

HODDER **GCSE** HISTORY FOR **EDEXCEL**



RUSSIA AND THE SOVIET UNION

1917–41

Steve Waugh • John Wright



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KEY TOPIC 1

The revolutions of 1917

This key topic examines the key developments in Russia in 1917, a year in which there were two revolutions. The First World War had increased the unpopularity of Tsar Nicholas II, and he was forced to abdicate as a result of the February Revolution. The short-lived Provisional Government, which followed, was unable to resolve the problems that faced Russia and was overthrown by the Bolsheviks in what became known as the October Revolution.

Each chapter within this key topic explains a key issue and examines important lines of enquiry as outlined in the boxes below.

There will also be guidance on how to answer the interpretations question:

- Understanding interpretations (page 23)
- How to answer the first question on interpretations – what is the main difference between the views (page 38).

CHAPTER 1 RUSSIA IN EARLY 1917

- Threats to the tsarist regime: discontent among peasants and town workers and the growth of opposition.
- The impact of the First World War, including military defeats, economic, social and political effects, and the Tsar as commander-in-chief.

CHAPTER 3 THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT

- The establishment of the Provisional Government and problems it faced.
- The weaknesses and failures of the Provisional Government, the role of Kerensky and the Bolshevik takeover in October.
- The significance of the Kornilov Revolt.

CHAPTER 2 THE FEBRUARY REVOLUTION

- Immediate reasons for the February Revolution.
- Events in Petrograd in February 1917, including strikes and the mutiny in the army.
- The Tsar's absence and abdication.

CHAPTER 4 THE BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION

- Lenin's return and activities including the April Theses and the growth in support for the Bolshevik Party. The 'July Days'.
- The Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917 and the reasons for their success. The roles of Trotsky and Lenin.

TIMELINE 1917

25 February	Strikes all over city of Petrograd	April	Return of Lenin to Russia and 'April Theses'
27 February	Soldiers in Petrograd garrison desert	July	Bolsheviks arrested during the 'July Days'
2 March	Abdication of Nicholas II	September	The Kornilov Revolt
3 March	Setting up of the Provisional Government	October	Bolshevik seizure of power

1 Russia in early 1917

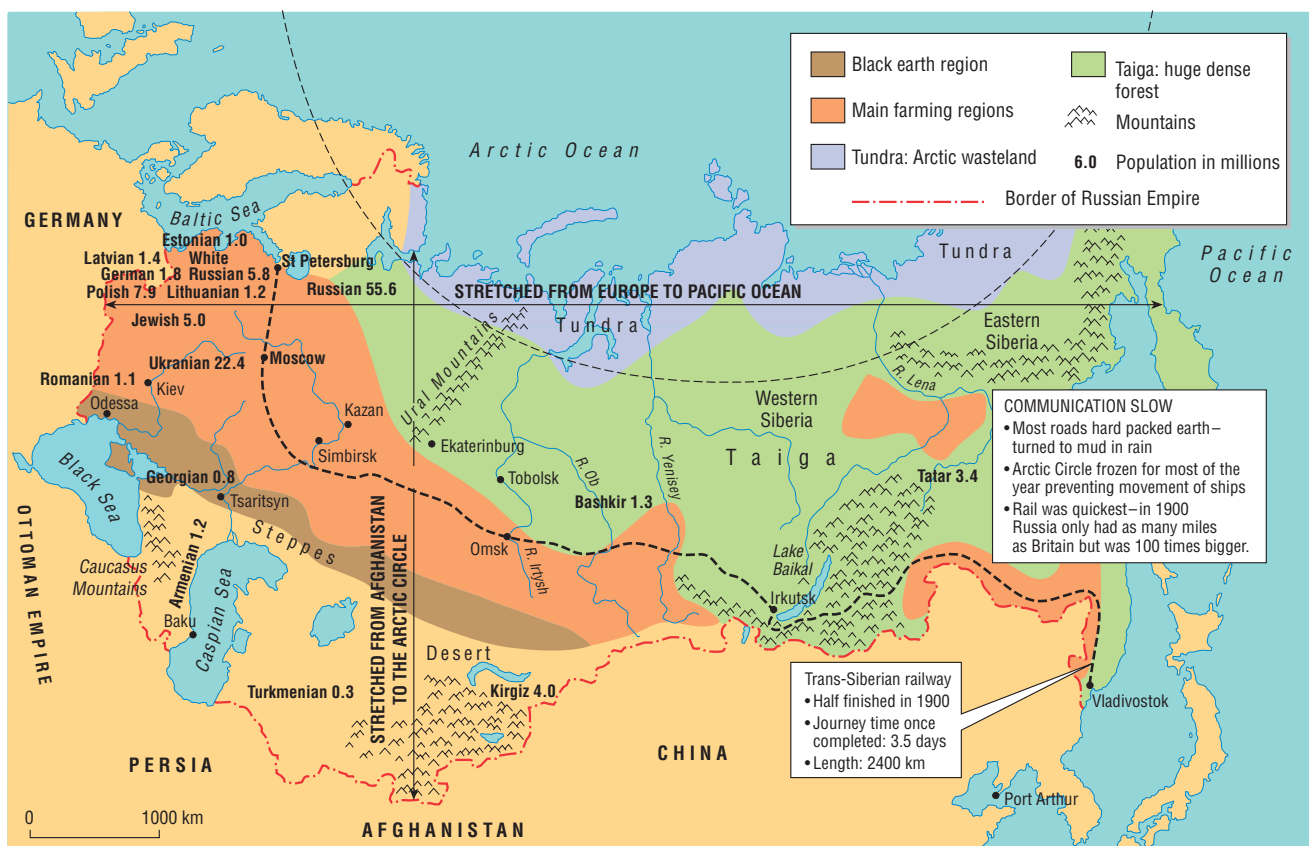
In 1917 there was massive discontent in Russia, due to long-term economic and political problems made worse by the effects of Russia's military failures in the First World War. These led to growing opposition against Tsar Nicholas II, who was blamed for the military defeats; an opposition which would eventually lead to his downfall.

