

Name: _____ Date: _____ P. _____

How Czarist Russia became the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)

In February 1917, problems in Russia resulted in the abdication (kicking out) of Czar Nicholas. For a few months, a temporary government made up of a mix of different groups ran Russia. But communists, led by Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky, pushed for a “true” revolutions and in November, the temporary government was peaceably removed and the Russian Communist party (the Bolsheviks) took control of Russia. Lenin suggested that Trotsky should take control of the new government but Trotsky refused, as he was Jewish and believed that the Russian people would have a problem with that. As a result, Lenin became the first leader of the Soviet Union.

The first act was to give the Cheka (secret police force) increased power. In addition, Joseph Stalin suggested to Lenin that he purge (kill) suspected enemies of the revolution as a warning to any future assassins. This purge became known as the Red Terror, and Lenin published lists of enemies in the newspaper and then had hundreds executed in public. He also gave the order to kill. The Cheka was given the power to arrest, torture and carry out executions without having to consult with anyone else.

One of the first political goals of Lenin and the new socialist Government was to modernize Russia, which was approximately 100 year behind the rest of Europe. Lenin recognized that the only way that Russia would be able to compete with the rest of the world would be to modernize as quickly as possible. In order to do this, Russia had to withdraw from World War I. In 1917, the new communist government signed the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, basically giving up all the land that Germany had captured from Russia during World War I.

In 1920, Lenin instituted the first of several reforms; establishing free health care, free education, and equal right for women. In addition, he streamlined production and gave more power to the workers in a particular industry to solve their own problems. Each industry had their own specific job to do for Russia; steel workers produced all the steel used, garment workers produced all the clothing, and farmers (peasants) produced all the food consumed in the entire country.

Not all people agreed with Lenin’s policies, however. The second largest group of Communists was called the Mensheviks (or “white” communists). They began to actively fight against Lenin and the Bolsheviks (“red” Communists) from places like Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. In reaction, Lenin annexed (took over) those locations and required the Russian farmers to give most of their harvests to feed the soldiers. The farmers reacted strongly to having their food requisitioned (taken away) by the government and the famine in 1921 killed 5 million Russian peasants.

Lenin generally worked 16-17 hours a day, seven days a week, and still had a bullet lodged in his neck from the second assassination attempt. This combination led to overwork and eventually a series of strokes. In 1922, he had the first of three severe strokes. He had a second stroke at the end of 1922, and a third severe stroke the following year, which left him unable to speak, and confined to bed. During this time, he expressed concern about the power that Joseph Stalin was accumulating. Lenin recommended that the other members of the Communist leadership consider ways to get rid of Stalin, and put Leon Trotsky in control instead. In 1924 when Lenin died and Joseph Stalin took control, the USSR quickly transformed into a Dictatorship.

Russia to USSR Reading questions:

1. Describe the first government of Russia (after the Czar was removed)
2. What was the Cheka?
3. What was the job of the Cheka?
4. Why did Lenin institute the Red Terror?
5. Why was it so important for Russia to modernize their country?
6. What kinds of reforms did Lenin put into place?
7. Are these true Communist reforms? Why or why not?
8. Was Lenin's reaction to the White Rebellion the right thing to do? Explain why or why not.
9. What happened to Lenin in the early 1920's?
10. Why was Lenin reluctant to give control to Stalin?

Analysis Question: (This one is worth a lot)

Was Lenin a True Communist? Explain your answer, using information you have previously learned in class.