skills and talents to the community in return for their daily needs. As Marx stated it, the formula for this new social arrangement was: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!"<sup>15</sup> However, Marx said little about how to create this utopia and it was inconceivable in the midst of Russia's bloody civil war. Although the Bolsheviks had sued for peace with Germany in March 1918 with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the new regime continued to fight Germans; "white" forces that wanted a return to the old regime (some monarchist, others not); Russia's World War I allies who, until the war ended, wanted to get Russia back into the war against Germany; peasant "greens" who fought against all attempts to conscript men for battle and expropriate grain for the troops; nationalists in ethnically non-Russian parts of the Russian Empire; and the occasional quasi-anarchist groups like Nestor Makhno's forces in Ukraine.

The inorganic nature of revolutionary change in 1917 had created many enemies. With so many groups opposed to their rule, the Bolsheviks decided that they must eliminate all internal opposition in order to present a united front to their enemies. This fateful turn led to the elimination of all other political parties, including socialists like the Mensheviks and SRs, which left the Bolsheviks as the only legal party. Moreover, more freedoms were restricted as the “counterrevolutionary press of all shades” was closed, and Marx’s dictatorship of the proletariat became the dictatorship of the party.<sup>16</sup> Defense of the revolution was now imperative and Lenin and the Bolsheviks used whatever means necessary to guarantee their goal. In the first days after the revolution workers took control of factories and soldiers voted for their officers, but during the Civil War hierarchy replaced egalitarianism in military and industry as rank and insignia entered the Red Army and factory bosses, often from the old regime, again set work norms. When Leon Trotsky reconstituted the Red Army in 1918 with many former tsarist officers, it signaled a return to the very oppressive hierarchy against which the revolutionaries had so recently fought. For many true Marxist believers, it appeared that the Bolsheviks had returned to the repressive tsarist method of rule while mimicking the very inequality of capitalist countries that Marx had critiqued. When in 1921 sailors at Kronstadt, some of the Bolsheviks’ most ardent allies in 1917, mutinied against the abandonment of revolutionary ideals, they were brutally crushed. For many, this was symbolic of the end to the Marxist revolution.

During the Civil War the trinity so odious to Marx—bureaucracy, military, and secret police—found renewed vigor in the first socialist society. With the fragile revolution in jeopardy and the need to spread it to the vast Russian Empire, the Bolshevik regime clearly realized the need for a strong central government in order to coordinate its state-building project. The formation of the Cheka, the Bolsheviks’ secret police and predecessor of the KGB, was nearly

coterminous with the revolution. Enemies real and imagined needed to be rooted out and the cruel efficiency of Cheka chief Felix Dzerzhinsky served the new regime well. After the crushing of a July 1918 takeover by Left SR Chekists in the Lubianka, the secret police prison in the center of Moscow, the secret police had little to restrain it from becoming the institution that Marx considered so central to state repression. In fear, many intellectuals and technical specialists had fled during the early days of Soviet Russia, which left Lenin and his comrades with few men and women who were both loyal to the Party and equipped with the skills needed to run modern state. Just as Trotsky had hired the remnants of the tsarist past to lead his revolutionary military, which replaced a volunteer militia a few months after the revolution, so too would “bourgeois specialists” be needed in the new bureaucracy. In less than a year the Bolsheviks had moved from a regime that envisioned freedom, equality, and justice to becoming an extreme version of the modern state that scrutinizes, categorizes, and preferences certain parts of society over others.

The campaign against the Russian population took an even more ominous turn during the Civil War with the advent of a new policy called War Communism that wrought devastation on peasants who had been promised land in 1917. The Bolsheviks embarked on a campaign of forced requisitioning in which they seized any food or materials that were needed to feed munitions factories and soldiers and thereby secure the regime’s place in power. Obviously, this won few allies among the peasantry. Relatively wealthier peasants were doubly injured because as early as August 1918, an all-out war was declared on rich peasants (*kulaks*) whom the Bolsheviks believed were keeping food from cities and soldiers. In order to put down peasant rebellions, Lenin called for the execution of “*at least 100 notorious kulaks, the rich, and the bloodsuckers*” so “that people for hundreds of miles around will see, tremble, know and scream

out: *let's choke* and strangle those bloodsucking kulaks.”<sup>17</sup> Beyond securing provisions for the war effort by taking all kulak grain, this was an extension of “class warfare” which pitted the rich against the poor. Even though a political coup had been carried out, Russia was still neither Marxist nor western as the Bolsheviks tried to extend their urban revolt to the countryside. While still paying homage to Marx’s vision, the Bolsheviks set about constructing a modern centralized state.