1.1 Reasons for discontent

In the early twentieth century Russia was a vast empire covering one-sixth of the world's surface (see Figure 1.1). Ruled by Tsar Nicholas II (of the **Romanov dynasty**), it had many different regions and a total population of 125 million people and faced a number of political, economic, social, religious and geographical problems. These led to discontent and growing opposition, which threatened the tsarist regime.

ACTIVITY

Using Figure 1.1, suggest reasons why the size of the Russian Empire made it so difficult to govern.



▲ **Figure 1.1** The Russian Empire in the early twentieth century

The 'subject nationalities'

The Russian Empire was difficult to rule because it was made up of more than 20 different peoples or ethnic groups. For six people out of every ten, Russian was a foreign language. These non-Russian groups were known as 'subject nationalities'. Many of these peoples resented being part of the Russian Empire, especially as its rulers carried out a policy of '**Russification**'. This meant making non-Russians speak Russian, wear Russian clothes and follow Russian customs. For example, in the area of present-day Poland, it was forbidden to teach children in Polish. Moreover, Russians were often given the important jobs in non-Russian areas.

Discontent with the government

Russia was an **autocracy** with all the power in the hands of the tsar. The tsar believed that he had a divine right to rule – that is, God had chosen him. This meant he could do whatever he liked without having to consult his people. The only parliament was the *duma* (see page 10) which had very little power.

About 70 per cent of the population were members of the **Orthodox Church**. The Church was closely linked to the tsar and supported his way of ruling. It taught that the tsar was the head of the country and the Church – in other words, that he was God's chosen representative on earth.

The tsar did have a council of ministers that ran the various government departments, but they could not make important decisions. There were thousands of civil servants, such as tax collectors, who carried out the day-to-day work of government. They were generally poorly paid, so this encouraged bribery and corruption.

The Russian people had little freedom. All unions of workers and strikes were forbidden, and newspapers and books were censored by the government. The tsar was determined to suppress all opposition through the Okhrana, his secret police. They used spies and agents to root out anyone who was against the tsar and his system of government. Such opponents could be imprisoned without trial or exiled to far-off Siberia. Russian writer Leo Tolstoy describes the situation in Source A.

Source A Extract from a letter about the discontent at the time, written from Russian novelist, Leo Tolstoy, to Tsar Nicholas II in 1902

A third of the whole of Russia lives under police surveillance. The army of the police, both regular and secret, is continually growing in numbers. The prisons are overcrowded with thousands of convicts and political prisoners. Censorship has reached its highest level since the 1840s. In all cities ... soldiers are ... equipped with live ammunition to be sent out against the people.

► **Source C** A portrait photo of Tsar Nicholas II of Russia, the Tsarina Alexandra, son Alexis and four daughters – Olga, Tatiana, Maria and Anastasia, c. 1914

Nicholas II's weaknesses

The system of autocracy only worked if the tsar was strong and able to control the government and different nationalities of the vast Russian Empire. Nicholas II, who became tsar in 1894, was not a strong character. He was reluctant to become tsar, possibly because he witnessed the assassination of his grandfather, Alexander II, in 1881. When Nicholas became tsar in 1894 he said:

What is going to happen to me? I am not prepared to be tsar. I never wanted to become one. I know nothing of the business of ruling. I have no idea of even how to talk to ministers.

Nicholas II insisted on governing as an autocrat. He and his wife, the Tsarina Alexandra, believed that they had been chosen by God to rule and that no one had the right to challenge them. He was ignorant of the nature and extent of opposition to tsarist rule and refused to share power. It was once said that, 'The two most important people in Russia are Tsar Nicholas II and the last person to whom he had spoken'.

Although a devoted husband and father, he was not particularly happy. His only son and heir, Alexis, suffered from an incurable blood disease known as **haemophilia** and was likely to die young.

Source B Extract from the diary of the tsar's sister, the Grand Duchess Olga

He had intelligence ... faith and courage but he was ... ignorant about governmental matters. Nicky had been trained as a soldier. He had not been taught statesmanship and ... was not a statesman.



Economic problems

Most of the population – 85 per cent – lived in the countryside. Russian agriculture, however, was poor. Extensive tundra, forest and desert meant only about five per cent of the land, mainly in the south-west, was used for farming (see Figure 1.1, page 5). In most villages the land was divided into three large fields. Each household had strips in each of these fields. This scattered strip farming system encouraged **subsistence farming** using primitive hand tools. These old-fashioned farming methods resulted in low food production and frequent famines, such as the one in 1892, shown in Source D.



▲ **Source D** Starving peasants being given food during a famine, 1892

Industrial development

Even though Russia was rich in oil and minerals, **industrialisation** did not happen until the end of the nineteenth century (much later than some other European countries, such as Britain and Germany). Considering Russia's size and resources, its manufacturing output was still very low at the beginning of the twentieth century. Its size and undeveloped system of roads and railways, together with the absence of an effective banking system, all restricted the growth of industry.

