

History Revolutions: Russia
Teach Yourself Series
Topic 2: Historians' views on the
causes and consequences of revolution

Contents

Historical Inquiry	3
Causes of the Russian Revolution.....	3
As it appears in Units 3 and 4	3
Outcomes of the Russian Revolution.....	4
As it appears in Units 3 and 4	4
What are the issues with Russian Revolution historical inquiry?	5
As it appears in Units 3 and 4	5
Soviet historians	5
As it appears in Units 3 and 4	5
Western liberal historians.....	5
As it appears in Units 3 and 4	5
Three views of the Bolshevik taking power.....	5
As it appears in Units 3 and 4	5
Three views of the outcomes of the Russian Revolution.....	5
As it appears in Units 3 and 4	5
Solutions to Review Questions	6

Historical Inquiry

Historical inquiry is the writing of history and studying how history is written. In VCE, students must understand that every historian has different interpretations of 'the facts.' Historians generally aim to be objective, but every historian is influenced by their own lives: where they grew up, their education and the values they developed, the values implicit in the culture in which they lived and worked, when they were researching and writing. This is never truer than for the Russian Revolution, which occurred in the early part of the 20th century. For much of that century, the Russian Revolution was a remote, distant event, but in many ways it still heavily influenced world events.

Although modern historians of the American or French Revolution may hold strong views about the event, they did not experience those events first hand. For the Russian Revolution, however, many historians you might encounter had direct, personal associations with the events, making it virtually impossible for them to be objective observers.

Historians living and researching in Russia after 1917 were heavily censored and were required to present their histories in support of the 'official view.' Some historians in the West were very sympathetic to the Soviet Union's aims and wrote histories that reflected this. Other Western historians were antagonistic towards the Soviet Union. During the Cold War (1945 to 1989), the Soviet Union and the USA, with their respective allies, were in a propaganda war, and sometimes this is reflected in historical writings.

Causes of the Russian Revolution As it appears in Units 3 and 4

Area of Study 1 for Units 3 and 4: Revolutions is titled 'Causes of revolution.' Students investigate:

- What caused the revolution?
- How did the actions of popular movements and particular individuals contribute to triggering a revolution?
- To what extent did social tensions and ideological conflicts contribute to the outbreak of revolution?

The key knowledge for Russia for Area of Study 1 includes:

- The events and other conditions that contributed to the outbreak of revolution, including tensions in Tsarist Russia, the formation of the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, the Russo-Japanese War, Bloody Sunday, the role of the Dumas, World War One, the February Revolution, the effectiveness of the Provisional Government, the Dual Authority, Lenin's return and his April Theses, the July Days, the Kornilov Affair and the events of October 1917.

Review Questions

1. List the thirteen possible events and conditions that contributed to the development of the Russian Revolution that are outlined in the Study Design.

- | | |
|----|-----|
| 1. | 8. |
| 2. | 9. |
| 3. | 10. |
| 4. | 11. |
| 5. | 12. |
| 6. | 13. |
| 7. | |

Outcomes of the Russian Revolution As it appears in Units 3 and 4

The Study Design for Area of Study 2: Consequences of revolution, asks four key questions:

- How did the consequences of revolution shape the new order?
- How did the new regime consolidate its power?
- How did the revolution affect the experiences of those who lived through it?
- To what extent was society changed and revolutionary ideas achieved?

The key knowledge for Russia for Area of Study 2 includes:

- The challenges the new regime faced in attempting to consolidate its power, including the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, political opposition, the creation of the Sovnarkom, land redistribution, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, State Capitalism, the Civil War, War Communism, the Red Terror, the Polish Soviet War, the 1921 Famine and the Kronstadt Revolt.

The Study Design also includes lists of key skills for both areas of study. For Area of Study 1, two key skills are:

- Evaluate historical interpretations about the significant causes of a revolution
- Construct arguments about the causes of revolution using primary sources and historical interpretations as evidence.

For Area of Study 2, two key skills are:

- Evaluate historical interpretations about the significant consequences of a revolution
- Construct arguments about the consequences of revolution using primary sources and historical interpretations as evidence.

