

A. Introduction¹

In many ways, the Twentieth Century is characterized as the Century of War. Russian Communism is one cause of that turmoil. The course goal for this topic is to motivate students **to evaluate Russian Communism** according to a criteria of the chronology, personalities, places, and degrees of certitude warranted.

B. Long Range Factors

There were three long range factors for the Russian Revolution. As background material, one needs to keep in mind that the very notion of classes developed slowly, throughout the Nineteenth Century, in Russia. Lenin simplified and exploited the complex existing social structure toward his own communist ends.²

First, there was no organized middle class interested in overthrowing the government. The middle class saw the government as useful for business. The middle class was also too small to be effective. These facts were stressed in previous lectures. The nobility, nevertheless, was faltering.

Second, there were masses who before 1905 had political parties to form them. Peasants were pinched for lands, but they only entered the revolt after it had begun. Workers were a new class, sensitive to the new ideas of democracy being promoted at the same time that freedom was being achieved. Propaganda incited workers to be willing to follow extremists.

Third, nationalities wanted independence. In 1917, these nationalities made up half of Russia, but, again, these only became significant after the revolt had begun. It was practically impossible to placate all of them. Between 1905 and 1917, an honest popular vote would probably have put socialists in power.

C. Intermediate Factors

There were three intermediate factors. First, the subjects--middle class, peasants, workers, and nobility--were alienated from the rulers. Events exacerbated this alienation. For example, Rasputin, a low peasant of Siberian origin, gained control of the royal family by having a good effect on the malformed son of Nicholas II's wife. Dr. Jirran conjectures that Rasputin was a country priest who may have used hypnotism to stop the son from bleeding. The son had hemophilia. Rasputin may have met the royal family on a country outing. In any event, the Russian subjects were disgusted and outraged. A conservative of the extreme right and a group of patriotic nobles joined to murder Rasputin at the end of 1916.

Second, Rasputin influenced the decision to put Sturgner in power. Sturgner played right into the hands of the Germans and got Rumania into the war as a German ally. The entrance of Rumania weakened an already weak Russia. The royal government could make no reprisals, and, at the end of 1916, the government was adrift.

Third, in February 1917, food riots occurred. The soldiers refused to fire to break up the mob. The representative body refused to dissolve at the commands of the emperor. The revolution was on. See Petrograd, July 1917, on page 1099 in the fifth edition of Chambers³.

D. Immediate Factors

The Duma or Provisional Government was weak because it was not elected. Soviets or councils, which in 1905 started to represent the workers, reappeared, agreeing to go along with the new government provided freedom and universal suffrage were respected. From a membership of not more than 40,000 at the time of the February Revolution, the Communists controlled one sixth of the world shortly after the October Revolution. The question is: How? Superior manipulation? Cynical opportunism? Attractive policy? Given these three choices, the best answer is the last.⁴ This section is developed further in the supplement. See "Lenin in Gorky Park in 1923" on page 1102.⁵

A social phenomena was at work which would ignite the revolution. Prior to February 1917, strikes were a means for settling disputes between labor and industrialists. By August these strikes had intensified beyond reasonable hope of a negotiated settlement. Bolshevik leaders were imprisoned and then released in order to gain soviet support for the defense of Petrograd.⁶

As Chambers notes on page 1101,⁷ most of Kornilov's men refused to follow his orders to defend Petrograd from the invading Germans. The refusal was a sign of changing dynamics in both Moscow and Petrograd. By October 1917, the weak democratic Provisional Government was no match for either the militant industrialists or the militant laborers. As Lenin put it, the battle had become over who would control whom.

Urban society had been polarized beyond repair, between militant industrialists and militant labor. By October 1917 strikes had become much more than a means for settling labor disputes. They had become a means for expressing dissatisfaction with the total social structure. Lenin tapped this dissatisfaction to begin the revolution.

Underestimating the extent of the social polarization, the growing intensity of class hostility, and the perceived irreconcilability of the people and the tsar makes the Bolshevik victory look like happenstance. The Bolsheviks make more sense not as superior manipulators or cynical opportunists but as molders of a policy formulated by Lenin in April and shaped by the events of the following months, through the February and October Revolutions, to be at the head of a genuinely popular movement.⁸ The collapse of the Soviet Union and the resurgence of the conservatives emphasized this appeal during the winter of 1994.