Nevertheless, by the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, Russia had experienced a rapid growth in industry due to:

- an increase in the output of coal in the Ukraine
- an increase in the output of oil in the Caucasus
- deliberate government policy.

One of the tsar's ministers, Count Sergei Witte (Minister of Finance, 1893–1903), set himself the huge task of modernising the Russian economy. He invited foreign experts and workers to advise on industrial planning and techniques. His reforms did stimulate industrial growth, as can be seen in Table 1.1. However, rapid industrial growth would in turn lead to poor living and working conditions for workers, causing discontent.

▼ **Table 1.1** Russia's annual industrial production (in millions of tonnes) 1880–1913

	Coal	Pig iron	Oil	Grain*
1880	3.2	0.42	0.5	34
1890	5.9	0.89	3.9	36
1900	16.1	2.66	10.2	56
1910	26.8	2.99	9.4	74
1913	35.4	4.12	9.1	90
1916	33.8	3.72	9.7	64

(* European Russia only)

ACTIVITIES

- 1 Why do you think the many non-Russian groups in the Russian Empire were known as the 'subject nationalities'?
- 2 What did 'Russification' mean? Start by defining the term and then give examples of how it was carried out.
- 3 Study Source A.
 - a) Why do you think Tolstoy wrote an open letter to the tsar? What was he hoping to achieve?
 - b) Write a letter in response from Nicholas II. Remember that he believed in the system of autocracy and the need to suppress opposition.
- 4 What was meant when it was said that 'The two most important people in Russia are Tsar Nicholas II and the last person to whom he had spoken'? Why do you think this might have been a problem?
- 5 What does Source D tell you about life in the Russian countryside and why there might have been discontent?

Practice question

Give **two** things you can infer from Source B about how Russia was ruled in the early twentieth century. (For guidance, see page 77.)

ACTIVITIES

- 1 Study Source F.
 - a) What message is the cartoonist trying to put across about Russian society in the early twentieth century?
 - b) Do your own sketch to show these different groups. Annotate your sketch with key words to show the main features of the aristocracy, middle class, peasants and town workers.

Practice question

Give **two** things you can infer from Source E about the lifestyle of the wealthy in Russia. (For guidance, see page 77.)

Source E Russian writer Leo Tolstoy describes the lifestyle of a Russian nobleman, Prince Dmitri Ivanovich Nechlyudov, in the late nineteenth century

The prince proceeded to a long dining table where three servants had polished for a whole day. The room was furnished with a huge oak sideboard and an equally large table, the legs of which were carved in the shape of a lion's paws. On this table, which was covered with a fine starched cloth with large monograms, stood a coffee pot, a silver sugar bowl, a cream jug with hot cream, and a bread basket filled with freshly baked rolls.

Social problems

Russian society was divided into various classes or groups. The vast majority of the people were poor peasants, while at the other end of the scale, at the top, were the tsar, the **aristocracy** and the higher clergy (the Church leaders who owned large amounts of land). Source F shows a satirical illustration of the hierarchy of Russian society at that time.

The royal family say
'We rule you'

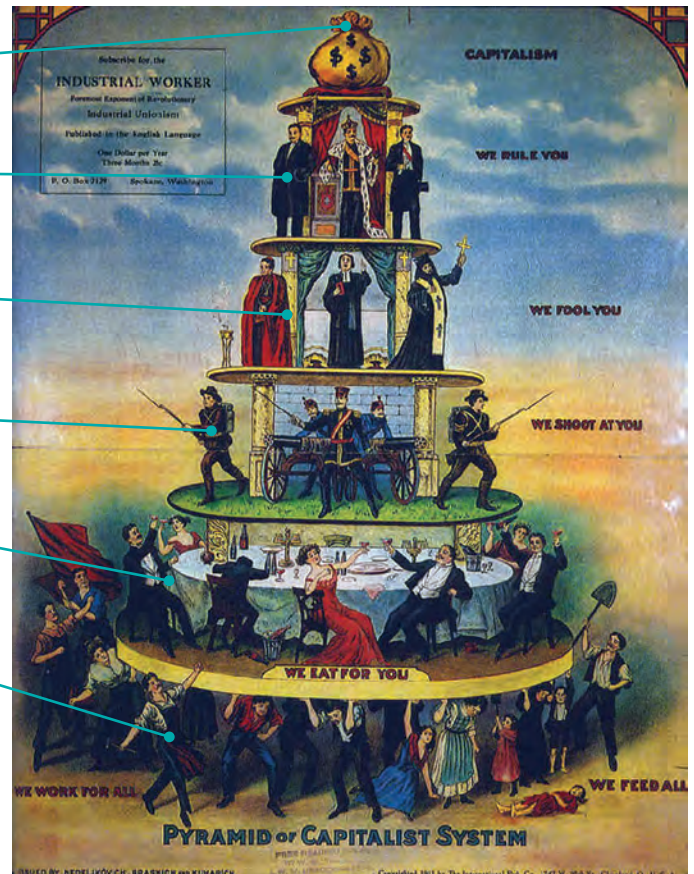
The nobles say
'We govern you'

The clergy say
'We fool you'

The army say
'We shoot you'

The capitalists say
'We do the eating'

The workers at the bottom protest about their lack of freedoms



Source F A poster published by the Marxists in 1901 showing their views on Russian society

The aristocracy

The aristocracy made up just over one per cent of the population and yet they owned almost one-quarter of all the land. Some were extremely rich, with lavish homes in the countryside, a second home in a town or city, and many servants, such as described by Russian writer Leo Tolstoy (Source E), and illustrated in Source G.