After the Civil War Lenin and his Party stepped back from many excesses of the Civil War period and ushered in a new era defined by the New Economic Policy (NEP). Seemingly realizing that he had erred, Lenin took “one step back” to capitalism, bred a new wealthy segment in society and expanded urban cabaret culture and criminality, but it also dealt a decisive blow to the vision of world revolution held by Marx and Trotsky. <<**TEXT BOX 3.3 NEAR HERE**>> War Communism and the war against the kulaks had failed horribly. The NEP, although couched in proper Marxist terms, was a retreat from Marxism because it explicitly allowed capitalism. Individuals rather than the state, owned businesses and factories; the “commanding heights” of mines, electrical plants, communications, transportation, and more remained under state control. Moreover, peasants, rather than having the regime simply seize their goods as was done in wartime, could, after paying a set tax, sell excess goods on an open market. This is the very essence of the capitalism that the revolution sought to destroy, but it provided an incentive to greater production that spurred greater productivity. The Bolsheviks explained this retreat from Marxism by saying that Russia was not yet developed enough for socialism and that it still needed the material benefits of capitalism before it could move fully into the next stage, socialism. The retreat was not permanent, they argued, because it merely set

forth the possibility of a more socialist society in the future. Moreover, the Bolsheviks believed exploitation could be controlled by the workers' state.

The NEP not only reintroduced capitalism into a supposedly Marxist state, but the new policy also made many wonder if the revolution had occurred organically and at the “scientifically” appointed moment as Marx had proposed. Lenin wrote that in War Communism “we [Bolsheviks] actually took from the peasant all the surplus grain—and sometimes not only surplus grain, but part of the grain the peasant requires for food” and that NEP would remedy this “peculiar” situation through a “revival of the petty bourgeoisie and of capitalism.”<sup>18</sup> Now that Russia supposedly had had a Marxist revolution, Russia's economy looked more like the capitalist West. Although political representation was strictly limited, the Bolsheviks, ironically, brought the USSR closer to the market capitalism of the West that was slowly recovering from World War I.

The Civil War period had brought hierarchy back to the military and created a one-party state without legal opposition, but the demographic changes in party membership truly helped to reshape the regime and its attitudes toward the West. After Lenin's death in 1924, an influx of Civil War veterans, peasants, and workers joined the party that was a creation of intellectuals like Lenin and Leon Trotsky. This new generation, less educated than the party leadership, knew less of the West, and the younger generation did not fully understand the philosophy on which the regime was built. Instead, the war generation relied on tradition and hierarchy, both of which were emphasized in the war years. Ironically, however, this return to tradition made the new generation more revolutionary than was Lenin in some cases. Many in the civil war generation called for a return to the roots of the revolution that would eliminate social stratification and the decadence of western capitalism that they saw in the NEP. The vision of this new generation,

however, was not the type of revolutionary democracy of the pre-revolutionary intellectuals, but rather the revolutionary culture and ideas that emerged during the civil war. Hierarchy, centralism, and tradition became much more important and resembled Russia's tsarist traits rather than Europe's representative forms of government that had emerged in the nineteenth century.<sup>19</sup> It is from this demographic base that Stalin created his regime.

The new culture that emerged after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 was in many ways as revolutionary and ambiguous toward the West as was the political takeover and the new economic principles. Revolutionary culture, some of which predated 1917, sought to create new symbols and rituals, but they were often based on forms from the old regime and borrowed from Europe and North America. Statues and monuments to the imperial family dotted large pre-Revolutionary cities and the Romanov family's crest was ubiquitous. The Bolsheviks' plan for monumental propaganda replaced statues of tsars with the images of revolutionary heroes and influential socialist thinkers like Karl Marx. Streets, parks, and squares all changed names, and when Lenin died in 1924 St. Petersburg/Petrograd, the pre-Revolutionary capital and site of the revolution, became known as Leningrad after the Bolshevik leader. Posters, books, and films surrounded Soviet citizens in homes, schools, cinemas, public buildings, and on the streets, which made the revolution and its message omnipresent.<sup>20</sup> For example, in the street performance "Toward a World Commune" viewers were told that Soviet Russia was successor to French revolutionaries and savior of the world's workers after Europe's socialists had abandoned them in World War I. Children's literature often describe the glorious future of communism that would bring staggering technological advances and peace and cooperation to the entire world.<sup>21</sup> The invasive state, which propagated a single official culture, flew in the face both of western liberal democracies, which sought to limit government intrusion although most had significantly

increased state intervention in light of the First World War. The Bolsheviks abandoned much of Marxism, too, as the promised society completely free of the repressive state institutions never materialized.

