

A Level History

Year 11 Bridging Work

Welcome, Year 11 (soon to be Year 12)!

This pack contains your bridging work for A Level History. These tasks are designed to give you a flavour of what the two sides of the Year 12 course are all about. These will introduce you to some of the key issues and individuals that we will study when you return in September.

You will be required to watch a video and read an article on the Chinese Civil War, and watch a video and read an article on the Russian Revolutions of 1917. There are questions/tasks to complete based on all of the above.

Don't feel you need to complete this all in one go. You can complete the tasks in this booklet in the spaces provided.

Have fun working on this - it will be a huge help next term. We hope you have a fantastic summer and we look forward to seeing you all in September!

Mr Hudson and Mr Marshall

Overview of Tasks

Mao's China, 1949-76

Video

Video link here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJdQ1gna10k>

Watch the video above and complete the questions on page 3.

Article

Read through the article on pages 4-7 and complete the questions on page 8.

Russia: from Lenin to Yeltsin, 1917-91

Video

Video link here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cV9G1QUIm7w&t=2s>

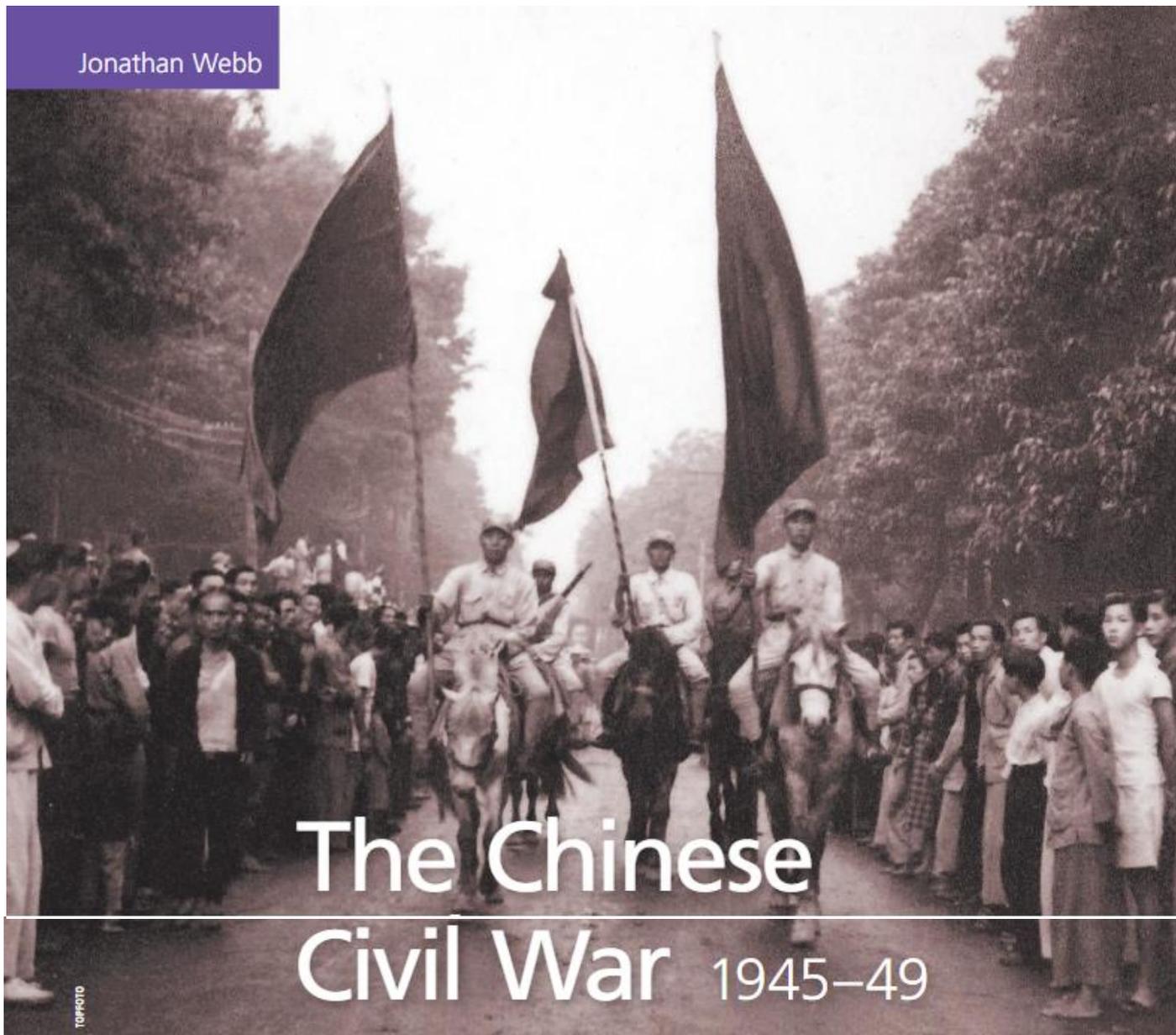
Watch the video above and complete the questions on pages 9-10.

