RUSSIAN REVOLUTION: ARTICLE 1

(Background & Summary)

Russian Revolution: Background

By 1917, most Russians had lost faith in the leadership ability of Czar Nicholas II. Government corruption was rampant, the Russian economy remained backward, people were starving, and Nicholas repeatedly dissolved the Duma, the Russian parliament established after the 1905 revolution, when it opposed his will. However, the immediate cause of the February Revolution–the first phase of the Russian Revolution of 1917–was Russia’s disastrous involvement in World War I (1914-18). Militarily, Russia was no match for industrialized Germany, and Russian casualties were greater than those sustained by any nation in any previous war. Meanwhile, the economy was hopelessly disrupted by the costly war effort, and moderates joined Russian radical elements in calling for the overthrow of the czar.

**Did You Know?**

After Czar Nicholas II and his family were executed by Bolshevik forces in July 1918, the killers hid the victims’ mutilated bodies. The remains were discovered and exhumed in the late 1970s near Yekaterinburg, Russia, and eventually identified through DNA testing.

February Revolution: 1917

*The February Revolution* (known as such because of Russia’s use of the Julian calendar until February 1918) began on March 8, 1917 (or February 23 on the Julian calendar), when demonstrators clamoring for bread took to the streets in the Russian capital of Petrograd (now called St. Petersburg). Supported by huge crowds of striking industrial workers, the protesters clashed with police but refused to leave the streets. On March 10, the strike spread among all of Petrograd’s workers, and irate mobs destroyed police stations. Several factories elected deputies to the Petrograd Soviet, or council, of workers’ committees, following the model devised during the 1905 revolution.

On March 11, the troops of the Petrograd army garrison were called out to quell the uprising. In some encounters, regiments opened fire, killing demonstrators, but the protesters kept to the streets and the troops began to waver. That day, Nicholas again dissolved the Duma. On March 12, the revolution triumphed when regiment after regiment of the Petrograd garrison defected to the cause of the demonstrators. The soldiers subsequently formed committees that elected deputies to the Petrograd Soviet.

The imperial government was forced to resign, and the Duma formed a provisional government that peacefully vied with the Petrograd Soviet for control of the revolution. On March 14, the Petrograd Soviet issued Order No. 1, which instructed Russian soldiers and sailors to obey only those orders that did not conflict with the directives of the Soviet. **The next day, March 15, Czar Nicholas II abdicated the throne in favor of his brother Michael (1878-1918), whose refusal of the crown brought an end to the czarist autocracy.**

Bolshevik Revolution: 1917

In the aftermath of the February Revolution, power was shared between the weak provisional government and the Petrograd Soviet. Then, on November 6 and 7, 1917 (or October 24 and 25 on the Julian calendar, which is why this event is also referred to as the October Revolution), leftist revolutionaries led by Bolshevik Party leader **Vladimir Lenin** launched a nearly bloodless coup d’état against the provisional government. The Bolsheviks and their allies occupied government buildings and other strategic locations in Petrograd, and soon formed a new government with Lenin as its head.

**Lenin became the virtual dictator of the first Marxist state in the world**. His government made peace with Germany, nationalized industry and distributed land, but beginning in 1918 had to fight a devastating civil war against anti-Bolshevik White Army forces. **In 1920, the anti-Bolsheviks were defeated, and in 1922 the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was established.**

POST-READING QUESTIONS - (answer each question completely on the back of this worksheet)

1. Why did Russians lose faith in their leader (Czar Nicholas II)? Identify multiple reasons.
2. Who were the Bolsheviks? Who were they led by? What type of economic system did they instate?
3. What did the Bolshevik party accomplish in Russia 1920?
4. What similarities do you notice between the Czar / the events proceeding the Russian Revolution and Mr. Jones / the events proceeding the Rebellion?

