



THE SOVIET UNION SINCE 1917

MARTIN McCaULEY



LONGMAN HISTORY OF RUSSIA

The Soviet Union since 1917

MARTIN McCAULEY



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Glossary

Agrogorod (plural *agrogoroda*) Agrotowns

Apparat Administrative apparatus of the Communist Party

ARCWC All-Russian Council of Workers' Control

AUCECB All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians and Baptists

AUCP(B) *see* CPSU

AUW All-Russian Union of Writers

Bolshevik A Party theoretical journal

Bolsheviks When the RSDRP split in 1903 those in the majority became known as Bolsheviks and those in the minority became known as Mensheviks

CC Central Committee (of the Communist Party)

CEC Central Executive Committee (of the soviet)

CENTO Central Treaty Organisation

Cheka Political or secret police (also known as GPU, OGPU, NKVD, MVD, MGB and KGB)

CMEA Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (also Comecon)

Comecon *see* CMEA

Cominform Communist Information Bureau

Comintern Communist International

Conference No longer held but previously important. Not all party organisations represented

Congress After revolution convened annually but now only meets every five years. Congress elects a new CC, Secretariat and Politburo

Cossacks Originally their task was to guard the nation's frontiers. Hence there are Don Cossacks, Kuban Cossacks and so on

CPSU Communist Party of the Soviet Union (formerly RSDRP, RCP(B) and AUCP(B))

DCs Democratic Centralists

Druzhinniki Voluntary civilian police

ECB *see* AUCECB

EDC European Defence Community

First Secretary Head of the Communist Party – this title was only used between 1953 and 1966. Also known as Secretary General. The head of a republican, krai, oblast, city and raion party organisation is also called first secretary.

FRG Federal Republic of Germany (also known as West Germany)

FYP Five-Year Plan

GDR German Democratic Republic (also known as East Germany)

GKO State Committee of Defence

Glavk (plural *glavki*) Chief department of a ministry or other central institution

GOSPLAN State Planning Commission, now responsible for all Soviet economic planning

GPU Main Political Administration (*see* Cheka)

Izvestiya Literally means 'news'. Name of the official organ of the Soviet government. In and after 1917 many soviets published their own *Izvestiya*

Kadets Constitutional Democrats (or Liberals)

Kavburo Caucasian Bureau of the CC, RCP(B). Co-ordinated activities of the CPs of Azerbaidzhan, Armenia and Georgia

KGB Committee of State Security (*see* Cheka)

Kolkhoz Literally collective economy. Collective farm

Kolkhoznik Male collective-farm peasant

Kolkhoznitsa Female collective-farm peasant

Kombedy Committees of the Poor

Kommunist A Party theoretical journal

Komsomol Communist Union of Youth

KPD Communist Party of Germany

Krai Administrative-territorial division (usually contains an autonomous oblast within its boundaries)

Kulak Well-to-do peasant (always used in a pejorative sense in Soviet writings)

Mao Zedong (Pinyin orthography) Mao Tse-tung (Wade-Giles orthography)

MBFR Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction

Mensheviks Those in minority when the RSDRP split in 1903

MGB *see* Cheka

Mir Village community

MRC Military Revolutionary Committee

MTS Machine Tractor Station

MVD Ministry of Internal Affairs (*see* Cheka)

GLOSSARY

Narkomindel People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs
Narkomnats People's Commissariat for Nationalities
NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NEP New Economic Policy
NKFD National Committee for a Free Germany
NKVD *see* Cheka
Novy Mir A literary journal
NSDAP National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazi Party)

Oblast Administrative-territorial division
OGPU *see* Cheka
Oktyabr A literary political journal
Orgburo Organisational Bureau of the CC

Partiinost Party-mindedness (writing from a Party point of view)
PCF French Communist Party
PCI Italian Communist Party
Politburo Political Bureau of the CC. Nowadays key decision-making body.
Was known as Presidium between 1952 and 1966
Popular Front Tactical alliance of communists with all anti-fascists
Pravda Literally means 'truth'. Official organ of the Communist party
Presidium *see* Politburo