Source G A dinner party in the palace of Countess Yelisaveta Shuvalova in St Petersburg in 1900



The middle class

By 1914, Russia had a growing **middle class** due to the development of industry. This included bankers, merchants and factory owners. Many made fortunes from government contracts and loans and had a very pleasant lifestyle, eating out at expensive restaurants and frequently going to the theatre or ballet.

The peasants

The biggest, and possibly poorest group, were the peasants. They made up nearly four out of every five Russian people in the years before 1917. For most, life was very hard. They lived in very poor conditions and survived on a staple diet of rye bread, porridge and cabbage soup. When the harvests were poor, there was starvation and disease, as Source H describes. The peasants had a life expectancy of less than 40 years, with many dying from typhus and diphtheria.

Source H A Russian lady, who led a relief party that took food to the Volga region which was suffering from famine in 1892, describes what she witnessed

It was tragedy to see splendid men in the prime of their life walking about with stony faces and hollow eyes. And then there were women clothed only in wretched rags, and little children shivering in the cold wind. There were many of them who had not tasted food for days. It was agonising to hear these people pleading to us for mercy lest they die of starvation. There was no complaint, no cries, just the slow monotonous chant, broken by the sobs of worn out mothers and the cries of hungry children.

The town workers

The final, and most rapidly increasing, group were the new industrial workers in the towns and cities. Large numbers of peasants had flocked to the towns and cities to work in industry. Their conditions were terrible. Workers lived in overcrowded slums (see Source J) and ate cheap black bread, cabbage soup and wheat porridge. In industrial centres away from the cities, workers often lived in barracks next to the factory and slept in filthy, overcrowded dormitories. They earned low wages, worked long hours and were forbidden to form trade unions to fight for better conditions (see Source I). Protests or strikes were crushed, often with great brutality by the police or army.

Source I From *The Story of My Life*, by Father Gapon, written in 1905. Gapon was a priest who organised a trade union to help workers

They receive terrible wages, and generally live in overcrowded conditions. The normal working day is eleven and a half hours not including meal times. But manufacturers have received permission to use overtime. This makes the average day longer than that allowed by the law – fifteen or sixteen hours.



▲ **Source J** A typical flat for workers in the late 1890s

ACTIVITIES

- 1 What do Sources D (page 7), G and J show you about the Russian lifestyle at the beginning of the twentieth century and why there was discontent? Explain your answer.
- 2 Make a copy of the table below and use the sources and information on pages 6–9 to complete it.
 - a) In the second column give a brief explanation for why these group might be discontented.
 - b) In the third column explain what you think the tsar should do to reduce or remove this discontent.

	Why discontented	What the tsar should do
Peasants		
Town workers		
Subject nationalities		

- 3 Go back to Source A on page 6. It gives only an extract from Tolstoy's letter. Using information from your table in Activity 2:
 - a) Add another paragraph to his letter about other reasons for discontent in Russia.
 - b) Conclude by advising the tsar on what he should do.

Practice question

Explain why there was discontent in Russia in the early twentieth century.

You may use the following in your answer:

- autocracy
- the peasants

You must also use information of your own.

(For guidance, see pages 95–96.)

1.2 The growth of opposition

In the years before 1917, there was increasing opposition to Nicholas II for several reasons.

'Bloody Sunday' and the 1905 Revolution

On Sunday 22 January 1905, Father Gapon led a peaceful march of around 200,000 people to the tsar's Winter Palace in St Petersburg. The marchers were petitioning for better working conditions. However, the tsar was not in his palace and the soldiers panicked. They fired on the crowd, killing hundreds and wounding thousands. This event became known as 'Bloody Sunday'. According to an American diplomat at that time, the consequences would be great (Source K):

Source K From a letter by an American diplomat in the Russian city of Odessa writing about 'Bloody Sunday'

Tsar Nicholas has lost absolutely the affection of the Russian people, and whatever the future may have in store for the Romanovs, Nicholas will never again be safe in the midst of his people.

Bloody Sunday, together with discontent over the defeat of Russia in the war with Japan (1904–05), sparked **revolution** in Russia in February 1905. There were strikes and a **mutiny** in the navy. In order to avoid further chaos, Nicholas II issued the October Manifesto, which promised freedom of speech, an end to **censorship** and a national parliament (*duma*). This revolution was a warning to the tsar about the need for change and reform. However, Nicholas ignored this warning.

Stolypin's 'necktie' and the failure of the *dumas*

After the 1905 Revolution, Nicholas appointed Peter Stolypin as prime minister. Stolypin did introduce certain reforms, especially of agriculture and education. However, those who openly opposed the tsar were dealt with severely. There were more than 3,000 executions during Stolypin's time as prime minister – and the gallows became known as 'Stolypin's necktie'.

Moreover, in the years after 1905, Nicholas ensured that the *duma* he had been forced to create had little power. After the election of the first *duma* in 1906, he declared that he had the power to dissolve it, and to change the rules by which it was elected, whenever he liked. There were four different *dumas* in the years 1906–14. Nicholas had gone against the promises made in his October Manifesto, refusing to share power and continuing to rule like an autocrat. This, in turn, stimulated further opposition, particularly among the different political groups (see page 12).

Rasputin

Resentment about the increasing influence of Rasputin was a further reason for the growth of political opposition. After 1907, Nicholas and his wife, Alexandra, came to rely on the help and guidance of a holy man named Gregory Rasputin. Rasputin had the ability to control the life-threatening illness of the tsar's son – Alexei suffered from haemophilia.