Article

Read through the article on pages 11-14 and complete the questions on pages 15-16.

Video – The Chinese Civil War: Animated History (The Armchair Historian)

- 1) Which dynasty fell in 1911?
- 2) What was the name of the nationalist party?
- 3) Why did the Nationalists and Communists form an alliance in 1923?
- 4) What campaign resulted in the deaths of many CCP members?
- 5) Which country looked to take advantage of China's fragile state during the civil war?
- 6) How many men did the Nationalists lose during the war with Japan?
- 7) How many men did the Communists lose during the war with Japan?
- 8) What is the official name of China that was formed in 1949?
- 9) Where did the Nationalists flee?



The Chinese Civil War 1945–49

TOP PHOTO

The Communist People's Liberation Army entering Guangzhou in 1949

Jonathan Webb explores why Mao Tse-tung's Communists defeated Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists in the Chinese Civil War

AQA AS The impact of Chairman Mao: China, 1946–1976

Edexcel AS Crises, tensions and political divisions in China, 1900–1949

OCR (A) AS The rise of China 1911–90

Argument China lost or gained?

On the face of it, Mao Tse-tung's Communist forces did not win the Chinese Civil War, rather Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists lost it. In reality, the truth was more complex.

It was only to be expected that news of the Communist victory in China in 1949 would be met with political recriminations in Washington, DC. How could Nationalist forces have lost to Mao Tse-tung's Communists — a force outsupplied, outgunned and outnumbered three to one?

Arguments in 1949

Those on the right in the USA smelt political blood. Republicans blamed the Democrats for 'losing China' by failing to give Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek the resources to defeat the Communists. Senator Joe McCarthy went further, launching a scathing attack on the State Department for harbouring Communists who, he claimed, had secretly supported Mao — torpedoing any effective support for Chiang, fighting 'our war'.

In defence, secretary of state Dean Acheson's assessment in August 1949 was stark: the Nationalists had thrown victory away — 'its leaders had proved incapable of meeting the crisis. its troops had lost

the will to fight and its government had lost popular support'. The Nationalists, he claimed, had not been defeated, they had simply disintegrated.

For Mao, conversely, proclaiming the republic in September 1949, the answer was simple: the people of China had 'closed their ranks, rallied to the **People's Liberation Army (PLA)** and won basic victory'. The revolution, he claimed, was a popular expression of the people's will against landlordism, exploitation and Western imperialism.

The truth was more complex. The Communist victory was not a simple matter of Nationalist ineptitude nor of Communist popularity. It was a complex interweaving of the two, with Mao successfully mobilising some, but not all, of the Chinese population, skilfully wielding his armies to exploit Nationalist incompetence. Chiang, ultimately, lacked the ruthless streak that Mao possessed in abundance.

A popular revolution?