E. Significance

The significance of the Russian Revolution lies in leading developing societies to challenge Western domination in the context of the worldwide drive for economic modernization. The greatest achievement of the Bolsheviks lies in creating a new political order that has had strong appeal to dictators, both Communist and non-Communist.⁹

F. Conclusion

By thinking about the reading and this lecture, within a context of class discussion, the student is better able to evaluate Russian Communism. The criteria for this includes truth itself, effective policy, and the relationship between truth and effective policy.

Supplement

G. Introduction

If all of the above is true, then how can it be that perceptions are so different. The problem is that what actually happened, the facts, does not fit the perception of what happened. Dr. Jirran suspects that the false impressions are due to a deliberate distortion of the historical record by friends of communism in academe.

H. Immediate Factors (continued)¹⁰

Imperial Russia did have a movement among the urban elite openly looking for reform. The problems rose from an overly rapid growth of the cities within an agrarian framework. The royal central government in Moscow, however, did not recognize the need for change. The landed gentry were having their way.

Rule rested in the person of the Czar, rather than in the law. Russians actually liked things that way. The problem was that such centralization was too cumbersome to cope with the rapidly rising problems. The cities needed greater taxing power and less obligations for sending scarce resources to Moscow. Research indicates that the Moscow Duma was composed of businessmen who let politics, rather than economic realities, determine the truth.

I. False Claims

With regard to the coming of Communism in 1917, there are four false claims successfully made and perpetuated by the Communists. First: Communists brought the industrial revolution to Russia. In fact, historians can argue that the industrial revolution began in Russia even before 1850. Russians claim so many inventions that the Russians remind Dr. Jirran of the cover-up of African-American inventions in the United States.

Since 1960 Vladimir Ivanovich Vernadsky has attracted more historical study than any other Russian scientist.¹¹ Vernadsky is not indexed in the fifth edition of Chambers, although Dmitri Mendeleev is found on page 1020. Vernadsky is more studied even than Pavlov, who is not indexed in the fifth edition of Chambers either.

Vernadsky is important for ecology. While most Western scientists studied the impact the non-living world had on the living world, Vernadsky directed research in the other direction, looking toward the impact the living world had on the non-living world. Marxist scholars had trouble fitting Vernadsky into their political schemes.¹²

During the 1920s and 30s Vernadsky suffered from Marxist name-calling. After his death in 1945, Marxists made Vernadsky into a scientific hero. After 1960 Vernadsky became associated with dialectical materialism, Marxist philosophy. Vernadsky was more of a positivist than dialectical materialist. In fact, Vernadsky directed two major criticism against dialectical materialism.¹³

First, dialectical materialism was too abstract to be of much use for understanding the grand structures of empirical science. Second, dialectical materialism in the Soviet Union was too pompous to profit from the challenges of divergent views, challenges essential for locating not only scientific truths, but also political, philosophic, artistic, religious, and ethical truths.¹⁴

Vernadsky is interesting because he sought "a middle course between the mysticism and irrationalism of the old order and the excessive scientism of the Soviet system." Vernadsky was dedicated to democratic ideals.¹⁵ Continued research in the newly opened Russian archives should continue to enrich the meaning of the Soviet peoples for the Twentieth Century and beyond.

The second false claim is that Communists brought literacy. In fact fifty percent, rather than the ten per cent the Communists claimed, could read. Russia produced twice as many books in 1910, many undoubtedly in foreign languages produced for export, as did the U. S. in 1950. More than half the Russian school system was already set up, with the ideal of universal education well in place.

