Voices from the Past

John Reed, an American journalist, described an important event that took place in St. Petersburg, Russia, on the night of November 6, 1917:

"After a few minutes huddling there, some hundreds of men began again to flow forward. By this time, in the light that streamed out of the Winter Palace windows, I could see that the first two or three hundred men were Red Guards [revolutionaries], with only a few scattered soldiers. Over the barricade of firewood we clambered, and leaping down inside gave a triumphant shout as we stumbled on a heap of rifles thrown down by the guards who had stood there. On both sides of the main gateway the doors stood wide open, and from the huge pile came not the slightest sound."

—Eyewitness to History, John Carey, ed., 1987

Reed was describing the Bolshevik seizure of the Winter Palace, seat of the Russian Government, by Bolshevik revolutionaries. This act led to a successful revolution in Russia.

Background to Revolution

As you will learn, out of Russia's collapse in 1917 came the Russian Revolution. Its impact would be felt all over the world.

Russia was unprepared both militarily and technologically for the total war of World War I. Russia had no competent military leaders. Even worse, Czar
Nicholas II insisted on taking personal charge of the armed forces despite his obvious lack of ability and training.

In addition, Russian industry was unable to produce the weapons needed for the army. Many soldiers trained using broomsticks. Others were sent to the front without rifles and told to pick one up from a dead comrade.

Given these conditions, it is not surprising that the Russian army suffered incredible losses. Between 1914 and 1916, two million soldiers were killed, and another four to six million wounded or captured. By 1917, the Russian will to fight had vanished.

**Beginnings of Upheaval** Czar Nicholas II was an autocratic ruler who relied on the army and bureaucracy to hold up his regime. Furthermore, he was increasingly cut off from events by his German-born wife, Alexandra. She was a willful and stubborn woman who had fallen under the influence of Grigori Rasputin (ra•SPYOO•tuhn), an uneducated Siberian peasant who claimed to be a holy man. Alexandra believed that Rasputin was holy, for he alone seemed able to stop the bleeding of her son Alexis. Alexis, the heir to the throne, had hemophilia (a deficiency in the ability of the blood to clot).

With the czar at the battlefront, Alexandra made all of the important decisions. She insisted on first consulting Rasputin, the man she called “her beloved, never-to-be-forgotten teacher, savior, and mentor.” Rasputin’s influence made him an important power behind the throne. He did not hesitate to interfere in government affairs.

As the leadership at the top stumbled its way through a series of military and economic disasters, the Russian people grew more and more upset with the czarist regime. Even conservative aristocrats who supported the monarchy felt the need to do something to save the situation.

For a start, they assassinated Rasputin in December 1916. It was not easy to kill this man of incredible physical strength. They shot him three times and then tied him up and threw him into the Neva River. He drowned, but not before he had managed to untie the knots underwater. The killing of Rasputin occurred too late, however, to save the monarchy.

**The March Revolution** At the beginning of March 1917, a series of strikes led by working-class women broke out in the capital city of Petrograd (formerly St. Petersburg). A few weeks earlier, the government had started bread rationing in Petrograd after the price of bread had skyrocketed.

Many of the women who stood in the lines waiting for bread were also factory workers who worked 12-hour days. A police report warned the government:

> "Mothers of families, exhausted by endless standing in line at stores, distraught over their half-starving and sick children, are today perhaps closer to revolution than [the liberal opposition leaders] and of course they are a great deal more dangerous because they are the combustible material for which only a single spark is needed to burst into flame."
On March 8, about 10,000 women marched through the city of Petrograd demanding "Peace and Bread" and "Down with Autocracy." Soon the women were joined by other workers. Together they called for a general strike. The strike shut down all the factories in the city on March 10.

Alexandra wrote her husband Nicholas II at the battlefront, "This is a hooligan movement. If the weather were very cold they would all probably stay at home." Nicholas ordered troops to break up the crowds by shooting them if necessary. Soon, however, large numbers of the soldiers joined the demonstrators and refused to fire on the crowds.