Rabkrin Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate
Raion Administrative-territorial division
RAPP Association of Proletarian Writers
RCP(B) All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks); now CPSU
Reds Communists; Bolshevik forces during the Civil War
RSDRP All-Russian Social Democratic Labour Party; founded 1898, split 1903; now CPSU
RSFSR Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic

SALT Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty
SEATO South East Asia Treaty Organisation
Secretariat The administrative centre of the communist party; now only second to Politburo
Secretary General Head of the Communist Party. Title used between 1922 and 1934 and since 1966
SED Socialist Unity Party of Germany (Communist Party in GDR)
Selkhoztekhnika Organisation for the provision of agricultural machinery and chemicals
Selsovet Village soviet
Social Democrats Members of the RSDRP
Soviet Council
Sovkhoz Literally 'State economy'; State farm
Sovkhoznik Male State farmworker

GLOSSARY

- Sovkhoznitsa** Female State farmworker
Sovnarkhoz Council of the National Economy (1957–65)
Sovnarkom Council of People's Commissars (the government). In 1946 changed to the USSR Council of Ministers
SPD Social Democratic Party of Germany
SRs Socialist Revolutionaries
Stakhanovite A worker who has performed extraordinary feats of endeavour; later led to raising of norms of others
State Capitalism Name of economic order between October 1917 and June 1918
STO Council of Labour and Defence
- TPA** Territorial Production Administrations
Travopole System of grassland management
Trudoden (plural *Trudodni*) Labour day; a kolkhoznik could earn several *trudodni* during a day's work
Tsar Imperial ruler (derived from Caesar)
Tsarina Imperial ruler's wife
TSFSR Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic
- Uchraspred** Records and assignment division of the CC
Uezd Administrative-territorial division
United Front Tactical communist alliance with social democrats; united front from above was with social democratic leadership; united front from below was with social democratic rank and file over the heads of their leadership
USPD Independent Social Democrat Party of Germany
USSR Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
- Vikzhedor** All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Railwaymen (Bolshevik)
Vikzhel All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Railwaymen (non-Bolshevik)
Voprosy Ekonomiki An economics journal
Vozhd Leader (cf. Fuhrer and Duce)
VSUNKh Supreme Council of the National Economy
- War Communism** Economic order between June 1918 and March 1921
Whites Anti-Bolshevik forces during Civil War
WO Workers' Opposition
- Zakraikom** Transcaucasian Bureau of the CC, RCP(B)
Zhou Enlai (Pinyin orthography) Chou En-lai (Wade-Giles orthography)
Znamya Journal
Zveno Link

Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	1
<i>Chapter one</i> Revolution	6
The February Revolution 6	
The October Revolution 14	
The mass organisations 18: Factory committees and trade unions 18, The soviets 21	
The Constituent Assembly 23	
The Brest-Litovsk Treaty 24	
Sovnarkom and the CEC 27	
The Civil War 28	
War Communism 33	
The Party and the State 35	
The nationalities 38 ✓	
Securing the frontiers 39	
Critical choices 40	
The key decision-making body 44	
The Comintern 45	
<i>Chapter two</i> The new economic policy	48
Introduction 48	
The foreign trade monopoly 51	
The Georgian affair 52	
The struggle for the succession 54: Against Trotsky 55, Against Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev 59, The foreign policy context 61, Against Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky 64	
Culture 67	
Summary 68	
<i>Chapter three</i> The thirties	72
Industrialisation and collectivisation 72	
Social policy 79	
Culture 87	
The purges 90	
Foreign policy 97	
Stalinism triumphant 102	
<i>Chapter Four</i> The great Fatherland war	108
Invasion 108	
German war goals 114	
The progress of the war 115	
The civil scene: the economy 118	
Culture 119	
The Church 121	
The Party 120	
The nationalities 120	
The Grand Alliance 122	