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION: ARTICLE 2

(Leon Trotsky)

Role in Soviet government

As war commissar, Trotsky faced the formidable task of building a new Red Army out of the shambles of the Russian army (post WWI) and preparing to defend the communist government against the imminent threats of civil war and foreign intervention. Trotsky chose to concentrate on developing a small but disciplined and professionally competent force. His abandonment of the revolutionary ideal of democratization and guerrilla tactics prompted much criticism of his methods among other communists. Trotsky’s military policies were resisted unsuccessfully by a coalition of ultra-left (communist) “purists” and rival party leaders, --notably **Stalin**-- with whom Trotsky had a bitter rivalry.

With the triumph of the communist forces and the end of the Russian Civil War in 1920, Trotsky, retaining his office as commissar of war, turned his attention to the **economic reconstruction of Russia**. He first proposed a relaxation of the stringent centralization of War Communism to allow market forces to operate. Rejected in this, he endeavored to apply military discipline to the economy, using soldiers as labor armies and attempting to militarize the administration of the transportation system.

During the Civil War and War Communism phase of the Soviet regime, **Trotsky was clearly established as the number-two man next to Lenin**. In intellectual power and administrative effectiveness, he was Lenin’s superior and did not hesitate to disagree with him, but he **lacked facility in political manipulation to win party decisions.** Trotsky took a prominent part in the launching of the Comintern (a communist party) in 1919 and wrote its initial manifesto.

The struggle for the succession

**When Lenin was stricken with his first cerebral hemorrhage in May 1922, the question of eventual succession to the leadership of Russia became urgent.** **Trotsky,** owing to his record and his **charismatic qualities**, was the obvious candidate in the eyes of the party rank and file, but jealousy among his colleagues on the Politburo prompted them to combine against him. As an alternative, the Politburo supported the informal leadership of the troika composed of Joseph **Stalin**….

Lenin characterized Trotsky as a man of “exceptional abilities” but “too far-reaching self-confidence and a disposition to be too much attracted by the purely administrative side of affairs.” Just before he was silenced by a final stroke in March 1923, Lenin invited Trotsky to open an attack on Stalin, but Trotsky chose to bide his time, possibly contemplating an alliance against Zinovyev. Stalin moved rapidly to consolidate his hold on the Central Committee at the 12th Party Congress in April 1923.

Stalin banishes Trotsky

In 1924, Lenin dies, and Joseph Stalin becomes as the leaders of the USSR. Against Stalin’s stated policies, Trotsky calls for a continuing world revolution that would inevitably result in the dismantling of the Soviet state. He also criticizes the new regime for suppressing democracy in the Communist Party and for failing to develop adequate economic planning. In response, Stalin and his supporters launch a propaganda counterattack against Trotsky. In 1925, Trotsky is removed from his post; and is later expelled from the Soviet Union outright.

He was received by the government of Turkey and settled on the island of Prinkipo, where he worked on finishing his autobiography and history of the Russian Revolution. After four years in Turkey, Trotsky lived in France and then Norway and in 1936 was granted asylum in Mexico. Settling with his family in a suburb of Mexico City, he was found guilty of treason in absentia during Stalin’s purges of his political foes. He survived a machine-gun attack on his home but on August 20, 1940, fell prey to a Spanish Communist, Ramon Mercader, who fatally wounded him with an ice-ax. He died from his wounds the next day.

POST-READING QUESTIONS – (answer each question completely on the back of this worksheet)

1. Describe Trotsky’s personality/character/skillset (in the context of the revolution)? What personal attributes helped him achieve political success, and win Lenin’s respect?
2. Describe Lenin’s relationship with Stalin.
3. Which character in Orwell’s *Animal Farm* does Trotsky remind you of most? Why? Justify you answer using evidence from the article and Orwell’s *Animal Farm* – (no direct quotes are necessary).
4. Who was Trotsky’s rival? Who killed Trotsky? Why?