Alexandra and Nicholas called Rasputin 'Our Friend' and his position and power at court grew so much that he eventually helped to choose government ministers. Stories about his hedonistic lifestyle abounded, such as rumours of orgies, and there were always large numbers of women in his presence.

Rasputin was another piece of ammunition for those who did not like **tsarism**. These critics saw corruption and incompetence now being added to the list of problems that Russia faced.

Source L From a statement by Rodzianko, Octobrist politician, March 1916, about the evil influence of Rasputin

I said to the tsar – ‘This cannot continue much longer. No one opens your eyes to the true role which Rasputin is playing. His presence in Your Majesty’s Court undermines confidence in your Supreme Power and may have an evil effect ...’

My report did some good – Rasputin was sent away to Tobolsk, but a few days later, at the demand of the Empress, this order was cancelled.



ACTIVITIES

- 1 What does Source K suggest about the importance of ‘Bloody Sunday’?
- 2 Why was Source M damaging for the tsar’s supporters?
- 3 Devise a caption for Source N that could have been used by opponents of the tsar.
- 4 Create a table with three columns titled ‘Political issues’, ‘Economic issues’ and ‘Social issues’, then, using the sources and information on pages 10–12, fill in the columns to show how opposition to the tsar was developing in the years before 1917.

Practice questions

- 1 Give two things you can infer from Source L about Rasputin. (*For guidance, see page 77.*)
- 2 How useful are Sources L and M for an enquiry into the growth of opposition? Explain your answer, using Sources L and M and your knowledge of the historical context. (*For guidance, see pages 85–87.*)

◀ **Source M** One of the many postcards that circulated around St Petersburg in 1916 and 1917, showing Rasputin and Alexandra

INDUSTRIAL UNREST

As we have seen, Russia’s rapid industrial growth had created poor living and working conditions for the industrial workers. This led to a wave of strikes in the years before 1914. One of the most important strikes occurred in 1912 at the Lena goldfields, where troops shot dead more than 200 strikers and injured several hundred (see Source N). The events at Lena heralded a new wave of strikes in urban areas across Russia and there was a general strike in St Petersburg in July 1914.

Source N Some of the ▶
dead strikers at the Lena
goldfields, 1912



Threats to the tsarist regime from political groups

By 1917 there were several political groups who opposed the tsar and posed a threat to the tsarist regime through challenging the authority of the tsar.

THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY

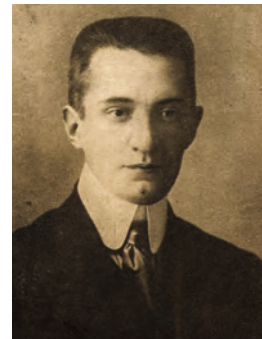
Founded in 1901, the Social Democratic Party followed the teachings of Karl Marx (see Figure 1.2) and believed that the workers (**proletariat**) would one day stage a revolution and remove the tsar. The revolution would lead to the setting up of a communist state. In 1903, the party split into two – **Mensheviks** and **Bolsheviks**. The Mensheviks believed that the party should have a mass membership and were prepared for slow change. The Bolsheviks believed that a small party **elite** should organise the revolution. Vladimir Lenin led the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks were led by Julius Martov and Leon Trotsky.



Vladimir Lenin

THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTIONARIES (SRs)

Founded in 1901, the SRs, as they were called, believed in a revolution of the peasants and aimed to get rid of the tsar. They wanted to share all land among the peasants, so that it could be farmed in small peasant communities. There was a mixture of beliefs within the party – some wanted to use terror to achieve their aims and others were prepared to use constitutional methods. Terrorist activity by SR members led to the deaths of thousands of government officials in the years before 1917. Alexander Kerensky eventually led the SRs.



Alexander Kerensky

THE OCTOBRISTS

Founded in October 1905, the Octobrists were set up after the tsar issued his October Manifesto (see page 10). They believed that the tsar would carry out his manifesto promises of limited reform. The Octobrists' main area of support came from the middle classes. They were led by Alexander Guchkov.



Alexander Guchkov

THE CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (CADETS)

As Russia developed a middle class, the demand grew for a democratic style of government. Founded in 1905, the **Cadets** wanted to have a **constitutional monarch** and an elected parliament – as in Britain – though some were prepared to set up a republic. The Cadets were led by Paul Milyukov.



Paul Milyukov

In what ways did these political groups threaten the tsarist regime?



▼ Figure 1.2 The theory of Marxism

History was shaped by the struggles between different social classes...



As society changed from *feudalism* to *capitalism*, there were struggles between the aristocracy and the middle classes. The middle classes were able to take power from the aristocrats and began to exploit the workers in the new industrial world.



The workers (proletariat) would eventually rebel against their exploitation and set up a socialist state.



Eventually, the ideal state would be created – communism, where everyone was equal and people worked for the good of the commune or state.

...Marx's interpretation of history meant that a successful proletarian revolution could only occur where there was an industrial society.