CONTENTS

<i>Chapter Five</i>	The last years of Stalin	131
	Internal politics 131 Economic policy 138 Social policy 141	
	Culture 143 Religion 148 Foreign policy 149	
<i>Chapter Six</i>	The Krushchev era	163
	Internal politics 163: 1953–55 167, 1955–57 173, 1958–64 180	
	Economic policy 188 Social policy 190 Culture 192	
	Religion 196 Foreign policy 198: The US and China 198,	
	The Middle East 203, Asia 205, Australia 208, Africa 209, Latin	
	America 210	
<i>Chapter Seven</i>	The Brezhnev era	214
	Introduction 214 Domestic policy 216 Economic policy 220	
	Social policy 222 Culture 227 Nationalities 230	
	Dissent and opposition 234 Religion 237 Foreign	
	policy 238: The United States and China 239, Eastern Europe 242,	
	Western Europe 245, The Middle East 247, South Asia 250, South	
	East Asia 251, East Asia 253, Australasia 254, Africa 254, Latin	
	America 258 The ruling class 260	
<i>Selected bibliography</i>	265
<i>Index</i>	276

Introduction

What makes a revolutionary? Sensitivity to suffering and injustice can grow with experience. This sensitivity first arouses sympathy, then a desire to alleviate the pain which is so visible. When the person places the responsibility for the circumstances he abhors on the way the State is governed he can be said to possess political consciousness. He then enters the marketplace of ideas, seeking a solution which will not only describe the desired society but also the route to be taken to get there. Hence sensitivity, idealism, self-sacrifice and love of one's fellow man may all be part of the make-up of the young revolutionary. Others, between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, may not succeed in adjusting to adult society. They nurture a resentment which may develop into hatred for adult society and may become politically active in order to destroy it. Some feel so exploited and downtrodden and possess so little faith in a better tomorrow that they eagerly join those bent on wrecking the existing order of things. Yet others, possessing considerable ability and energy, seek a purpose in life.

Just what shape should the new society take? It is quite clear what is not desired, the existing state of things. This can be considered as negative truth. The objective, positive truth, is perceived as the opposite of this. In the case of the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs), the Russian agrarian socialists, it was ownership of land in excess of family needs which was seen as the root cause of inequality and exploitation. Redistribute the surplus among the peasants and the gates of the new society would open. In the case of the social democrats, the private ownership of the means of production, the factories, mines and so on, was the main barrier to progress. Inherent in both these views is the conviction that labour is virtuous. The social democrats also believed in the perfectibility of human nature. The time-scale of change is another factor. Some, who may be called moderates, are more willing to wait for circumstances to become more propitious. Others, who may be referred to as maximalists, wish to nudge the elbow of history and quicken the pace of events. In Russia both factions were to be found within the SR party and the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDRP). The latter had split in 1903 into Bolsheviks (majoritarians) and Mensheviks (minoritarians). By 1917 the Men-

sheviks really represented the RSDLP with the Bolsheviks forming their own party. The dominant, if not domineering personality in the Bolshevik camp was Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov (1870–1924), known to the world as Lenin.

After war had broken the back of Imperial Russia the moderates enjoyed considerable influence. The February Revolution of 1917 led to the formation of a Provisional Government, dominated by liberals. The forum of the moderate socialists (SRs and Mensheviks) was the soviet. The SRs, Mensheviks and even the Bolshevik leadership inside Russia (Lenin was still in exile in Switzerland at the time) agreed that the Provisional Government had the right to rule since the February Revolution had been bourgeois. The bourgeois stage would last quite some time. This harmony was shattered by Lenin on his return to Petrograd on 3 April 1917. He advocated opposition to the Provisional Government, all power to the soviets, an end to the war and shortly afterwards all land to the peasants. The Mensheviks were to be fought tooth and nail. His goal was socialism and he believed that the bourgeois stage of the revolution could be cut short. Lenin was the principal maximalist. Others rallied to his side, anarchists, some Mensheviks and SRs but his main support came, of course, from the Bolshevik party which grew in strength under his direct guidance. The moderates joined the government and this provided the maximalists with more ammunition. The inability of any government to alleviate the dire economic distress or end the war radicalised the population. Kerensky's attempt to suppress the Petrograd Soviet by using the military was the last straw. The maximalists were unstoppable. The Bolsheviks took power on 25 October/7 November 1917 and presented it to the IInd Congress of Soviets which had a Bolshevik majority. So the October Revolution was a Soviet Revolution. It had overwhelming support throughout the country. It should be underlined, however, that the masses understood that power had passed to soviets at all levels. They were not making a revolution to usher in the dictatorship of the proletariat and, by extension, of the Communist Party. That was only the desire of part of the working class, a small minority in Russia at that time.