The Duma, or legislative body, which the czar had tried to dissolve, met anyway. On March 12, it established the provisional government, which mainly consisted of middle-class Duma representatives. This government urged the czar to step down. Because he no longer had the support of the army or even the aristocrats, Nicholas II did step down, on March 15, ending the 300-year-old Romanov dynasty.

The provisional government, headed by Alexander Kerensky (keh-REHN-skee), now decided to carry on the war to preserve Russia's honor. This decision to remain in World War I was a major blunder. It satisfied neither the workers nor the peasants, who, tired and angry from years of suffering, wanted above all an end to the war.

The government was also faced with a challenge to its authority—the soviets. The soviets were councils composed of representatives from the workers and soldiers. The soviet of Petrograd had been formed in March 1917. At the same time, soviets sprang up in army units, factory towns, and rural areas. The soviets, largely made up of socialists, represented the more radical interests of the lower classes. One group—the Bolsheviks—came to play a crucial role.

Later, the woman claiming to be Anastasia came to the United States. While in New York, she registered at a Long Island hotel as Anna Anderson and soon became known by that name. In 1932, she returned to Germany. During the next 30 years, she pursued a claim in German courts for part of the estate left to Empress Alexandra's German relatives. In the 1960s in the United States, she became even better known as a result of a popular play and film, Anastasia.

In 1968, Anna Anderson returned to the United States, where she died in 1984. In 1994, DNA testing of tissues from Anna Anderson revealed that she was not the Grand Duchess Anastasia. In all probability, Anna Anderson was Franziska Schanzkowska, a Polish farmer's daughter who had always dreamed of being an actress.

The woman claiming to be Anastasia convinced many people of the authenticity of her claim. What do you think might have motivated her to act out the part of Anastasia for so many years?
The Rise of Lenin

The Bolsheviks began as a small faction of a Marxist party called the Russian Social Democrats. The Bolsheviks came under the leadership of Vladimir Ilyich Ulianov (ool• YAH•nuhf), known to the world as V. I. Lenin.

Under Lenin’s direction, the Bolsheviks became a party dedicated to violent revolution. Lenin believed that only violent revolution could destroy the capitalist system. A “vanguard” (forefront) of activists, he said, must form a small party of well-disciplined professional revolutionaries to accomplish the task.

Between 1900 and 1917, Lenin spent most of his time abroad. When the provisional government was formed in March 1917, he saw an opportunity for the Bolsheviks to seize power. In April 1917, German military leaders, hoping to create disorder in Russia, shipped Lenin to Russia. Lenin and his associates were in a sealed train to prevent their ideas from infecting Germany.

Lenin’s arrival in Russia opened a new stage of the Russian Revolution. Lenin maintained that the soviets of soldiers, workers, and peasants were ready-made instruments of power. He believed that the Bolsheviks should work toward gaining control of these groups and then use them to overthrow the provisional government.

At the same time, the Bolsheviks reflected the discontent of the people. They promised an end to the war, the redistribution of all land to the peasants, the transfer of factories and industries from capitalists to committees of workers, and the transfer of government power from the provisional government to the soviets. Three simple slogans summed up the Bolshevik program: “Peace, Land, Bread,” “Worker Control of Production,” and “All Power to the Soviets.”

Reading Check

Examining: What was Lenin’s plan when he arrived in Russia?
The Bolsheviks Seize Power

By the end of October, Bolsheviks made up a slight majority in the Petrograd and Moscow soviets. The number of party members had grown from 50,000 to 240,000. With Leon Trotsky, a dedicated revolutionary, as head of the Petrograd soviet, the Bolsheviks were in a position to claim power in the name of the soviets. During the night of November 6, Bolshevik forces seized the Winter Palace, the seat of the provisional government. The government quickly collapsed with little bloodshed.