Revolutionary rituals also built on traditional pre-Revolutionary forms. Parades celebrating the anniversary of the revolution and May Day looked like Orthodox processions from before 1917. Instead of icons of Jesus, Mary, or saints leading the procession, now images of Lenin, Marx, and Engels fluttered at the head of the marching mass. New rituals replaced Orthodox rites at baptism, marriage, and death. Christening names like Ninel (Lenin spelled backwards), Revolution, Elektrifikatsiia (Electrification), and Dynamo replaced traditional saints' names for children and marked both the revolutionary and the hoped-for industrial development of the Bolshevik state. At secular revolutionary marriage ceremonies, instead of the couple swearing to follow their faith and raise their children in the church, the bride and groom swore to defend the regime and raise their children to understand the benefits of the new system. Cremation began to replace burials in elaborate mausoleums or hand carved headstones. All would be equal in death, as Marx had hoped would happen in life. Many in the revolutionary movement had hoped to create a new society based on equality, justice, and progress and free from the obscurantism of religion, but the Bolsheviks in turn created a "secular" state religion with all the demands for obedience, sacrifice, loyalty, and even martyrdom common in pre-Revolutionary Orthodoxy.

The Revolution and Civil War forever changed Russia's political relations with the West. The Bolsheviks ended their participation in World War I against their allies' wishes, which then led to allied intervention against the Bolsheviks in the Civil War. Hoping to bring about the international workers' revolution, Russia's new revolutionary government supported worker

uprisings in Germany and Hungary, for example, until they were crushed in 1919. At this point Lenin abandoned Marx's international vision and formed the Third International (or Comintern) to direct the establishment of Leninist parties throughout Europe and the wider world. The Second International had collapsed as socialists joined the "imperialist war" in 1914. The more aggressive rhetoric and support of radicals in other nations soured relations with the West even further. The international socialist movement would now be directed from Moscow, the capital of the first socialist society. The hierarchy and coercion found in domestic politics now found its way into the international socialist movement.

The broad grassroots political participation of 1917-18 soon gave way to harsh single-party rule. Authority became centralized through the coercion and command system of the Civil War era. Even though the Bolshevik Party was in power, it was still a minority party that craved broad active support and some legitimization for its rule. Force and terror could not attain or retain the population's support over the long term, and at some point the regime needed to prove its competency and usefulness to average Soviet citizens in order to gain the latter's collaboration.<sup>22</sup> The Bolshevik Party justified its rule by claiming that it was a vanguard group fighting against the remnants of the old order to usher in a new and better era in human history. With material conditions still horrible in Soviet Russia, the regime took a step back in the NEP to rebuild its economy. In short, the regime needed to start responding to the needs of its people, which is so important for the stability of western democracies too. During Stalin's reign, however, he also created an image of himself, his system, and the regime's enemies that made him indispensable as the Soviet Union turned even further away from the Marxist ideal and began to diverge even further from western liberal democracies.

## **Stalin: The Revolution Betrayed?**

Both before and after the Revolution Lenin sought to make Marxism conform to Russia and Russia to conform to his idea of a progressive state in the making. Stalin sought to transform both the state and its ideological foundation even more so that it eventually came to represent all the worst characteristics of the modern state against which Marx had warned. In Autumn, after Lenin's January 1924 death, Stalin advanced his theory of "socialism in one country," which, among other changes in policy, caused Leon Trotsky in 1936 to write *Revolution Betrayed: What is the Soviet Union and Where is it Going?*<sup>23</sup> <<TEXT BOX 3.4 NEAR HERE>> In an appendix, Trotsky, using quotes from both Lenin and Stalin, showed that Stalin's "socialism in one country" betrayed the essence of Marxism and Leninism and even went against Stalin's own previous thought. "Socialism in one country" marked not only a further retreat from Marxism, but it also heralded a turn inward for revolutionary Russia. Stalin's new theory suggested that the Soviet Union did not have to rely on workers' revolutions in Europe for support. In a pitch toward rising nationalism, Stalin challenged Trotsky's theory of "permanent revolution," which necessitated support for the young USSR from the more industrially developed nations of Europe. Only when workers in Europe staged socialist revolutions could the USSR feel secure, according to Trotsky. Stalin argued that this denied the potential of the Soviet Union and its people to protect themselves and to prosper. Stalin argued, unlike Marx, that socialism and communism could be constructed in one nation, isolated from the other workers of the world. World revolution was no longer an ideal or necessity, Stalin posited and thus he moved away from both Marxism and Europe. However, an isolated country must be self-sufficient, which for Russia meant dramatic social and economic change.