The popular nature of the revolution has long been debated. While it must be conceded that the Communists did successfully mobilise parts of the peasantry, Mao's claims were exaggerated. It should be noted, for one thing, that the Communist victory was a rural phenomenon. The **Kuomintang (KMT)** had, since 1927, successfully neutralised Communist influence in the cities. In 1962 Johnson argued that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) succeeded in mobilising peasant support during the **Sino-Japanese War** because peasants were nationalistic. He claimed that the Communists showed the greatest military and organisational ability to oppose the Japanese. This interpretation, unfortunately, lacked substantial evidence, though Chiang's Nationalists did little to challenge the Japanese forces.

Some historians, alternatively, accepted the Maoist interpretation that the peasants flocked to the CCP's land reform programme to pursue their class interests. But the assumption that peasants immediately saw their interests as an issue of class must be questioned. Village life was a complex mix of loyalties to lineage, landlord and religion, and it is hard to accept that class antagonism was a spontaneous phenomenon. There were no independent peasant uprisings.

CCP reforms

This is not to underplay the CCP's programme of agricultural reform, however. In the early 1940s cooperation with local peasant associations sensibly focused on reducing rents and taxation in order not to alienate landlord elites. Famine relief, production cooperatives and the revival of the silk industry were efforts to demonstrate the party's ability to provide tangible benefits for local communities. In 1947–48 policy was escalated with land seizures and popular 'speak bitterness' trials, in which landlords were publicly humiliated for 'class crimes'. In some

Key points

- Communists argued that their victory in the Chinese Civil War was the inevitable product of peasant reaction to landlordism and capitalist exploitation. Western opinion blamed the corruption and military errors of the ruling KMT and its leader Chiang Kai-shek who, they claimed, threw away the chance of victory.
- Evidence for the popular nature of the revolution is not clear cut. While the Communists gained support for their land reform policies, they alienated many with their terror tactics. Urban and central and southern China was conquered in war, not overcome by peasant uprisings.
- The superpowers helped shape the nature of the war, if not fully determining its final outcome. The USSR supported the Communists in seizing Manchuria while the USA gave over \$3 billion in aid and helped transport and supply the Nationalists. The 'loss of China' led to right-wing scrutiny of Truman's Asia policy and partly explains why the USA took more determined action in the Korean and Vietnamese wars.
- Organisational and military factors played a key role. The Communists were highly motivated and pursued a ruthless strategy of attrition under Mao's leadership, which also involved the mass conscription of peasants to supply the PLA. The Nationalist Army, by contrast, was poorly led and its economic policies were weakened by corruption and inflation.
- What finally determined the outcome was a loss of faith and resolve on the part of the Nationalist leadership and its supporters, while the majority of the population accepted the seemingly inevitable triumph of the Communists. Communist confidence, by contrast, grew as the tides of events turned their way.

instances they were brutally beaten and executed by party cadres.

In Manchuria, where traditional social hierarchies had been destroyed by the Japanese, the Communists offered stability and social order. A Shaanxi village report describing the seizure of landlord food was typical: 'In the past we never lived through a happy new year because he always asked for his rent and interest and cleaned our houses bare. This time we'll eat what we like.' In areas reconquered by the Nationalists landlords were often restored to power, intensifying peasant bitterness. As **General Stilwell** observed, there was a stark difference between the two sides: 'GMD (KMT) — corruption, neglect, chaos...CCP — reduce taxes, rents, interest. Raise production and standard of living.'

Mao Tse-tung: born to a peasant family in 1893, Mao became leader of the Communists in 1935 and chairman of the People's Republic in 1949. He died in 1976.

Chiang Kai-shek: leader of the Nationalists in China from 1927, he fled to Taiwan in 1949 where he became leader until his death in 1972.

Joe McCarthy: Republican senator for Wisconsin who led the 'red scare' in the USA from February 1950 until his censure by the US Senate in 1954.

People's Liberation Army: the military wing of the Communist Party of China (CCP).

Kuomintang (KMT): the Nationalist Party of China, founded in 1912. Since 1949 it has been the dominant political party of the Republic of China (Taiwan).

Sino-Japanese War: in 1931 Japan invaded and occupied Manchuria in northern China. In 1937 Japan attacked the rest of China, occupying much of coastal China until its defeat in 1945.

cadres: members of the Communist Party.