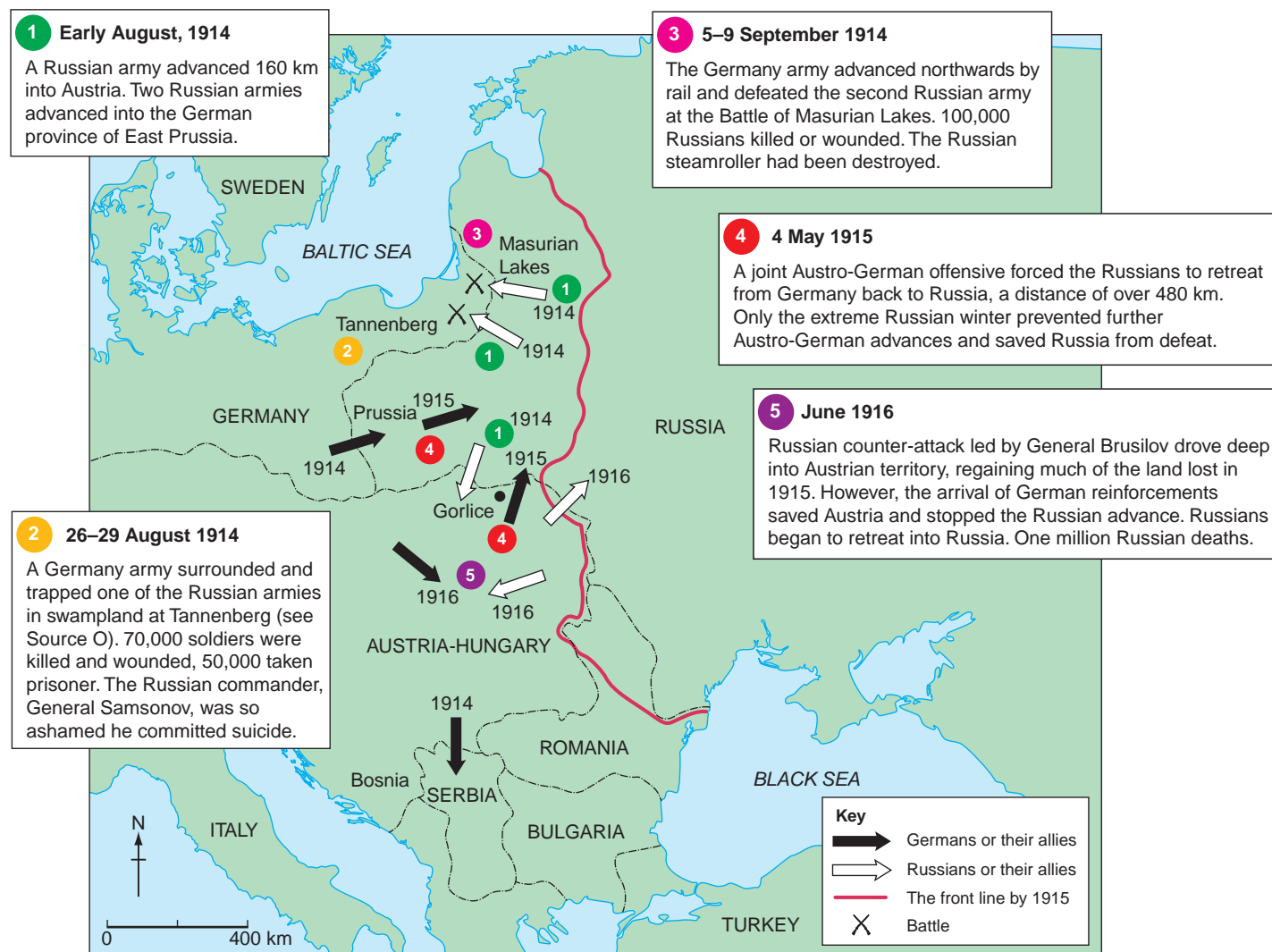
1.3 The impact of the First World War

When the heir to the Austrian throne, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, was assassinated in Serbia on 28 June 1914, Austria–Hungary, supported by Germany, declared war on the Serbs. Russia was the protector of Serbia, so Russia mobilised its military forces to help Serbia, leading Germany to declare war against Russia in August.

Russia entered the First World War with great expectations of success. Many believed the sheer size of the Russian army, known as ‘the Russian steamroller’, would be too strong for both Germany and Austria–Hungary. However, by the end of 1914 Russia had over one million casualties, and by the end of 1916, Russia had suffered defeat after defeat, outlined in Figure 1.3. This led to growing discontent with the tsar and his government.

ACTIVITY

Using Figure 1.3, create a timeline of Russian defeats, 1914–16.



