Soviet Russia, 1917-1939
Background to Revolution

- Czars and absolutism
- Decembrist Revolt crushed (1823)
- Alexander II abolishes serfdom (1862)
  - State pays nobles for land for freed serfs
  - Peasants must pay state back in installments for land
- Rural radicalism and Marxism take root (Socialist Revolutionaries, Anarchists)
- Alexander II assassinated (1881)
- Czarist state promotes rapid industrialization
1905 Revolution

- War with Japan causes food shortages, resentment at military defeats (May 1905)
- Bloody Sunday turns workers against the Nicholas II (January 22nd)
- Czar grants Duma to placate liberals (August 6th)
Russia’s Entry into the Great War

- Russia backs down to German war threats in 1907 over the Balkans (national pride is further wounded)
- Russia unprepared for European war in 1914 (industrial shortages, incompetent leadership, social unrest)
- Defeat at Tannenberg puts Russia on defensive (August 1914)
March Revolution

- 10,000 women demonstrate against bread rationing in St. Petersburg (March 8)
- Protests joined by socialists, further strikes (March 10)
- Troops refuse to fire on protesters
- Nicholas II abdicates (March 15)
- Duma becomes the Provisional Government (Kerensky)
The Provisional Government (March-October, 1917)

- Liberal reformism and capitalism
- Constituent Assembly plans democratic elections after war’s end
- Continue Russian war effort with allies
- No state facilitated land distribution to former peasants
The Soviets

- Workers councils representing laborers
- Initially favor power sharing with the Provisional Government (March 1917)
Russia’s Main Political Parties in 1917

- Constitutional Democrats (Kadets)
  - Favor liberal reforms, democracy, provisional government
    (Alexander Kerensky, Paul Miliukov, Prince Lvov)

- Mensheviks
  - Favor evolutionary Marxism, revolutionary defensism, mass participation, revolution from below, power sharing
    (Irakli Tsereteli, Fedor Dan)
Bolsheviks

- Favor direct revolutionary action led by small elite, Soviet power, anti-war, immediate land distribution, party control of Army, revolution led from above

(V. I. Lenin, Nikolai Bukharin, Gregori Zinoviev)

Social Revolutionaries

- Favor immediate land distribution, local agricultural socialism (Chernov)
Weaknesses of the Provisional Government

- Cannot secure peace in war-weary nation
- No land distribution plan
- Delay of democratic elections until victory in war
The October Revolution

- Bolsheviks gain majorities in Petrograd and Moscow Soviets, call for seizure of power
- Storming of the Winter Palace
- Mensheviks, SR’s leave government
- Constituent assembly dispersed (Jan 1918)
Bolshevik Rule

- Soviet Power (party dictatorship)
- Land officially distributed to peasants
- Peace with Germany in March 1918 (Treaty of Brest-Litovsk)
- Worker’s factory committees control industry
The Russian Civil War, 1918-1921

- Whites (monarchists, socialists, liberals, foreign interventionists)
- Reds (Bolsheviks)
- Lack of coordination among white armies
- Russian nationalism helps Bolshevik cause
- The Cheka (state terrorism)
- War Communism (grain requisitioning and industry nationalizations)
The Soviet Union, 1921-1939
Near Collapse of Bolshevik Power in Russia

- Drought of 1920-1922 (estimated 5 million deaths)
- Peasants hoard grain, urban starvation
- Industry at 20% of pre-1913 levels
Lenin’s New Economic Policy (NEP), 1921-1928

- Small scale capitalist enterprises allowed
- End of grain requisitioning (Kulaks)
- Communist tactical retreat
The Struggle for Power after Lenin

- Lenin dies in 1924
- Trotskyite left wing (favors ending NEP, world revolution, rapid industrialization, grain requisitioning)
- Stalin, Bukharin and the right wing (Continue NEP, socialism in Russia, gradual industrialization, peasant taxation)
- Stalin, as General Secretary, expels Trotsky from Party (1927), then the USSR (1929)
- Stalin then leads Left wing
- Bukharin arrested, tried, and executed (1937)
The Great Purge of 1937-1938

- Stalinist show trials (class enemies)
- Purging the old Bolsheviks
- Minimum of 300,000 executed
- Seven million sent to labor camps
- Ideological purity (Comintern, apparatchiks)
The Soviet Economy, 1928-1939

- State central planning (Gosplan)
- Industrialization quotas (Five Year Plans)
- Collectivization of agriculture and state farms (Socialist accumulation and dekulakization)
- Minimum of five million peasant deaths (1929-1932)
- Heavy industry, lack of consumer goods (forced savings)
- Stalin fears capitalist encirclement and imminent war with the West