General Stilwell: Chiang's US-appointed chief of staff during the Second World War.



PETER NEWARK'S HISTORICAL PICTURES

Mao proclaiming the founding of the People's Republic of China on 1 October 1949

Not class but terror?

There is an alternative view. Peasant testimony suggests many were revolted by the excesses of party activities. Historians Chang and Halliday's biography of Mao goes further in suggesting that what bound the peasants together was not class but terror. They claim that Communist violence traumatised millions into submission, although their evidence lacks balance.

What emerges is a subtle picture — a mixture of Communist zeal, practical hatred of landlordism, but also revulsion at some of the Communists' tactics. While peasant support swelled the ranks of the PLA, however, it still fails to explain how the Communists were victorious against larger, better-equipped Nationalist forces. The answer must be found in the military and logistical aspects of the war.

The military angle

Mao had created a strong and organised party from its base at Yen'an. With total conviction and an utter disregard for US intervention, Mao mounted three successful campaigns after 1945. Securing Manchuria and its vital mineral wealth, the Communists defeated the Nationalist offensive there in 1947–48, isolating urban garrisons by destroying rail and air links and starving the populations into surrender.

Following the seizure of Mukden and Changchun in October 1948, the PLA moved on to the conventional

counteroffensive in 1948–49, seizing the Xuzhou railway junction before taking Beijing in January 1949. Huge quantities of American equipment fell into Communist hands. Nanjing fell without a fight in April, Shanghai in May. Chiang and 300,000 loyal troops withdrew to Taiwan. By October, following mopping-up operations in the south, the civil war was over.

Though smaller, the Communist Army possessed higher morale, fired by the rhetoric of class struggle. Living off the land they occupied, they initially used a 'passive defence' strategy to withdraw in the face of superior numbers, and attack to wear the enemy down. Conscription of 2 million peasant labourers helped supply the armies with food and materials.

The occupying Russian forces were crucial in the early stages of the campaign. Though outwardly favouring a Communist–Nationalist coalition (Stalin personally doubted whether Mao could rule alone and feared US intervention), they secretly supplied money and made available to Lin Bao, commander in Manchuria, abandoned Japanese weapons and 200,000 Korean Communists.

The Americans, by contrast, proved an ambivalent ally to Chiang. Indeed, US contact with Mao in 1943 and special envoy George Marshall's visit to Yen'an in December 1945 concluded positively about Mao's land policy. Assessments of the Nationalists, by contrast, were often unfavourable. Rampant corruption suggested that supporting Chiang was like pouring money down a 'rat hole'. Fear of Soviet influence was perhaps the only reason why the Americans maintained their support for the Nationalists. Marshall urged a Communist–Nationalist power-sharing government, but talks in 1946 failed as Nationalist attacks on Communist positions undermined consensus. The talks, however, inadvertently gave Mao much-needed breathing space.

It is incorrect, though, to accuse the USA of contributing to Chiang's downfall. US policy was muddled and incoherent, but its priority was Europe and it was understandably unwilling to commit more than 55,000 advisers, preferring to concentrate military power on the Pacific-rim islands. The USA did, however, airlift 100,000 of Chiang's troops from Chongqing to the northern cities of Manchuria. It also gave Chiang vast amounts of money — \$570 million

Questions

- What were the similarities and differences between the Communist victories in Russia (1917) and China (1949)?
- To what extent can the breakdown of Sino–Soviet relations in the 1950s be traced back to the era of the civil war?
- What were the implications of the Communist victory in China for Cold War politics in Asia after 1949?

in 1948 alone — even though too much help might prejudice Chiang's position with his own people, who resented domination by an 'imperialist power'.

The 'rat hole'

If the blame doesn't lie with the USA, and Communist popularity and zeal provide only partial explanations, then the argument that the Nationalists threw victory away remains the most compelling. Chiang's catalogue of errors was large. Foremost was his military strategy. Attempting to wrest Manchuria from the Communists extended supply lines, taking the war into areas outside of Nationalist control. Patient consolidation of the southern and central regions would have been better. Though the Nationalists seized Manchurian cities in 1945, their defence was hampered by carelessness and corruption, allowing the Communists to slowly strangle each city.