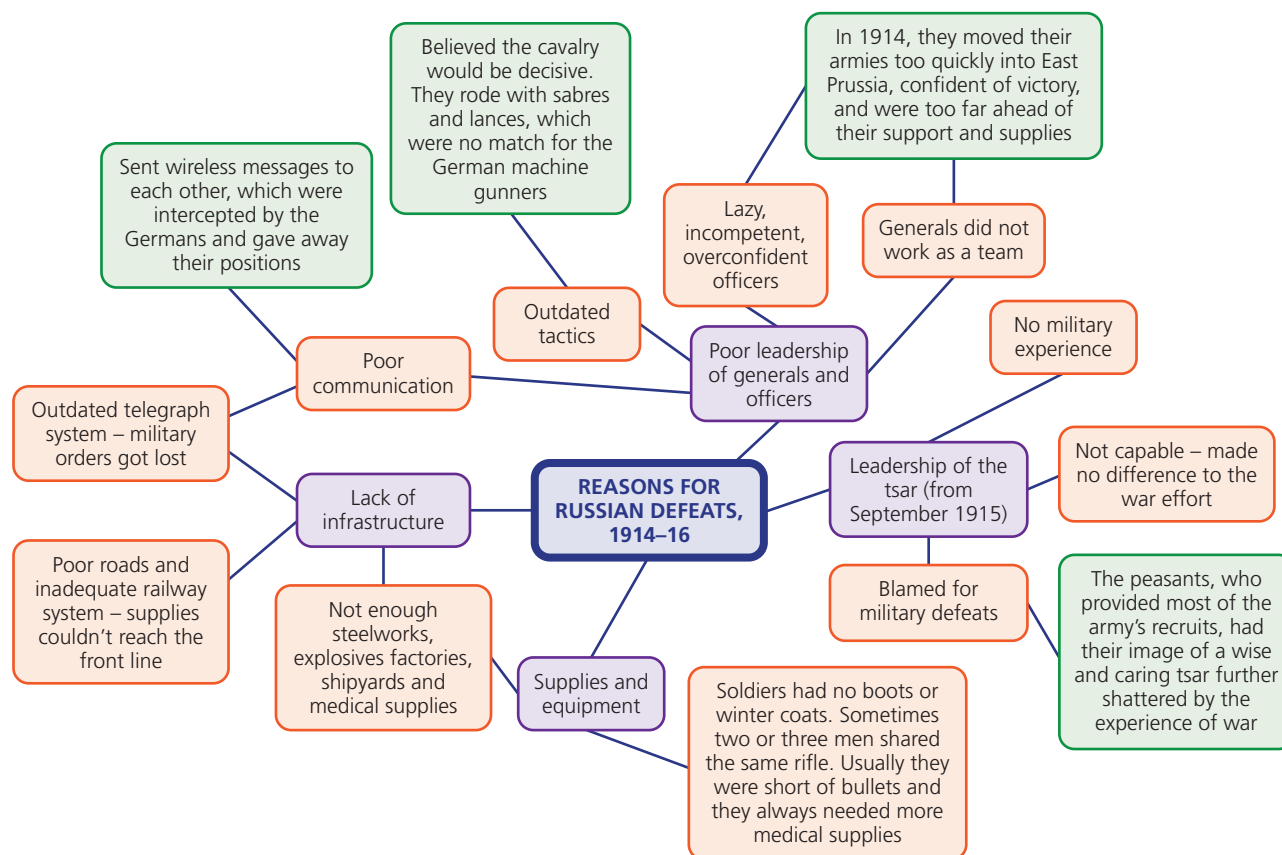
▲ **Figure 1.3** The key events on the Eastern Front, 1914–16

Source O The German general, von Moltke, describes the slaughter at Tannenberg

The sight of thousands of Russians driven into huge lakes and swamps was ghastly. The shrieks and cries of the dying men I will never forget. So fearful was the sight of these thousands of men with their guns, horses and ammunition, struggling in the water that, to shorten their agony, they turned the machine guns on them. But even in spite of that, there was movement seen among them for a week after.

Reasons for defeats

The reasons for Russian defeats are shown in Figure 1.4 and the problems of supplies are described in Sources P and Q.



▲ **Figure 1.4** Reasons for Russian defeats in the First World War

Source P From a letter written by the tsar to his wife in July 1916

Without metal the mills cannot supply a sufficient number of bullets and bombs. The same is true as regards the railways. The Minister of Transportation assures me that the railways are working better this year than last, but nevertheless every one complains that they are not doing as well as they might.

Source Q From a letter written by Belaiev, a Russian general, in 1916

In recent battles, a third of the men had no rifles. The poor devils had to wait patiently until their comrades fell before their eyes and they could pick up weapons. The army is drowning in its own blood.

ACTIVITIES

- Examine Figure 1.4, which shows the key reasons for Russia's defeats.
 - Explain how the different reasons are linked.
 - Rank the reasons in order of importance in the defeat of Russia. Explain your ranking (think about the number of links the reasons have to other links in order to explain their importance).
- You are an adviser to Nicholas II who has been sent to the Eastern Front in September 1915. Write a memorandum to the tsar explaining the problems at the front and what needs to be done. Use Sources P and Q and your work in Activity 1 to help you.

Practice question

How useful are Sources P and Q for an enquiry into Russian defeats in the First World War? Explain your answer, using Sources P and Q and your knowledge of the historical context. (For guidance, see pages 85–87.)

Military effects of defeats

Enthusiasm for the war soon waned. Casualties, frequent defeats and poor equipment lowered the morale of the soldiers. They soon lost respect for their officers, who seemed unfeeling and ineffective, and **desertion** was common (see Sources R, S and T). Many soldiers died without weapons or ammunition, and some did not even have boots to wear in the bitterly cold weather.

This discontent spread to the people of Russia. News of high casualties caused alarm in different parts of the Russian Empire. For example, in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, women lay on the rails to stop troop trains moving. In other areas there was violent resistance to **conscription**.

Source R From a report by the Chairman of the Military Commission of the *duma*

As early as the beginning of the second year of the war, desertions of soldiers at the front and on their way to the front became commonplace, and the average number of deserters reached 25 per cent. I happen to know of three cases when the train was stopped because there were no passengers on it; all, with the exception of the officer in command, had run away.

Source S A police report on army morale, October 1916

The behaviour of the soldiers, especially in the units in the rear, is most provocative. They accuse the military authorities of corruption, cowardice and drunkenness, and even treason. Everywhere one meets thousands of deserters, carrying out crimes and offering violence to the civilian population.

Practice question

Explain why there were Russian defeats on the Eastern Front in the years 1914–16.