As Stalin consolidated power by 1927-8, having isolated and sometimes eliminated his rivals like Trotsky, his regime artfully combined the dichotomies between the West and Russia. Stalinism extended Enlightenment thought into a hyper-rationalism that attempted to coordinate every segment of the economy and public culture. Rather than rely on the natural laws of many Enlightenment philosophers and nineteenth-century western economists and politicians, Stalin attempted to create and to systematize a “rational” economy. His answer to the excesses of the NEP was the Five-Year Plan for industry and agriculture. The State Planning Bureau (*Gosplan*) coordinated all segments of the economy. <<TEXT BOX 3.5 NEAR HERE>> Transportation, production, sale, and the extraction of natural resources were supposed to follow a trail of statistical plans. However, the lack of technical specialists and the over-ambitious plan necessitated a system of production that followed traditional production practices of “storming” in which short and high intensity production, as was typical in an agricultural society that operated by the seasons instead of the factory whistle, punctuated long periods of relatively low productivity. Of course, this ebb and flow of production undermined the entire premise of planned, rational, scientific, and centralized production, which Stalin’s charge to finish the “Five-Year Plan in Four” only exacerbated.

In industry, higher work quotas often led to workers intentionally breaking equipment, assaulting managers, or simply showing up drunk and unable to meet planned targets. Any shortfall in production led to a ripple effect throughout the economy because the plan economically interlinked all sectors. When inevitable shortfalls occurred, consumers and managers had to rely on a black market to survive, which undermined the ideal rational economy and instead mimicked the worst exploitation that Marxists saw in the capitalist West. As one worker in the lumber industry recalled, “if you rely on the Plan, you will sit idle.”<sup>24</sup> Any means

of acquiring labor, money, or materials was deemed legitimate. Begging, borrowing, bribing, and stealing were the rule, rather than the exception in all industries. However, the Soviet press continued to hail the new system's effectiveness in creating higher production and avoiding labor exploitation. When problems occurred they were, without merit, blamed on wreckers and saboteurs in league with the West, which was jealous of Soviet progress while most of the rest of the world reeled in depression.

A similar planned rationalization through compulsion, in the hopes of efficiency and greater yields, overtook agriculture during the period of collectivization. Small farmers surrendered nearly all of their private property and were forced into large state-run farms. In late 1929 Stalin noted that the party had shifted "from the policy of *restricting* the exploiting proclivities of the kulaks to the policy of *eliminating* the kulaks as a class."<sup>25</sup> Millions of people in Ukraine and other grain-growing regions of the USSR died in the resulting famine or were executed; even more were sent to hard labor in Siberia. One American engineer working in Siberia in the 1930s noted that no one on the worksite really understood "dekulakization" because kulaks were often the best workers.<sup>26</sup> By removing these supposedly wealthy and exploitative peasants, collectivization brought hunger and starvation to the countryside as some of the best farmers were killed or arrested and many of the other peasants slaughtered livestock rather than hand it over to the state. Millions of head of cattle, pigs, chickens, and more were slaughtered and consumed or allowed to rot rather than be surrendered to the Bolsheviks.

Simultaneously, the regime embarked on an attack against the church. Although anti-clericalism had become part of the liberal-democratic tradition in Europe in the previous century, none were as violent and destructive as the campaign waged in the USSR. Led by the League of the Militant Godless, a group of mostly young atheists, Stalin's regime set out to destroy

religion, and especially the Orthodox Church. Thousands of churches were closed, destroyed, and looted. While some survived as warehouses or other secular buildings, much of Russia's architectural heritage, including the enormous Christ the Savior Cathedral not far from Moscow's Kremlin walls, were simply razed. Religious icons were burned and the precious metals so ubiquitous in the larger churches were melted down and used as currency for the new regime. Exposing false miracles and cursing God in the streets became a fairly common occurrence. Destroying the Church was more than merely a matter of atheist conviction; it also sought to eliminate a rival locus of power and identification, especially in the less well-controlled countryside. The flood of young enthusiasts out to convert the countryside surely reminded many of the Populists' debacle fifty-five years earlier. The combination of collectivization and the resulting famine with the anti-clerical campaign created long-lingering resentment in the periphery and a demographic deficit of people and animals that, in some cases, has not yet been recovered.

The rich cultural activity in Russia in the first third of the twentieth century also suffered from oppressive and violent state control. Although cultural activity was relatively free in the 1920s, during the mid-1930s, all cultural producers (e.g. writers, painters, musicians, architects, and others) were forced to join state unions. If one tried to remain outside of the union, the regime restricted one's access to materials and audiences. The unions controlled both the materials necessary to create art and also provided housing, pensions, and strict control over the themes and aesthetics of cultural production. All art had to meet the needs of the state and show how beautiful the ideal communist future would be. Scenes of happy tractor drivers, smiling iron workers, and children grateful to Comrade Stalin permeated public life. The goal of this artistic policy known as "socialist realism" was to show the glory of the communist future in the present.