Review Questions

2. As used in the Study Design, what do these words and phrases mean?

a. the consequences of revolution:

b. dissolution:

c. land redistribution:

d. historical interpretations:

e. primary sources:

What are the issues with Russian Revolution historical inquiry? As it appears in Units 3 and 4

For much of the 20th century, Russia was ruled by the regime established by the 1917 October Revolution. Throughout its life, that regime heavily censored what was read, taught and written about the Revolution. Russian historians working within Russia were unable to be objective about their work.

Western historians were also often quite subjective in writing histories of the Russian Revolution. Some Western historians were sympathetic to Marxism and tried to put a positive, Marxist interpretation, on the revolution and its subsequent regime. Other Western historians were staunchly anti-communist, and their histories of the revolution were sometimes equally subjective.

Communism in Eastern Europe finally collapsed in the years 1989 to 1991, and since then, historians from former communist countries as well as from the West have had more access to archives where primary source material was collected. Historians research this material, but continue to view it through their own cultural eyes.

Solutions to Review Questions

1.

1. *tensions in the Tsarist regime*
2. *formation of the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks*
3. *Russo-Japanese War*
4. *Bloody Sunday*
5. *the role of the Dumas*
6. *World War One*
7. *the February Revolution*
8. *the effectiveness of the Provisional Government*
9. *Dual Authority*
10. *Lenin's return and his April Theses*
11. *the July Days*
12. *the Kornilov Affair*
13. *events of October 1917*

2.

- a. *the consequences of revolution: what results from revolution; the effects of the revolution.*
- b. *dissolution: removal, dismantling, dismissing.*
- c. *land redistribution: land taken from the hands of the former owners and, generally, given to those who worked the land but did not own it.*
- d. *historical interpretations: various views written by historians about particular events. These may use the same 'set of facts' but arrive at different views about those 'facts.'*
- e. *primary sources: documents from the times or prepared by those who witnessed the events, describing or reflecting on those events.*

3.

Objective: not seen from one's own biases; being open to all and any interpretations.

Subjective: presenting history from one's own viewpoint, from one's own biases.

Primary source material: records and evidence taken from the time of the event; the first pieces of evidence.

Hagiography: writing about saints; history that presents only a positive view of a person.

Personality cult: one person is raised almost to 'sainthood' or is considered god-like.

4. **a.** *The History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks): Short Course (1938) and History of the October Revolution (1966) are two histories written by Soviet historians.*
- b.** *Christopher Hill, Isaac Deutscher and Eric Hobsbawm wrote histories sympathetic to the Soviet Union.*
5. **a.** *An 'unperson' is someone who the official Soviet histories wanted to disparage by not including him in writing, photographs or paintings. They had basically been 'written out' of history to make it seem they had never existed.*
- b.** *Trotsky could be accused of writing subjective history because he tried to raise his own role in events such as the October Revolution.*
6. *Winston Smith, in Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four, explores how people received only messages that supported the government's view. The government, which controlled the present, was in a position to control what was written about the past. All that was written about the past was that that suited the present government's view.*
7. **a.** *Western liberal historians could not be considered objective because (i) they had little or no access to Soviet historical archives, and they had no direct experience of living in Russia, so tended to see the Russian Revolution only through a Western liberal-democratic viewpoint.*
- b.**

	Official Soviet historian	Western liberal historian	Revisionist historian	Russian, not supportive of Soviet history
Name	<i>Sobolov; historian's name not considered important, sometimes not given.</i>	<i>Leonard Schapiro or Richard Pipes</i>	<i>Sheila Fitzpatrick or Robert Service or Orlando Figs</i>	<i>Alexander Solzhenitsyn or Dmitri Volkogonov</i>
Time of writing	<i>Late 1920s onwards</i>	<i>Schapiro 1950s Pipes 1990s</i>	<i>Fitzpatrick 1980s Service 1990s Figs 1990s</i>	<i>Solzhenitsyn 1960s-1970s Volkogonov 1990s</i>
One comment about Russian Revolution	<i>'the peasants and workers of Russia, under guidance of the Communist Party, accomplished the greatest revolution the world had ever known.'</i>	<i>'a group of determined men seized power for themselves in Russia in 1917' (Schapiro) extremely antagonistic view of Russian Revolution (Pipes)</i>	<i>Tend to concentrate on social history, that is, how the Revolution affected Russians' lives.</i>	<i>Both represented Lenin as extreme, terrorist, responsible for violence.</i>

8.