You may use the following in your answer:

- lack of infrastructure
- leadership of Tsar Nicholas II

You must also use information of your own.

(For guidance, see pages 95–96.)



ACTIVITIES

- 1 What does Source S suggest about the behaviour of some Russian soldiers?
- 2 Does Source R support the evidence of Source S about the behaviour of some Russian soldiers?
- 3 Study Source T. This photograph was probably taken by opponents of the tsar and the war. Devise a caption that they could have used with this photograph.

◀ **Source T** Russian deserters, including officers, in December 1916

Economic and social effects of the war

The war had a devastating effect on the Russian economy. Inflation increased – there were seven price rises between 1913 and 1917. Less food was produced because of the shortage of labour and horses. As more peasants were called up to the armed forces, there were fewer men left to work on the land. Indeed, 14 million men were called up to serve in the army between 1914 and 1917. The demand for horses at the front also made it harder for peasants to cultivate their land. This food shortage, in turn, encouraged higher food prices.

Industry, too, was hit by the shortage of workers and by the lack of fuel and essential supplies. Russia's transport system could not cope with the increased demands of war, as well as providing industry with the necessary raw materials. Consumer goods, such as boots and cloth, became scarce and expensive. There were shortages of vital coal, iron and steel. Many factories closed.

The economic problems brought misery. The closure of factories led to unemployment and even greater poverty. Because of the shortages, prices were rising continually, but wages for those still in work were hardly going up at all. To make matters worse, workers were being asked to work longer hours.

All these hardships were, in turn, worsened by fuel and food shortages. Even when fuel and food were available, supplies frequently failed to reach the people in the towns and cities, due to Russia's inadequate transport system and the incompetence of the government.

By the beginning of 1917, Russia was close to defeat on the Eastern Front and there was mass discontent in the armed forces and among the Russian people. To make matters worse, Petrograd (formerly St Petersburg) experienced the worst winter in living memory, with temperatures falling below minus 30 degrees centigrade, at a time when there were severe food and fuel shortages.

Source U Police report from Petrograd at the end of 1916

The industrial proletariat of the capital is on the verge of despair. The smallest outbreak will lead to uncontrollable riots. Even if we assume that wages have increased by 100 per cent, the cost of living has risen by 300 per cent. The impossibility of obtaining food, the time wasted in queues outside shops, the increasing death rate due to inadequate diet and the cold and dampness as a result of the lack of coal and firewood – all these conditions have created such a situation that the mass of industrial workers are quite ready to let themselves go to the wildest excesses of a hunger riot.

Political effects of the war

At first, the war seemed to improve the government of Russia as it encouraged the tsar to work with the *dumas*, but ultimately it seriously weakened the position of the tsar.

The tsar's decision to take over command of the war and move to the front was a serious political mistake. It meant that he left the running of the country in the hands of his wife, Alexandra, the tsarina. She refused to take advice from middle-class members of the *duma* and they became increasingly frustrated.

During the war, the Russian people grew to hate anything German. They changed the name of their capital city from the German St Petersburg to the Russian Petrograd. Alexandra was German and it was rumoured that she was a German spy trying to **sabotage** the Russian war effort.

Rasputin was the only person Alexandra was prepared to listen to. Indeed, he seemed to be in charge of the government. The tsarina frequently dismissed any capable ministers from the *duma* on Rasputin's advice and replaced them with his friends, who were totally incompetent. There were so many changes of ministers that nobody was properly organising food, fuel and other supplies to the cities. The railway system fell into chaos and trainloads of food were left rotting.

As news from the war got worse and the situation in the cities became more desperate, support for the tsar and his wife began to decrease among the middle and upper classes. They blamed the tsar for leaving the country under the control of a German woman, influenced by a mad monk.

DEATH OF RASPUTIN

Rasputin's murder by members of the royal family illustrates the extent of discontent in Russia, especially with Rasputin's influence over Alexandra. Indeed, members of the royal family begged Alexandra to dismiss Rasputin. When she refused, some, led by Prince Yusupov, in desperation decided to assassinate him. One evening in December 1916, Rasputin was invited to Yusupov's mansion for a social evening. During the course of the evening he ate cakes laced with enough cyanide to kill several men. He collapsed but then stood up and ran into the courtyard. There he was shot twice. His hands were bound behind him and his body was thrown into the icy river where he drowned.

You do not need to know the details of his murder for this depth study. However, you may wish to carry out your own further research on the mystery surrounding the exact circumstances of his death.



▲ Nicholas II (on the right) as Commander-in-Chief of the Russian army with other leading generals in 1916. In 1915, Tsar Nicholas II made himself commander-in-chief of the Russian army. As a result, he left St Petersburg and moved to army headquarters in Russian Poland. He was convinced that his direct leadership would increase army morale and improve the war effort. However, Nicholas had little experience or knowledge of military leadership and the military defeats continued. Moreover, in his absence, he left the government of Russia under the control of his wife Alexandra who was increasingly influenced by Rasputin

ACTIVITIES

- 1 Study Source U. How serious was the situation in Petrograd at the end of 1916?
- 2 Explain the economic and social effects of the war on Russia in the years 1914–16.
- 3 In what ways did Nicholas make a political mistake in becoming Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces during the First World War?
- 4 Look at the circles opposite. This is known as a Venn diagram. They are used to show how factors can overlap with each other – how one factor can influence another. Sketch your own Venn diagram and use it to show the overlap between the military, political, economic and social effects of the war. One example has been done for you, showing the leadership of Rasputin and the tsarina.

