

military power that could put down any opposition. During the long war of attrition France's deficiency in manpower had worsened; it was clear that the French nation, fighting alone, could not hope to withstand another onset of German might.

The Russian Revolution

Robert Service

Historians often respond to the challenge of explaining the occurrence of a major revolution by constructing a complex set or theory of causes. For Marxist historians, the Russian Revolution was of extraordinary importance. These historians and others point to long-term economic and social factors as crucial in causing this revolution. Many historians, however, argue that the causes were more immediate and less complex. Robert Service, a respected author of several works on Russian history, takes a middle ground, focusing on a few circumstances as the key causes for the revolution. In the following selection, Service analyzes the revolution that toppled the tsar's government in February 1917, as well as the rise to power of Lenin and the Bolsheviks in October 1917.

CONSIDER: *The problems facing the Russian Empire; how Tsar Nicholas II placed himself in "double jeopardy"; why the Bolsheviks resorted to terror.*

Under the tsars, the Russian Empire faced many problems and approval of the state's demands and purposes was largely absent from society. The technological gap was widening between Russia and the other capitalist powers. Military security posed acute problems; administrative and educational co-ordination remained frail. Political parties had little impact on popular opinion, and the State Duma was to a large extent ignored. Furthermore, the traditional propertied classes made little effort to engender a sense of civic community among the poorer members of society. While most Russians lacked a strong sense of nationhood, several non-Russian nations had a sharp sense of national resentment. The Russian Empire was a restless, unintegrated society.

Nicholas II, the last tsar, had put himself in double jeopardy. He had seriously obstructed and annoyed the emergent elements of a civil society: the political parties, professional associations and trade unions. But he also

stopped trying to suppress them entirely. The result was a constant challenge to the tsarist regime. The social and economic transformation before the First World War merely added to the problems. Those groups in society which had undergone impoverishment were understandably hostile to the authorities. Other groups had enjoyed improvement in their material conditions; but several of these, too, posed a danger since they felt frustrated by the nature of the political order. It was in this situation that the Great War broke out and pulled down the remaining stays of the regime. The result was the February Revolution of 1917 in circumstances of economic collapse, administrative dislocation and military defeat. Vent was given to a surge of local efforts at popular self-rule; and workers, peasants and military conscripts across the empire asserted their demands without impediment.

These same circumstances made liberalism, conservatism and fascism impractical for a number of years ahead: some kind of socialist government was by far the likeliest outcome in those years. Yet it was not inevitable that the most extreme variant of socialism—Bolshevism—should take power. What was scarcely avoidable was that once the Bolsheviks made their revolution, they would not be able to survive without making their policies even more violent and regimentative than they already were. Lenin's party had much too little durable support to remain in government without resort to terror. This in turn placed limits on their ability to solve those many problems identified by nearly all the tsarist regime's enemies as needing to be solved. The Bolsheviks aspired to economic competitiveness, political integration, inter-ethnic co-operation, social tranquillity, administrative efficiency, cultural dynamism and universal education. But the means they employed inevitably vitiated their declared ends.

CHAPTER QUESTIONS

1. In what ways was World War I an outgrowth of the major trends of the late nineteenth century? Why is World War I nevertheless often considered a dividing line between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries?
2. What role did World War I play in explaining the Russian Revolution and the Bolsheviks' rise to power?
3. What was there about the causes and process of World War I that made the peace settlement at the end of the war so difficult?

SOURCE: Robert Service, *A History of Twentieth-Century Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 545–547.