It on the one hand glossed over the hardships of the present, but also provided instruction on how to become the ideal Soviet man or woman. The positive hero in most works served as an example for the audience and often promised social mobility to those who emulated the hero's effort or feat. Strict state regulation forced public conformity through censorship, but many in the creative intelligentsia also employed private self-censorship so as not to run afoul of the regime.

Industry, agriculture, and the arts, now highly centralized, showed little of the efficiency and vibrancy that the political leaders had hoped, and the secret police vigilantly watched for any "deviations" from the state program. Rather than withering away as Marxists had expected, the state grew into a massive bureaucracy that attempted, but failed, to direct nearly every aspect of economic, political, and cultural life. The revolutionary goals of justice and equality, although still espoused, had disappeared from Soviet Russia. A façade of participation replaced real civic activity. For example, elections were held frequently with tremendous press coverage of the issues and candidates, and it was expected that every man and woman would appear at the polls to vote. Unions, neighborhood groups, and more gathered to discuss upcoming elections, but there was just a single candidate who the Party had pre-selected. The Soviet Union went through the motions of western democratic elections while maintaining strict control over "representation."

During the 1930s, life in the Soviet Union began to look more and more traditional, although the rhetoric remained Marxist (as interpreted by Stalin); tradition had reappeared in Soviet guise. For women, the 1930s in many ways brought back pre-revolutionary gender roles. The Stalin regime replaced both the easy divorce and legalized abortion of the 1920s with a pro-natalist policy that emphasized strong nuclear families and rewarded women and families for having many children who could then become labor for the growing industrial sector and

military. Opportunities for women opened as men and women worked side-by-side on construction sites and in factories. However, male attitudes changed little, which meant that women often had the double burden of hard labor during the day and domestic labor in the evening. Few of the 1920s' enticing reforms to liberate women—like communal nurseries, laundries, and cafeterias—were well funded or popular enough to alleviate women's domestic labor.

Constructing the new Soviet man and woman became a prominent feature of the 1930s. “Culturedness” (*kul'turnost'*) and “educatedness” (*obrazovannost'*) became catchwords for the decade's attempt to eliminate cultural backwardness. Culturedness was designed to eliminate the peasant behaviors of the newly urban and bring them closer to their European peers. For example, Trotsky, early in the revolution, wrote articles against spitting and profanity. In the 1930s, proper behavior and deportment were nearly as important as one's class origin. Good Soviet citizens did not drink to excess, were tidy and dressed appropriately for the occasion, maintained a good household, were polite and courteous, and more. Educatedness attempted to eliminate both the illiteracy that had plagued tsarist Russia, but also to acquaint Soviet citizens with literature and the arts. Popular magazines carried quizzes that tested the readers' knowledge of Russian and foreign literature, scientific facts, and understanding of socialism. Not only did the new Soviet man and woman need to shed their peasant behaviors in favor of those consistent with European traits, but they also had to replace the economic and social elites of pre-Revolutionary society who were more cultured than their peasant successors.

Although literacy and education in the Soviet Union far surpassed the tsarist period, the Soviet Union in the 1930s began to once again draw social and economic distinctions among the population. Education and behavior helped determine social mobility and status. Class and social

origins, while still most important, began to be less important, despite Marx's argument to the contrary. Consumerism also became a sign of status and culturedness. Well-connected members of society, especially those in the government and party apparatus, received more money than the workers in whose name the revolution had been made. Factory bosses and collective farm chairmen gained more power and control over their workers. Model citizens who were party members, fertile mothers, or extraordinary workers, received higher pay and bonuses and often had access to better housing and shopping at stores open only to the privileged elite. The ability to display one's wealth and status in clothing, radios, white tablecloths, and maybe a car was the exact opposite of the Marxist ideal. For example, the return of the New Year's Tree not only allowed people to celebrate a religious holiday, Christmas, surreptitiously, but it also created a private culture of celebration and display of wealth in windows. The size and ornamentation of the trees, as well as the quantity and quality of gifts exchanged, was a way for a new upwardly mobile segment of the population to separate from the average worker. Parade culture also supported the hierarchy within society. In Moscow, for example, the political elite, setting itself off from the crowd, stood atop Lenin's tomb to view the parade. The order of the parade participants was also constructed in such a way as to show deference to superior workers, model factories, and favored ethnic groups, primarily Russians. Hierarchy and social distinctions replaced the egalitarianism of the revolutionary ideal, and a pro-Russian policy supplanted Marxist internationalism.<sup>27</sup>