Had the Bolsheviks not acted when they did there would still have been a revolution in 1917. Elections to the Constituent Assembly, the new parliament, scheduled for 25 November 1917, were bound to sweep away the Provisional Government and place the SRs in power. It is possible that a socialist coalition government would have resulted. What would have been the relationship between the Constituent Assembly and the Congress of Soviets? Here again the moderates and the maximalists diverged. The moderates regarded the soviets as institutions which would gradually transfer their functions to central governmental organs. They would remain but only play a supervisory role. The maximalists, first and foremost the Bolsheviks, saw the soviets as the key institution in post-revolutionary Russia. They would afford the creative and dynamic talents of the population full play. As it turned out Lenin did not regard the soviets as sovereign bodies. They were to be brought under central control and become instruments of rule. This was not spelled out before the October Revolution.

INTRODUCTION

The October Revolution was three revolutions in one: a peasant revolution, a workers' revolution and a national revolution. The peasants were given the land, the workers claimed the factories but this was only accepted by the Bolsheviks in June 1918, and the nationalities claimed self-determination. And October was also a Soviet revolution. The Bolsheviks did not consider that the revolution could survive unless the world socialist revolution came to its aid. There were those, the maximalists again, who wanted a revolutionary war with Imperial Germany and the immediate construction of a socialist economy. Lenin opposed both suggestions; he was forced to become a moderate in the circumstances.

The realities of post-October Russia forced most Bolsheviks to rethink their ideas. The peasants, the vast majority of the population, rejected Marxism as they had rejected the attempt by Stolypin to introduce a Western pattern of land-holding in the countryside. Lenin's optimistic views, expressed in *State and Revolution*, about the withering away of the State and the ease with which the State and economy could be run had to be abandoned as utopian. What exactly did the dictatorship of the proletariat mean? How could a whole class rule? Had circumstances been more propitious, a greater degree of flexibility could have been tried. Given the shrinking support base of the Bolsheviks and their overriding desire to stay in power, come what may, dictatorship of the party and then of a small group of leaders was inevitable. Soviet Russia was too underdeveloped to be ruled from anywhere else than the centre. Returning to our analogy there was precious little room for positive truth: its negative aspects still loomed too large. A factor which complicated matters was the twofold nature of Soviet Russia; was she a revolutionary base or a State? The 'left' communists, the maximalists again, in the early years regarded her as the former while Lenin and others tended to see her as the latter.

The failure of War Communism and the world socialist revolution forced the Bolsheviks to retreat. The 1920s were the golden era of the Soviet peasant but this very fact increased internecine strife at the top of the party. All the leaders agreed that planned industrialisation was necessary. Their policy differences were not all that great but Stalin and his supporters were skilled enough to make it appear that a gulf separated the left from the right. Trotsky was found sadly wanting. A tower of strength in war and revolution he fizzled out as a peacetime politician. Mundane detail was too much for him. Bukharin's practical economic experience was restricted to running *Pravda*.

If a ruling class, Rakovsky's phrase, had come into being in the 1920s, the next decade saw the rise of a single man, Joseph Vissarionovich Dzhughashvili, known as Stalin. He was driven forward by the dynamic force of the revolution: there was no way of knowing where things were leading. The policies adopted in the late 1920s exacerbated the situation but, that aside, anyone coming to the top in the Soviet Union at that time would have faced the same problems as Stalin. Industrialisation could have moved ahead at a moderate speed but Stalin, the arch maximalist, adopted a frantic pace. His brutal methods, however, were not the only way to proceed. His vision of socialism which included rigorous discipline, hierarchy, privilege, the importance of the

INTRODUCTION

family, the overriding importance of the present, coercion and subordination to one leader was his own. Others could also have propelled the country towards socialism and had they done so the USSR would be quite a different country today.