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION: ARTICLE 3

(Joseph Stalin)

Joseph Stalin (1878-1953) was the dictator of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) from 1929 to 1953. Under Stalin, the Soviet Union was transformed from a peasant society into an industrial and military superpower. However, he ruled by terror, and millions of his own citizens died during his brutal reign. Born into poverty, Stalin became involved in revolutionary politics, as well as criminal activities, as a young man. **After Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924) died, Stalin outmaneuvered his rivals for control of the party.** Once in power, he collectivized farming and had potential enemies executed or sent to forced labor camps. Stalin aligned with the United States and Britain in World War II (1939-1945) but afterward engaged in an increasingly tense relationship with the West known as the Cold War (1946-1991). After his death, the Soviets initiated a de-Stalinization process.

The early years…

Stalin grew up poor and an only child. His father was a shoemaker and alcoholic who beat his son, and his mother was a laundress. As a boy, Stalin contracted smallpox, which left him with lifelong facial scars. As a teen, he earned a scholarship to attend a seminary in the nearby city of Tblisi and study for the priesthood in the Georgian Orthodox Church. **While there he began secretly reading the work of German social philosopher and “Communist Manifesto” author Karl Marx, becoming interested in the revolutionary movement against the Russian monarchy.** In 1899, Stalin was expelled from the seminary for missing exams, although he claimed it was for Marxist propaganda.

After leaving school, Stalin became an underground political agitator, taking part in labor demonstrations and strikes. He adopted the name Koba, after a fictional Georgian outlaw-hero, and joined the more militant wing of the **Marxist Social Democratic movement, the Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Lenin**. Stalin also became involved in various criminal activities, including bank heists, the proceeds from which were used to help fund the **Bolshevik Party**. He was arrested multiple times between 1902 and 1913, and subjected to imprisonment and exile in Siberia.

Joseph Stalin’s Rise to Power

In 1912, Lenin (then in exile in Switzerland) appointed Joseph Stalin to serve on the first Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party. Three years later, in November 1917, the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia. The Soviet Union was founded in 1922, with Lenin as its first leader. During these years, Stalin had continued to move up the party ladder, and in 1922 he became secretary general of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, a role that enabled him to appoint his allies to government jobs and grow a base of political support.

After Lenin died in 1924, Stalin eventually outmaneuvered his rivals (primarily **Trotsky**) and won the power struggle for control of the Communist Party. By the late 1920s, he had become dictator of the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union Under Joseph Stalin

Starting in the late 1920s, Joseph Stalin launched a series of five-year plans intended to transform the Soviet Union from a peasant society into an industrial superpower. His development plan was centered on government control of the economy and included the forced collectivization of Soviet agriculture, in which the government took control of farms. Millions of farmers refused to cooperate with Stalin’s orders and were shot or exiled as punishment. The forced collectivization also led to widespread famine across the Soviet Union that killed millions.

Stalin ruled by terror and with a totalitarian grip in order to eliminate anyone who might oppose him. He expanded the powers of the secret police, encouraged citizens to spy on one another and had millions of people killed or sent to the Gulag system of forced labor camps. During the second half of the 1930s, Stalin instituted the Great Purge, a series of campaigns designed to rid the Communist Party, the military and other parts of Soviet society from those he considered a threat. Cities were renamed in his honor. Soviet history books were rewritten to give him a more prominent role in the revolution and mythologize other aspects of his life. He was the subject of flattering artwork, literature and music, and his name became part of the Soviet national anthem. His government also controlled the Soviet media.

POST-READING QUESTIONS - (answer each question completely on the back of this worksheet)

1. Describe Stalin’s personality and character. How did he use his personal “assets” to move up the political ladder?
2. How would you describe Stalin’s feelings towards Lenin? How did Stalin handle threats?
3. Which character does Stalin align with most from Orwell’s *Animal Farm*? Justify your answer using evidence from both the article, and Orwell’s text – (no direct quotes are necessary).
4. Describe Russia under Stalin’s control.