As Stalin's regime began to create the very hierarchy and social differentiation that Marx despised so much in the western system, the Constitution of the USSR,<sup>28</sup> ratified in December 1936, provided a façade of democracy, justice, equality, and economic rights to Soviet citizens and foreign observers. Reality, however, was far different. Stalin's regime created a document,

especially chapter ten on the Fundamental Rights and Duties of Citizens, which guaranteed speech, assembly, conscience, a free press, and more. It limited the workday to seven hours for most, asserted absolute equality for women and national minorities, promoted a right to employment and state-funded leisure, extended free education to all, and promised to provide pensions for the old and infirm. Qualitatively or quantitatively all these promises were broken. In fact, as the Constitution became law in 1936 the rights to due process and privacy in articles 127 and 128 were consistently violated. The secret police arrested people in the middle of the night, followed by torture, execution, or hard labor in a prison camp. This juxtaposition between word and deed could not have escaped most Soviet citizens as millions of people were arrested and executed during the Great Purges of the late 1930s. <<TEXT BOX 3.6 NEAR HERE>> The regime hinted at a declaration of rights familiar to western nations, but implementation was little different from the arbitrariness that had been at the center of revolutionary complaints as early as Bloody Sunday 1905. Again, Russia had the veneer of western constitutional government operating on the rule of law; however, the Stalin regime continued to differentiate and repress much of Russian society as was done in tsarist times. Stalin had added the tools and techniques of a bureaucratic state to count, categorize, and engineer the population into his vision of a new society.

Russia and Russian history, heroes, and traditions reappeared throughout the 1930s.<sup>29</sup> The New Year celebration returned Soviet citizens to a pre-revolutionary tradition and so too did the reclamation of nineteenth-century Russian literature. In the late 1930s, one could find affordable, yet elaborate, collections of the works of Tolstoy, Pushkin, and others. The reclamation of part of Russia's cultural past helped to legitimize the regime and further the image of a long-standing and strong Russian cultural heritage. The Pushkin Centennial in 1937 carefully crafted the poet's

new image as a social commentator. Rather than discuss his connections to the imperial court, Soviet biographers focused more on his relationship with the Decembrists, which thus highlighted his participation in the birth of Russia's revolutionary movement. The Pushkin Centennial, as part of a larger celebration for the twentieth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, was merely one part of a larger process of resurrecting the Russian pre-Revolutionary past.

The connection between the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire was a difficult topic for Stalin's regime. For example, collectivization, to peasants, seemed a lot like serfdom. By mid-decade, however, a new plan (which included the New Year's celebrations) commenced to resurrect and recraft Russia's usable past. Whereas the Bolshevik Revolution overthrew the monarchy that the party claimed had oppressed the population since its inception, the 1937 anniversary of the Revolution sought to reclaim some of the monarchs and heroes of the past. Films and books brought Peter the Great, Ivan the Terrible, and the thirteenth-century military hero and saint of the Church Alexander Nevsky to the Soviet public. Peter symbolized Russia becoming a rational and modern nation, which Ivan had begun to centralize and unite. Nevsky defeated the Germanic Teutonic knights and the film about him found resonance as Nazi Germany remilitarized prior to World War II. All three men helped to create and defend the Russian<sup>30</sup> state, but Peter was most well known for introducing reforms from the West while Nevsky's sainthood came from his defense of the Orthodox nation from western Catholic crusaders. All three men also killed thousands to make their state strong. The image of a powerful leader was central to legitimizing the harsh, authoritarian behavior of the 1930s in which millions of "enemies" were killed in the name of "progress." In short, Stalin's regime

hoped to show that the sacrifices in the 1930s were a “normal” part of Russia’s history and march toward greatness.

World War II heightened the “re-nationalization” started during the 1930s. The 1917 Bolshevik revolution and much of the 1920s promised a new internationalism based on Marxist suppositions that class meant more than nationality, but World War II initiated a new emphasis on the primacy of Russian greatness. For example, the Soviet national anthem changed from the *Internationale*, the worldwide song of the socialist movement, to a new Soviet anthem that opened with an elaboration of Russia’s place as first among equals in the USSR: “Unbreakable union of freeborn republics/Great Russia has welded forever to stand!”<sup>31</sup> The “International Union” and “International Working Class” of the *Internationale* found no place in the new Soviet anthem that urged the population to fight for the fatherland under comrade Stalin’s leadership. In a toast to Red Army commanders at the end of the war in Europe in May 1945, Stalin clearly stated the new attitude toward nationality:

<<BEGINEXT>>

I drink primarily to the health of the Russian people because it is the most outstanding of all the nations that constitute the Soviet Union.

I drink to the health of the Russian people, because, during this war, it has earned universal recognition as the guiding force of the Soviet Union among all the peoples of our country.