This overthrow of the provisional government coincided with a meeting in Petrograd of the all-Russian Congress of Soviets, which represented local soviets from all over the country. Outwardly, Lenin turned over the power of the provisional government to the Congress of Soviets. The real power, however, passed to a Council of People's Commissars, headed by Lenin.

The Bolsheviks, who soon renamed themselves the Communists, still had a long way to go. Lenin had promised peace, and that, he realized, would not be an easy task. It would mean the humiliating loss of much Russian territory. There was no real choice, however.

On March 3, 1918, Lenin signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany and gave up eastern Poland, Ukraine, Finland, and the Baltic provinces. To his critics, Lenin argued that it made no difference. The spread of the socialist revolution throughout Europe would make the treaty largely irrelevant. In any case, he had promised peace to the Russian people. Real peace did not come, however, because the country soon sank into civil war.

**Triumph of the Communists**

How had Lenin and the Communists triumphed in the civil war over what seemed to be overwhelming forces? One reason was that the Red Army was a well-disciplined fighting force. This was largely due to the organizational genius of Leon Trotsky. As commissar of war, Trotsky reinstated the draft and insisted on rigid discipline. Soldiers who deserted or refused to obey orders were executed on the spot.

Furthermore, the disunity of the anti-Communist forces weakened their efforts. Political differences created distrust among the Whites and prevented them from cooperating effectively with one another. Some Whites insisted on restoring the czarist regime. Others believed that only a more liberal and democratic program had any chance of success.
The Whites, then, had no common goal. The Communists, in contrast, had a single-minded sense of purpose. Inspired by their vision of a new socialist order, the Communists had the determination that comes from revolutionary zeal and convictions.

The Communists were also able to translate their revolutionary faith into practical instruments of power. A policy of war communism, for example, was used to ensure regular supplies for the Red Army. War communism meant government control of banks and most industries, the seizing of grain from peasants, and the centralization of state administration under Communist control.

Another Communist instrument was revolutionary terror. A new Red secret police—known as the Cheka—began a Red Terror aimed at the destruction of all those who opposed the new regime (much like the Reign of Terror in the French Revolution). The Red Terror added an element of fear to the Communist regime.

Finally, the presence of foreign armies on Russian soil enabled the Communists to appeal to the powerful force of Russian patriotism. At one point, over a hundred thousand foreign troops—mostly Japanese, British, American, and French—were stationed in Russia in support of anti-Communist forces. Their presence made it easy for the Communist government to call on patriotic Russians to fight foreign attempts to control the country.

By 1921, the Communists were in total command of Russia. In the course of the civil war, the Communist regime had transformed Russia into a centralized state dominated by a single party. The state was also largely hostile to the Allied powers, because the Allies had tried to help the Communists' enemies in the civil war.

**Reading Check**

Why did the Red Army prevail over the White Army?

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**SECTION 3 ASSESSMENT**

**Checking for Understanding**

1. Define soviets, war communism.

2. Identify Alexandra, Grigori Rasputin, Alexander Kerensky, Bolsheviks, V.I. Lenin, Leon Trotsky.

3. Locate Petrograd, Ukraine, Siberia, Urals.

4. Explain why Lenin accepted the loss of so much Russian territory in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

5. List some of the different opinions that split the White forces.

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**Critical Thinking**

6. Explain How did the presence of Allied troops in Russia ultimately help the Communists?

7. Organizing Information Using a chart like the one below, sequence the steps the Communists took to turn Russia into a centralized state dominated by a single party.

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Steps to Communist control
1.  
2.  
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**Analyzing Visuals**

8. Examine the photograph of Czar Nicholas II and his family shown on page 733 of your text. Is this photograph an idealized view of royalty? Do you think the people of Russia would have agreed with this view of the royal family as portrayed in this photograph, especially during World War I?

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**Writing About History**

9. Expository Writing Write an essay comparing the economic, political, and social causes of the American, French, and Russian Revolutions.