Stalinism was the formative experience of the Soviet Union. It fitted the country at a certain stage of development. It attempted to speed up modernisation. An effort was made to transform reluctant peasants into exemplary workers inside a very short time-span. All the evidence from other societies is that this process takes a very long time. It is evident that the Soviet Union today still has some way to go before she becomes an advanced, modern society.

The Second World War welded Soviet society together for the first time. Common suffering during wartime, then pride at victory, then determination to put the country back on its feet after 1945 galvanised millions. Now, in 1980, the Soviet Union is a super power. Economically, despite the waste and inefficiency, the USSR is a success story. However, Soviet power and influence nowadays does not rest on economic and political foundations, it is primarily the result of military might. Despised in 1917, the armed forces have become the strong right arm of the Soviet state. Great power rivalry with the United States since 1945 has led to the scientific and engineering talent of the nation being concentrated in the military sector of the economy. This now amounts to about one-third of the industrial sector and is, not surprisingly, the most efficient part. One may view Soviet foreign policy as essentially defensive with military and defence thinking concentrated on protecting the gains of the USSR in the Second World War. However, there appears to have been a fundamental change in thinking in the early 1970s just after Moscow had achieved nuclear parity with Washington. Since then foreign policy has been more closely linked to military might. Soviet advances in Africa; in Angola, Mozambique and Ethiopia especially, were made possible by the capabilities of the Soviet army and navy. They provided war materiel for the insurgents and, after victory, prevented any foreign power from intervening. Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, in late December 1979, provided a new pattern. Whereas in Africa the Soviets only supplied officers and equipment with the Cubans doing the actual fighting, only Soviet troops are involved in Afghanistan. The presence of over 80,000 troops there is made possible by the ability of the Soviet Union to provision her forces by land from Tashkent. Building strategic roads in the past in Afghanistan is now paying extra dividends.

In 1980 Soviet military power has never been so great. On the other hand the economy is under considerable strain. Growth rates have dropped, partly due to the slow rise in labour productivity. This at a time when there is a growing labour shortage in certain industries and in certain parts of the country. Increases in oil output are becoming more difficult to achieve and hydrocarbons will have to be extracted in the future from more inhospitable terrain than at present. This will add to the costs of exploitation. Agriculture is a high-cost sector of the economy. Between 1963 and 1979 shortfalls of feed grain could always be covered by imports from North America. However, the

INTRODUCTION

grain embargo imposed by President Carter in January 1980—this does not include the 8 million tonnes which the USSR is permitted to purchase according to the US – USSR grain agreement – means that home-grown grain output will have to increase to cover the eventuality that future shortfalls may not be covered from North America. More money going into Soviet agriculture means less investment elsewhere.

The only area in the Soviet Union in which there is substantial underemployment is Central Asia. Migration out of the region is small. Here as in Kazakhstan and Azerbaidzhan the local Muslim population has been increasing in self-awareness and self-confidence of late. Moscow's nationality policy in the 1980s will be vitally important. Hence there is a whole complex of problems facing the Soviet leadership now. Allocations of investment will become a more contentious subject than in the past. There are just not the resources available to meet demand.

Did a ruling class come into being, as Rakovsky maintains, in the 1920s and if so is it still in control of the Soviet Union? A case is made out that the USSR today has a ruling class but that it attempts to hide this fact behind a wall of rhetoric.

All dates before 25 October 1917 are Old Style; all dates after that are New Style. Add thirteen days to an Old Style date to get a New Style date. The terms February and October Revolutions have been used throughout although these events took place in March and November 1917, New Style.

Some recent books have been included in the Selected Bibliography but were published too late to be taken into consideration during the writing of this book. Strictly speaking the Soviet Union did not come into existence until 1922 but notwithstanding this, this book is called *The Soviet Union since 1917*. The country was known before 1922 as Soviet Russia. However it is now general practice to date the Soviet Union from 1917.

July 1980

MARTIN McCAULEY

Revolution

'DAYS OF HOPE AND DAYS OF DESPAIR'

THE FEBRUARY REVOLUTION

The pomp and circumstance which attended the tercentenary celebrations of the Romanov dynasty in 1913 matched the occasion. The Tsar, Nicholas II, and the Tsarina, Aleksandra, glowed with pride. But pride comes before a fall. And the fall, in February 1917, was sudden, unexpected and complete. The autocrat of all the Russias passed from the scene without so much as a whisper of protest. How was this possible?