I drink to the health of the Russian people, not only because it is the leading people, but also because it is gifted with a clear mind, a staunch character, and patience.<sup>32</sup>

<<ENDEXT>>

“Russian” became more prominent than “Soviet” and class virtually disappeared as a uniting image in Soviet propaganda. This return to a form of nationalism mirrored similar trends in Europe in the 1930s and early 1940s, but it was the antithesis of what Marx had envisioned and to which the Party continued to pay lip service. At this point, contact with the West turned Russia inward and away from the West. Stalin’s USSR became an extreme representation of the

western process of building a powerful, unifying state. The Soviet Union, however, went much further than its British and French counterparts and began to show similarities with the Nazi and Italian fascist systems it demonized and fought against in World War II.

## **Conclusions**

This look at the Russian revolutionary period in the early twentieth century has shown that Russian and Soviet history has been marked by an ambiguous relationship with western ideas and ideals. From Peter to Stalin, reforms were meant to create an ideal society of efficiency and order, but by force if necessary. Russian Marxists actually instituted a hybrid system that was in some ways constructed from a foundation of state violence and coercion while espousing Karl Marx's system of equality and justice that would follow worldwide revolution. Destroying the old regime was relatively easy; creating a system based on Marxism proved an impossible task. The Soviet system, while still speaking the language of Marxist equality and justice, fell back on pre-revolutionary trends toward hierarchy (social and political) and arbitrary application of laws. The Civil War forced the Marxist revolutionary dreams to become pragmatic politics in order to protect the new regime, and Stalin brought further centralism in lieu of socialist democracy. The "New Soviet Man and Woman" was not the ideal of a professional revolutionary of self denial discussed by Cherneshevsky and Lenin in their works *What is to Be Done*. Rather, the ideal Soviet in the 1930s craved social mobility, material consumption, and luxury. The ideal was to rise out of the working class rather than for the working class to command. The revolutionary ideals had faded and much of the imperial administrative baggage was carried into the future.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to say whether revolutions in Russia were "western." Part of the problem lies in terms. If one argues that "western" in this period generally includes

participatory politics, a capitalist economy, individualism, and state institutions that protect rights more than they impose on them, then revolutionary Russia fell far short of the mark. Russia since Peter the Great has been in constant contact with the West and imported a number of innovations, but nearly all of them have been adapted in some way to native conditions. The method of forcing the population to adopt western models, whether they be from Enlightenment philosophers or Marxist socialists, was too often coercive, which led to inorganic change and all the opposition that comes with it. From the Old Believers who considered Peter the anti-Christ to peasants during Soviet collectivization who thought the same of the Bolsheviks, rapid change from above rather than emanating from a broad spectrum of the population led to resistance and discontent. Despite achieving military and economic parity with the West during the Soviet period, Russia's adaptation of western ideas without the real participation of and competition within the population resulted in a system that ossified. Without incentive to innovate or improve and only limited social mobility through merit, technological and industrial progress (except in the military) stagnated and many people turned to a more traditional institution, the family, for stability and solace. Now that the Soviet Union has collapsed, will Russia be able to find peace, prosperity, and stability on its own, on a western model, or some combination of both? This is something that history cannot predict.

The Soviet system became an amalgam of word and deed and Russian and western models. The ideas and ideals that governed the system were born of Marxism and Russian Populism and the method of transforming society and implementing change borrowed the worst elements of Russian autocratic tradition and the modern technological state of the West. With better technology and methods the Bolsheviks were able to better achieve the centralization sought by the tsarist predecessors. Rather than create the stateless society that Marx had

envisaged, Soviet Russia built a strong, centralized, bureaucratic state that blended the violence and coercion of the tsarist state with the regulated western European nation-state.

**Notes:**

1. This is not meant to argue that revolutions are always inorganic and that positive, progressive, “western” development can only come about through peaceful development. One need only think of the English Civil War and Glorious Revolution, the American Revolution, or the French Revolution.
2. See Daniel H. Kaiser and Gary Marker, eds., *Reinterpreting Russian History: Readings, 860-1860s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 244-246, 321-324.
3. Marc Raeff, *The Well-Ordered Police State: Social and Institutional Change Through Law in the Germanies and Russia, 1600-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).
4. Basil Dmytryshyn, ed., *Imperial Russia: A Source Book, 1700-1917*, 3d ed. (Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1990), 207-228.
5. W. Bruce Lincoln, *In the Vanguard of Reform: Russia's Enlightened Bureaucrats, 1825-1861* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1982).
6. Alexander Herzen's *My Past and Thoughts*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Knopf, 1973), 231.
7. Angelica Balabanoff, *My Life as a Rebel* (London: Hamilton, 1938), 18.
8. “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*” quoted in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* 2d ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), 23.
9. “On Social Relations in Russia” in Tucker, 665-675.