Accusations against key generals that they were Communist 'sleepers' remain a matter for debate, but rivalries, jealousies and sheer incompetence among the Nationalists were major problems. Chiang was quick to blame his generals' 'muddle-headed' planning, but his tendency to promote on the basis of personal loyalty rather than merit hampered the armies. Military fiasco was compounded by political error. Allowing administrators who had collaborated with the Japanese to remain in office cemented the belief that Chiang favoured the Japanese over the Communists. This allowed Mao to appear as a nationalist champion.

Economic disaster

Most important of all in undermining the Nationalist cause was a disastrous economic policy. Printing money to fund the war machine induced hyperinflation. Waves of strikes, which hit cities like Shanghai in 1947, were partly orchestrated by Communist agents but primarily a response to the steady rise in unemployment. Wage and price fixing failed and attempts to stabilise the currency with gold in 1948 proved short-lived. Over-printing of the new currency soon induced another inflationary spiral. The Nationalists' response to instability was terror. But public executions alienated the urban population from which the Nationalists drew their strength. Communist terror, while more brutal, was more low-key in rural areas.

Conclusion

The Nationalists were never really the party of the people. They drew their core support from urban business elites, and their failure to stem chronic corruption, speculation and plundering of factory stocks alienated a large percentage of the population who might have provided support. Morale in the army was low and desertion rates high. Many soldiers were conscripted and conditions were brutal and rations poor, despite the Nationalists controlling China's

April 2012

Weblink

A detailed history of China from ancient days until the latter part of the twentieth century can be found at: www.tinyurl.com/3abhya

A biographical history of Mao's life can be found at: www.tinyurl.com/2dyeo46

Chronology

- 1911 Fall of the last imperial dynasty and establishment of the first republic under President Sun Yat-sen.
- 1921 Foundation of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).
- 1927 Chiang Kai-shek defeats warlords to establish his rule as leader of the Kuomintang (KMT) and begins war against the Communists.
- 1931 Japan invades Manchuria.
- 1934 Mao becomes leader of the CCP after the Long March, making his base at Yanan.
- 1937 Sino-Japanese War begins. CCP and KMT form a 'united front' against the Japanese, though unofficially fighting continues.
- 1945 Civil war between the CCP and KMT begins again.
- 1949 Mao proclaims the victory of the Communists and the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

most productive land. No wonder their armies often disintegrated in the face of the Communist onslaught.

It is therefore hard to question a US report that claimed the Nationalists were prone to 'apathy and defeatism'. Though most of the population feared the Communists, many were willing to give them the benefit of the doubt. There was a fatalistic acceptance of the Communist triumph — none more evident than Chiang's careful preparation of Taiwan in the 1930s as his place of final refuge. Acheson, while not entirely right, was not far from the truth.



See [20thCenturyHistoryReviewOnline](#) for a revision activity to go with this article.

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Further reading

- Chang, J. and Halliday, J. (2007) *Mao: the Unknown Story*, Vintage.
- Fenby, J. (2005) *Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-shek and the China he Lost*, Free Press.
- Lynch, M. (2010) *The Chinese Civil War*, Osprey.
- Short, P. (2004) *Mao: a Life*, John Murray.
- Spence, J. (1990) *The Search for Modern China*, Hutchinson.

Video – The Russian Revolution 1917 (Epic History TV)

- 1) In what year did Nicholas II become leader of the Russian Empire?
- 2) In what year was there a revolution and what was the name of the national assembly created?
- 3) Why was World War I a disaster for Russia?
- 4) Why was the Tsar blamed for the poor performance in the war?
- 5) What happened on 23rd February 1917?
- 6) On what date did Nicholas agree to abdicate?
- 7) Who did the Provisional Government share power with and who was this group dominated by?
- 8) What was the slogan used by the Bolsheviks to appeal to the peasants?
- 9) Where did Lenin flee to after the July Days?
- 10) Who became the Prime Minister in July?
- 11) What happened during the Kornilov attempted coup?
- 12) On what date did the Bolsheviks seize key points around the capital and storm the Winter Palace?
- 13) In what month did the Russian Civil War begin?