The First World War imposed intolerable strains on the State. Russia had been undergoing a process of modernisation before 1914 and the war quickened the pace but the demands were too great. By the end of 1916 public confidence in the government had evaporated, the army had been defeated and transport problems were mounting. About 80,000 metal and textile workers went on strike on 23 February. It also happened to be International Women's Day. It had not been organised by any political party, it was the spontaneous expression of increasing exasperation at the privations and shortages, exacerbated by war. There were 160,000 troops garrisoned in the capital, Petrograd. The regime did not appear to be in danger. The strike gradually spread throughout the city, bringing vast numbers of people on to the streets. On 26 February the troops fired on the demonstrators and drew blood but by the following day the mood of the army was different. The Volhynian regiment went over to the people and set out to convince others to do the same. Other regiments followed. The Cossacks, *formally the most reliable of the imperial guards*, changed sides and this doomed the dynasty. The revolution had almost been bloodless; only 587 civilians, 655 soldiers and 73 policemen sealed its victory with their blood.

The leaderless crowds turned to the only authority they knew, the parliament or Duma. It had been dissolved by the Tsar but a thirteen-man Temporary Committee composed of members of all political groupings except the right, and essentially middle class, was set up on 27 February. Also established the same day and in the same building, the Tauride Palace, was the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' Deputies (when representatives arrived from the

garrisons it became known as the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies). A descendant of the Soviet of 1905, it was brought into being largely on Menshevik initiative. The Temporary Committee wanted to preserve the monarchy, fearing anarchy if the symbol of authority passed from the scene. However, the Tsar could not be saved and he abdicated almost with a sigh of relief. He abdicated first in favour of his haemophiliac son, Aleksei, on 2 March 1917 but then changed his mind when he discovered he would have to part from the boy if the latter became Tsar. He then abdicated a second time, later the same day, in favour of his brother Grand Duke Mikhail Aleksandrovich. The latter refused the proffered crown, wisely indicating that he would only accept it if the Constituent Assembly placed it on his head. Russia had become a *de facto* republic. This was what the crowds wanted, a constitutional monarchy held little attraction for them. Already the Temporary Committee was out of step with the aspirations of the people. After all, the masses had made the revolution and not the middle classes. In the months after February they accepted that the bourgeoisie should hold the reins of government since they had no leaders of their own and the Petrograd Soviet had no desire to rule. It was dominated by the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs) and the Mensheviks – the moderate socialists – and they reasoned that since the revolution was at its bourgeois stage the representatives of the bourgeoisie should form the administration. The Soviet would support the new government (or the Provisional Government as it became known when it took office on 2 March) against reaction but it would oppose it if it went against the goals of the February Revolution. The government was provisional or temporary until the Constituent Assembly, the first democratically elected parliament, convened. A government of national unity was never contemplated.

The first Prime Minister was Prince G. E. Lvov, a liberal but not a member of any party. The liberals, the Constitutional Democrats or Kadets, dominated the ten-man administration. There was only one surprise among the ministers, the Minister of Justice was A. F. Kerensky, an SR and a member of the Petrograd Soviet. The latter had officially voted not to participate in the new government but Kerensky's verbal wizardry, on a par with that of his contemporary David Lloyd George, won him the right to accept a portfolio.

The government immediately enacted much progressive legislation. An amnesty was declared for all political prisoners, capital punishment was abolished, the right to strike and organise was granted and all legal restrictions based on class, nationality and religion were lifted. Lenin even went so far as to state that Russia was the freest of all the belligerent countries in the world. This meant that the government had to pay more attention to public opinion and the universal feeling among the population was that the war should be brought to a swift end. But how was this to be achieved? The Soviet wanted international socialist action to secure a just peace without annexations and indemnities. Correspondingly the Soviet issued an appeal to the 'comrade proletarians and toilers of all countries'.¹ The government, on the other hand, believed that one of the reasons for the Revolution had been the inefficient manner in which the Imperial regime had prosecuted the war. Prince Lvov