10. Vladimir Lenin, “Left-Wing’ Communism—An Infantile Disorder” in *V.I. Lenin: Selected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 521;  
<http://www.marx2mao.org/Lenin/LWC20.html#c3> (page 10).
11. Dmytryshyn, 409-413.
12. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/what-itd/index.htm>
13. Vladimir Lenin, “One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: The Crisis in Our Party” in *Collected Works*, v. 7, 4th ed., (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), 203-425;  
<http://www.marx2mao.org/Lenin/OSF04NB.html>
14. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution and Leninism or Marxism?* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1970), 81-109;  
<http://marxists.org/archive/luxembur/works/1904/org-rsd/index.htm>
15. See his “Critique of the Gotha Programme” in Tucker, 525-541;  
<http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1870/gotha/index.htm>
16. Robert V. Daniels, ed., *A Documentary History of Communism in Russia: From Lenin to Gorbachev* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1993), 65.
17. Daniels, 81.
18. Daniels, 113.
19. Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928-1931* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977); Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinowitch, and Richard Stites, eds., *Russia in the Era of NEP: Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); William G. Rosenberg and Lewis Siegelbaum eds., *Social Dimensions of Soviet Industrialization* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); and the monographs that followed from these collections.

20. James von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals, 1917-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Abbott Gleason, Peter Kenez, and Richard Stites, eds., *Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1985); Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dream: Utopian Vision and Experiments Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford, 1989); Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).
21. James von Geldern and Richard Stites, eds., *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia: Tales, Poems, Songs, Movies, Plays, and Folklore 1917-1953* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 29-31, 90-112.
22. Ronald Suny, "Stalin and His Stalinism: Power and Authority in the Soviet Union, 1930-1953" in Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin, eds., *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 26-52.
23. See <http://csf.colorado.edu/psn/marx/Other/Trotsky/Archive/1936-Rev/> for the full text at the Trotsky Internet Archive.
24. Gennady Andreev-Khomiakov, *Bitter Waters: Life and Work in Stalin's Russia*, trans. Ann E. Healy (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 70.
25. Daniels, 178-179.
26. John Scott, *Behind the Urals: An American Worker in Russia's City of Steel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).
27. Jeffrey Brooks. *Thank You Comrade Stalin!: Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd, eds.,

*Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution: 1881-1940* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Karen Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades: Celebrations in the Time of Stalin* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

28. Thomas Riha, *Readings in Russian Civilization* v. 3, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 600-614.

29. David Brandenberger, 'The "Short Course" to Modernity: Stalinist History Textbooks, Mass Culture and the Formation of Popular Russian National Identity, 1934-1956', (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1999).

30. Nevsky and Ivan the Terrible lived before "Russia" became a political entity as we know it today, but the lands in which they fought became part of the Russian Empire under Peter and their activities are part of the long history of transforming a kingdom centered on Kiev (today's capital of Ukraine) into a state centered on Moscow and St. Petersburg.

31. von Geldern and Stites, eds., *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia*, 406.

32. Daniels, 232.

## Study Questions

1. What did Peter and Catherine the Great adopt from the West and why? How did they implement their changes?
2. Marxism and Russian Populism influenced Lenin greatly. What did he take from each and how did he combine them?
3. How did Lenin, and then Stalin, hope to implement their visions of an ideal society? Compare their systems to Marxism.
4. Twenty-five years after the Bolshevik Revolution, was the Soviet Union more western, Russian, or socialist?
5. Was the Soviet Union a Marxist state? Why or why not?

## Suggested Reading

Adams, Arthur and Ronald Suny, eds. *The Bolshevik Revolution and Bolshevik Victory: Visions and Revisions*. 3d ed. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1990.

A collection of excerpts from scholarly works that present various interpretations of the events of 1917

Cracraft, James. *Peter the Great Transforms Russia*. 3d ed. Toronto: D.C. Heath, 1991.

A collection of excerpts from scholarly work from different vantage points that assess the substance and impact of Peter's reign and policies

Daniels, Robert V., ed. *The Stalin Revolution*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997.

A collection of excerpts from scholarly work from different vantage points that assess the substance and impact of Stalin's reign and policies

de Madariaga, Isabel. *Catherine the Great: A Short History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.

A brief but substantive biography of Catherine that places her in the context of other European monarchs

Fitzpatrick, Sheila, Alexander Rabinowitch, and Richard Stites, eds. *Russia in the Era of NEP: Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

A collection of scholarly pieces that deal with various aspects of NEP society, including commerce, women, policing, culture, and more

Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times, Soviet Russia in the 1930s*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

A remarkable portrayal of the fight for survival during the calamitous 1930s amidst policy changes, goods shortages, housing problems, and more

## **Key Terms**

Peter the Great

Catherine the Great

Intelligentsia

Decembrists

Populism

Socialism

Marxism

1905 Revolution

Father Gapon

Nicholas II

Duma

Vladimir Lenin

War Communism

NEP

Joseph Stalin

Five-Year Plan

Industrialization

Collectivization