14) What happened to the Tsar and his family in 1918?

15) How many people died during the Russian Civil War overall (including epidemics)?

16) In what year was the Soviet Union created?



Russia 1917

From February to October

Christopher Read

We continue our series of items commemorating the centenary of the Russian Revolution

The Winter Palace, St Petersburg, as it appears today

Exam links



AQA 1H Tsarist and Communist Russia, 1855–1964

AQA 2N Revolution and dictatorship: Russia, 1917–1953

Edexcel paper 1 option 1E Russia, 1917–91: from Lenin to Yeltsin

Edexcel paper 2 option 2C.2 Russia in revolution, 1894–1924

Edexcel paper 3 option 38.1 The making of modern Russia, 1855–1991

OCR Y249/Y219 Russia 1894–1941

OCR Y318 Russia and its rulers 1855–1964

In my article in *MODERN HISTORY REVIEW* Vol. 19, No. 3 I focused on the February Revolution and traced the downfall of Tsar Nicholas II. The article considered the part played in that downfall by widespread street demonstrations. It also looked at the role of senior military officers, members of the Duma and much of the property-owning elites, who

ModernHistoryReviewExtras



Go online for tips on writing about Russia in 1917 (www.hoddereducation.co.uk/historyreviewextras)

experienced a deep loss of faith in the tsar's ability to govern. Instead of preventing the revolution from developing further, the removal of the tsar opened the way to a vast upheaval with global consequences. A timeline of 1917 was published in *MODERN HISTORY REVIEW* Vol. 19, No. 4. This article focuses on the events leading up to the October Revolution.

After the February Revolution

The sequence of events unleashed by the February Revolution touched every region, province, town, city, village, estate, military unit and battleship in the collapsing empire. Every class — workers, peasants, educated professionals, managers, capitalists and landowners — developed its own agenda for the new situation. Totally disparate nationalities sought autonomy or even independence. A gender revolution was also underway as women fought for equality.

This state of affairs is referred to as a 'kaleidoscope of revolutions' in which precise patterns varied in every place. The history of 1917 is how this wave of revolutions developed and why the outcome was the Soviet state and Bolshevik power.

Revolutionary honeymoon

At first, there was a honeymoon of support for the February Revolution which embraced almost the

whole empire. Euphoric celebration was the order of the day and the overwhelming feeling was one of patriotism based on support for the war and the feeling that Russia was now in a better state to defend itself. It was argued by some leftists, who called themselves revolutionary defencists, that this was now a democratic Russia that was worth defending, unlike its outmoded, dictatorial, racist tsarist predecessor.

Emerging contradictions

The honeymoon, however, did not last very long. The varied groups quickly realised they were celebrating different things and, above all, they had vastly different expectations for what the revolution would bring. Some thought they were simply replacing one tsar with another, but this was soon shown to be politically impossible. Others aimed to construct a parliamentary capitalist Russia modelled on Britain and France.

Worker revolt

Once the honeymoon was over, the initiative was taken up by the masses. From one end of the country to the other peasants began to encroach on the landowners' estates and privileges. At first this took the form of timid actions like taking firewood from the forest or pasturing animals on landowners' meadows. However, they acted with greater confidence when they got the measure of what they could get away with, and withheld rents and labour from the landowners and began to prevent the landowner from asset-stripping the estates.

In cities, workers went on strike for higher wages, shorter hours and more humane working and living

conditions. In the military, a vast purge of unpopular officers took place. This included arbitrary killing of the most hated commanders.

Organised

Especially remarkable was the vast wave of self-organisation that swept all branches of the movement of the masses. Peasant committees, factory committees and military committees were set up at grass roots level. The remarkable spread of soviets, mainly in towns and in the army and navy, gave increasing political weight to the lower classes. There was no permanent national soviet, but the Petrograd Soviet was universally recognised as the top of the soviet pyramid.