Some historical dimension is in order. Moscow University Press began catering to Russian intellectuals as far back as 1757. In the 1780s, Catherine the Great inaugurated significant school reforms.¹⁶

Almost fifty years later, in 1828, the tsars founded the Foreign Censorship Committee. Between 1856 and 1896 less than ten percent of all publications imported into imperial Russia for sale in bookstores and libraries were censored.¹⁷

As of 1973, the U.S.S.R. still limited quality education to all but two per cent of her students. Some say that the ideal of universal education was only resurrected by the Communists ten years after their take over. Science was advanced before the Communists took control. Before 1914, in fact, Russian scientists had already worked with the first four-engine plane and autogyros (a type of helicopter).

The third false claim put forth by the Communists was that the Communists brought socialized medicine to Russia. In fact, socialized medicine was already thought of as a public service in Russia, like education, before 1914.

The fourth and final false claim is that the Communists brought democracy to Russia, when, in fact, many political parties were already in existence between 1912 and 1915. Pravda and other newspapers of differing political views were allowed to be published. Ability, rather than birth alone, was recognized as a criteria for advancement. Between 1914 and 1917 several generals were of peasant origin.

J. Geography

The difference between perceptions and facts also arises in the matter of geography. The Ural Mountains divide Europe from Asia, Russia from Siberia. Siberia was as misunderstood by the Russians as was the rest of the world by the rest of Europe.¹⁸

In the early Nineteenth Century, Russian autocrats considered Siberia a remnant of bygone glory. Non-autocrats regarded Siberia as a hope for democracy and egalitarian society. Nationalists related Siberia to Russia as one part of a mosaic to another. Siberia was neither a bygone glory nor a future hope.¹⁹

In general, Siberia still comes across as a sort of colonial resource for petroleum, natural gas, coal, and metallic and mineral ores, rather than furs. For the European Russian imagination, Siberia is a sort of barbaric Wild West. That is a nationalist view.²⁰

Siberia remains a Twentieth Century hope for dissidents. In the Nineteenth Century, dissidents disagreed with the Czar, in the Twentieth Century with the Communists. Alexander Solzhenitsyn represents this hopeful vision. Solzhenitsyn wrote:

Fortunately, we have . . . a home, a spacious and unsullied home preserved for us by history--the Russian Northeast [i.e. Siberia] . . . The Northeast is a reminder that Russia is the Northeast of the Planet, that our ocean is the Arctic, not the Indian Ocean, that we are not the Mediterranean nor Africa and that we have no business there! These boundless expanses, senselessly left stagnant and icily barren for four centuries, await our hands, our sacrifices, our zeal and our love . . . (W)e should be directing our forces and urging our young people toward the Northeast--that is the far-sighted solution. Its great expanses offer us a way out of the worldwide technological crisis. They offer us plenty of room in which to correct all our idiocies in building towns, industrial enterprises, power stations and roads. Its cold and in places permanently frozen soil is still not ready for cultivation, it will require enormous inputs of energy--but the energy lies hidden in the depths of the Northeast itself, since we have not yet had time to squander it . . . Only a free people with a free understanding of our national mission can resurrect these great spaces, awaken them, heal them, beautify them with feats of engineering.²¹

K. Conclusion

The incompatible inseparables at work here are between the vernacular, or language as spoken by the people, and Latin, or language as spoken by the intellectual specialist. Dr. Jirran is coming to see this incompatible inseparable as the one between truth and politics, Latin being the truth, the vernacular being politics. At the economic level, the great Russian struggle has been over the middle classes, but at the political and religious levels the great Russian struggle has been over which should dominate which, truth or politics. By studying the Introduction, Long Range Factors, Intermediate Factors, Immediate Factors, Significance, and Conclusion in the lecture proper and Introduction, Immediate Factors (continued), False Claims, Geography, and this Conclusion in the supplement, students have been able to evaluate Russian Communism **according to a criteria of the chronology, personalities, places, and degrees of certitude warranted. Students are reminded to read, study, think, and prepare a comment.**