The Provisional Government

Naturally, the propertied elites — 'old money' aristocrats and landowners, and 'new money' businessmen and financiers — were increasingly alarmed as this wave of democratisation spread throughout the empire. But no one seemed able to stop it. The Provisional Government, which had emerged from the February Revolution, was proving to have little power. However, for the time being, it did retain authority and was seen as the only legitimate government by almost everyone from the army leadership to the leaders of the soviets.

Dual power?

It is sometimes said that the Provisional Government's weakness came from the emergence of a so-called *dual* power in which the soviets, especially the Petrograd Soviet, had a veto over the actions of the Provisional Government. The Petrograd Soviet did indeed lobby hard for its policies to be adopted but, for the time being, did not see itself as an alternative government.

Multiple power?

Recently, historians have argued more plausibly that there was a situation of *multiple* power. The unity of autocratic power was replaced by repositories of

Provisional Government

Set up initially from members of the State Duma (Russia's quasi-parliament) as a result of agreement, or even pressure, from the Petrograd Soviet. It was dominated by liberals and conservatives in the early days but by July, when Alexander Kerensky became prime minister, the majority of ministers were from the right of the socialist parties.

Petrograd Soviet

Set up informally in the heat of the February Revolution as a committee to coordinate the activities of the revolutionaries. Soviets sprang up very quickly in urban centres

across Russia and increasingly spread to parts of the countryside.



Street demonstrations during the 'July Days'

www.hoddereducation.co.uk/historyreview

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Provisional Government propaganda poster, urging the populace to subscribe to the 'freedom loan' in support of the PG



Kadets Named from the initials of the party in Russian (KD), standing for Constitutional Democrats in English. It was dominated by members of the educated professional classes. They were led by Paul Miliukov who was the main political tactician behind the Provisional Government.

Octobrists Named after the October Manifesto of 1905 which they supported. They were largely the liberal wing of the manufacturing and business classes.

Dark people A derogatory name for the lower classes, especially peasants. It embodied the fear and ignorance of much of the elite when it came to dealing with 'ordinary' people.

partial power in the military, the soviets, the remnants of local government, trade unions, employers and landowners associations and so on. Russia was a free-for-all of organisations and committees from top to bottom.

However, the weakness of the Provisional Government was much more fundamental. It was committed to continuing the war, while the opposition to it built up as 1917 proceeded. True, no one wanted peace at any price but enthusiasm for a war of annexation was replaced by a widespread policy of peace without expansion or reparations.

Dilemmas of the Provisional Government

On other key issues the Provisional Government faced policy choices it could not resolve. In terms of land, the peasants wanted a total takeover by themselves whereas landowners and the Provisional Government wanted a more limited land reform. Even a political settlement appeared beyond it. It had an essentially liberal and democratic philosophy but knew that the main parties in the government, especially the Kadets and Octobrists of the centre-right, would not survive a democratic, universal suffrage election. The peasants would have the mass of votes and the educated professionals of the Kadet Party feared what the 'dark people' might do.

Faced with these dilemmas, the government played for time by setting up Land and Supply committees to prepare for land reform and to mend the economy,

especially where supplying the army was concerned. It also set up an inquiry into the situation in the provinces. None of these gave it much credibility in the eyes of the population or reassurance for itself.

Attempted coup

June Offensive

The one bold initiative the Provisional Government did embark on was a military offensive in June. It had two main purposes. One was to reassure the allies that Russia was still in the war and ready to relieve the massive pressures on the Western Front. The second was to bring the soldiers to heel behind patriotic ideas and strict discipline.

But two problems settled the fate of the offensive. First, the soldiers themselves had urged that they should not be involved in offensives. They would fight off enemy attacks, but not take the initiative since most offensives were very costly in lives. The second problem was that the offensive turned into a chaotic and costly retreat.

July Days

Only chance circumstances saved the day for the Provisional Government in the form of the July Days. As part of the build up of troops for the offensive, the army chiefs tried to move units sympathetic to the soviets out of Petrograd. There were also protests because older men — up to the age of 45 — were being conscripted. The demonstrations culminated in a large force, possibly about 10,000 strong, of armed sailors from the nearby Kronstadt naval base coming into Petrograd and demanding the overthrow of the Provisional Government.

Oddly, no political party was ready to lead the sailors. The political offensive faltered and the Provisional Government was able to go on the attack against the left, and the Bolsheviks in particular. With a mixture of manipulated facts, deception and outright forgery the Provisional Government was able to claim that the Bolsheviks were German agents. Right-wing gangs attacked the Bolshevik press in Petrograd. Lenin fled to Finland to evade justice, proclaiming with uncharacteristic pessimism that the pre-1914 situation had returned. The party must go back underground. How did the situation turn around and bring the Bolsheviks to power only 3 months later?

The Kornilov affair

If the radicals had overstretched themselves in the July Days it was the turn of the right to do the same in late August. Encouraged by the July success, the right began to dream of re-gaining the initiative. In particular the Commander-in-Chief of the army, General Kornilov, was encouraged by groups of landowners, bankers and industrialists to seize power.



Bolsheviks descend on the Winter Palace in October 1917

The result was the murky 'Kornilov affair' when, in late August, Kornilov moved troops towards Petrograd to suppress the soviet.

The degree to which the new head of the Provisional Government, Alexander Kerensky, was either in on the plot or, more plausibly, its intended victim, remains unresolved. The outcome of the affair is, however, much clearer. Fearing at the last minute that Kornilov wanted to overthrow the government, Kerensky turned to the Petrograd Soviet for help. Kornilov was arrested, his troops refused to fight and the apparent coup collapsed. This opened a vacuum in politics. Kerensky had lost almost all his support. The left mistrusted him for his links with Kornilov while the right, the army in particular, despised him for undermining Kornilov.

The October Revolution

From his exile in Helsinki, Lenin sensed his moment had come. The political vacuum combined with renewed militancy from peasants and workers, who sensed a developing threat to the gains they had made so far in the revolution, convinced Lenin that the conditions for soviet power were maturing. Bolshevik majorities in the key soviets of Moscow and Petrograd in early September led him to write a series of letters to the party Central Committee urging seizure of power.

The Central Committee dragged its feet. Only on 10 October, under direct pressure from Lenin, did

Further reading



Read, C. (2015) *War and Revolution in Russia 1914–22*, Palgrave, Chapters 3–5.

Smith, S. (1983) *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories 1917–18*, Cambridge University Press.

Rendle, M. (ed.) (February 2017) *The Centenary of the Russian Revolution New Directions in Research*. Special issue of the journal *Historical Research*, Vol. 90, No. 247. Available at: www.tinyurl.com/k87p4he.

they agree to put armed uprising 'on the agenda'. In the event the soviet came to Lenin's rescue and it was largely the manoeuvring of forces loyal to the soviets not just the Bolsheviks, which brought success. They were easily able to take the key points of the city: bridges, railway stations, telephone exchanges and so on.

The Bolsheviks, it was said, had not seized power; they had found it lying in the street and picked it up. The initial stage was, indeed, very easy. Resistance in Petrograd was minimal. Holding on to that power — spreading it through the country and definitively putting the Bolshevik stamp on it — was much harder and took over 3 years of intense conflict.

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Russia 1917: From February to October

- 1) What was the general feeling after the February Revolution?

- 2) Why did the 'revolutionary honeymoon' not last very long?

- 3) How did the worker revolt affect the armed forces?

- 4) Which Soviet was recognised as the most important one?

- 5) What was the Provisional Government and why did it struggle for power?

- 6) What is meant by the idea of 'multiple power'?

- 7) What was the main debate around land reform for the Provisional Government?

- 8) What were the two problems that ruined the June Offensive?

- 9) Why was the Provisional Government able to survive the July Days?

10) Why did the Kornilov coup fail?

11) Which exiled individual saw his opportunity after the 'Kornilov Affair'?

12) How had the Bolsheviks gained power?