Footnotes

- ¹ My comments are largely based on class notes I took about 1960 at Kent State University with the late Professor Alfred Skerpan. Professor Skerpan made several statements which I have entitled False Claims, Long, Intermediate, and Immediate Factors. His thoughts have stood the test of time before my students better than practically any other. The lecture based on these notes was used for about ten consecutive years, from 1970 to 1980, without change.
- ² See Gregory L. Freeze, "The Soslovie (Estate) paradigm," The American Historical Review, 91, (February 1986): 11-36, especially p. 35.
- ³ P. 995 in the fourth edition of Chambers.
- ⁴ Ronald Grigor Suny, "Toward a Social History of the October Revolution," The American Historical Review, 88 (February 1983), 31-52.
- ⁵ Page 998 in the fourth edition of Chambers.
- ⁶ This and the next two paragraphs draw from William G. Rosenberg and Diane P. Koenker, "The Limits of Formal Protest: Worker Activism and Social Polarization in Petrograd and Moscow, March to October, 1917," The American Historical Review, 92 (April 1987): 323-326.
- ⁷ Page 997 in the fourth edition of Chambers.
- ⁸ Ronald Grigor Suny, "Toward a Social History of the October Revolution," The American Historical Review, 88 (February 1983): 49 and 52.
- ⁹ John Keep, review of Dietrich Geyer, The Russian Revolution: Historical Problems and Perspectives, in The American Historical Review, Vol. 93, No. 5 (December 1988), page ?? unknown, but crosses from even to odd numbered and comes just before the "Near East" book reviews.
- ¹⁰ Relies on Daniel T. Orlovsky, review of Robert W. Thurston, Liberal City, Conservative State: Moscow and Russia's Urban Crisis, 1906-1914 in The American Historical Review, Vol. 95, No. 2 (April 1990), pages 551-552.
- ¹¹ Alexander Vucinich, review of Kendall E. Bailes, Science and Russian Culture in an Age of Revolutions: V.I. Vernadsky and His Scientific School, 1863-1945 in The American Historical Review, Vol. 96, No. 2 (April 1991), pages 565-566.
- ¹² Alexander Vucinich, review of Kendall E. Bailes, Science and Russian Culture in an Age of Revolutions: V.I. Vernadsky and His Scientific School, 1863-1945 in The American Historical Review, Vol. 96, No. 2 (April 1991), pages 565.
- ¹³ Alexander Vucinich, review of Kendall E. Bailes, Science and Russian Culture in an Age of Revolutions: V.I. Vernadsky and His Scientific School, 1863-1945 in The American Historical Review, Vol. 96, No. 2 (April 1991), pages 565.
- ¹⁴ Alexander Vucinich, review of Kendall E. Bailes, Science and Russian Culture in an Age of

Revolutions: V.I. Vernadsky and His Scientific School, 1863-1945 in The American Historical Review, Vol. 96, No. 2 (April 1991), pages 565.

¹⁵ Alexander Vucinich, review of Kendall E. Bailes, Science and Russian Culture in an Age of Revolutions: V.I. Vernadsky and His Scientific School, 1863-1945 in The American Historical Review, Vol. 96, No. 2 (April 1991), pages 565.

¹⁶ J. L. Black, review of Gary Marker, Publishing, Printing, and the Origins of Intellectual Life in Russia, 1700-1800, in The American Historical Review, 90 (April 1986): 435-436.

¹⁷ Charles A. Rudd, review of Marianna Tax Choldin, A Fence around the Empire: Russian Censorship of Western Ideas under the Tsars, in The American Historical Review, 90 (April 1986): 436.

¹⁸ Mark Bassin, "Inventing Siberia: Visions of the Russian East in the Early Nineteenth Century," The American Historical Review, Vol. 96, No. 3 (June 1991), page 792.

¹⁹ Mark Bassin, "Inventing Siberia: Visions of the Russian East in the Early Nineteenth Century," The American Historical Review, Vol. 96, No. 3 (June 1991), page 792.

²⁰ Mark Bassin, "Inventing Siberia: Visions of the Russian East in the Early Nineteenth Century," The American Historical Review, Vol. 96, No. 3 (June 1991), page 792.

²¹ Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "Repentance and Self-Limitation," From under the Rubble, A. M. Brock, et al., trans. (Boston, 1974), 140-42 as cited in footnote 90 in Mark Bassin, "Inventing Siberia: Visions of the Russian East in the Early Nineteenth Century," The American Historical Review, Vol. 96, No. 3 (June 1991), page 794.