

Toronto Model United Nations Conference 2018

The October Revolution: Mateo Huegel, Natalka Bowley



Introduction:

Welcome to the October Revolution committee. My name is Mateo Huegel, and I'm a Grade 11 student and University of Toronto Schools. I've been doing Model UN for about two years now, but this is my first time chairing at TMUN.

My name is Natalka Bowley and I'm also a student at UTS. I have also been doing MUN for two years, and although I am also a SOMA chair, but this is my first time chairing at TMUN.

With this committee, we are hoping to teach you about a typically overlooked period in history, that happens to come between two much more famous historical periods: World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution. We'll be examining what happened in Russia between those two periods, and particularly why the Bolshevik revolution occurred. You will be tasked with navigating the complicated new landscape of Russia's Provisional Government, formed after a large-scale revolution, commonly called the February Revolution, that forced Tsar Nicholas II to abdicate, ending the Russian Tsarist autocracy. Delegates will be representing a wide spectrum of political views within the new Russia, and diplomatic finesse will be required of each and every one of you to prevent another large-scale revolution. Succeeding in the new Russian government will not be easy, but through diplomatic skill and careful alliance, there is much you can accomplish. That said, we hope that this committee is a fun and meaningful experience for every delegate who participates. We're looking forward to it!

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Topic 1: World War I and Foreign Affairs

The War's Effect on Russia

One of the principal causes of the Russian Revolution was the First World War and its effects on the Russian economy. The war sapped Russia's resources and its morale, especially as Russia had lacked military victory for the past six decades. Just before the war, Russia had suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Japanese in the Russo-Japanese war. The military was very large but also very disorganized. Over the course of the war, many Russian troops were badly treated by their commanders. The men were starving because their food was taken from them by their commanders and sold for a profit. They went naked because their generals sold their clothes. They died because their generals were incompetent. Many cadres turned against their commanders killing them instead of dying themselves at the hands of the oncoming Germans. This meant that not only were the Tsarist Russians losing the war to the Germans; they were also losing their soldiers faith and morale. Because of WWI, there were a great many poor, hungry, and angry young men roaming a country which was in great economic distress, ready to fight those noble commanders that had treated them so poorly.

Meanwhile, in the cities, the economic situation was even more dire. Food shortage was strikingly common. At most bakeries, lines would start to form at 11pm-2am, depending on the affluence of the district. People would simply bring their bedding and camp out. Bags of potatoes went for 20 roubles in St. Petersburg; about a month's wages for a factory worker. Foreigners visiting the St. Petersburg and Moscow were known to remark upon the quantity of prostitutes.

Every train station, every barrack, every affluent promenade or park, was suffocated by their number. The sight of a nine year old prostitute was dizzyingly common. Meanwhile, also in the cities, the nobility was throwing ever more extravagant parties in defiance of the incoming Germans. Містяні (mistyani, city folk) were living in almost medieval poverty and they had a clear enemy in the Russian nobility.

At the same time, the city population was exploding as peasants ran from the Germans to the Russian strongholds. This meant that the short food supply was spread between an ever increasing number of people. The peasants just wanted to return to their lands, but so much Russian territory had been taken away from them. Much had gone to the Germans, but the larger problem was Russian feudalism which will be addressed later in this paper. The crux of the matter was that they were not legally allowed to own land and were created as slaves by the upper class. In fact, their flight to cities was incredibly perilous because lords generally did not permit their serfs to leave their lands. In the countryside, peasants were starving as a result of the war since much of their crop was being taken to feed the Russian army, exacerbating the poverty caused by the feudal system. They were essentially starving to death while the nobility continued to dance well into the night. This meant that peasants, in the city and in the countryside, hated the upper classes and bourgeoisie and were ready to revolt.

Tsarist with Western Powers

Russia before the Revolution was part of the Triple Entente with France and Britain going into the war. This meant that they were theoretically close allies. However, before this treaty was signed, the British and the Russians had been engaged in “the Great Game” since



Russia depicted as a bear, England as a lion, eyeing an edible Afghanistan.

approximately 1820. They had been vying over Afghanistan and other Central Asian countries and Britain greatly feared an attack on its prized jewel, India. France had actually been a Russian ally against Britain; they had signed a mutual defence agreement stating that France was obliged to threaten England with an attack if Britain declared war on Russia, while Russia was to concentrate more than 300,000 troops on the Afghan border for an incursion into India in the

event that England attacked France. This meant that the tsarists had allies in the West; powerful ones, in fact.

Bolshevik Allies (Please note; this section contains information on circumstances immediately after the meeting of the Soviet; this information should not bias you as a delegate but should rather serve to inform you as to the desires of your characters during the revolution)

The belief of Lenin and of the other Bolsheviks was that the October revolution would be the spark that would ignite the world's leftists and socialist, leading to a "World Revolution" Lenin was quick to create the Communist International (Comintern) which would serve to spread communist ideology to Europe and Asia. Lenin's key plan was to liberate all of Asia from the Capitalist-Imperialists.

The Soviets needed allies in Europe if they were to succeed at all as a nation. Their first priority was Germany, a nation beloved by Lenin. In fact, it was the Germans that had brought Lenin back to Russia after his exile to Scandinavia in a plot to bring Russia out of the war. They simply smuggled him back in with a great amount of money and continued funding his ventures. This plot was, if the historical record has anything to show, more successful than the Kaiser and his advisors could have bargained for. As a result of this kindness and because of Germany's status as the most modern and organized European state, Lenin idealized the nation in a way which bore little resemblance to reality. The Bolsheviks were extremely disappointed when the Germans did not have a socialist revolution of their own after the October Revolution. This forced the Bolsheviks to sign the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March of 1918, taking Russia out of World War I. Lenin likely did not anticipate that this would be necessary, expecting that the war would end in a grand German-Russian alliance, according to historian Robert Service. The Treaty was a great shock to the Bolsheviks. The foreign policy which emerged from the war was one in which the Soviets sought pragmatic cooperation with Western powers while also trying to spread the message of communism into the world.

Immediately after World War One, the Soviets "encouraged" Communist revolutions across Germany and briefly install Bela Kun as the head of the Hungarian Socialist Republic. Lenin planned to send the Red Army into Europe in 1919 to "peacefully encourage" the spread of Communism. However, the White Russians (Tsarist supporters) started the Russian civil war, forcing Lenin's plans onto the back burner. Lenin noted that capitalism was not going to collapse after all and made major attempt to lure German corporate investors into buying stake in the Soviet Union as a way of modernizing the country. This was too much for many Bolsheviks,

who complained that his Germanophilia went too far. As a part of this push for a German-Soviet alliance, the Soviets signed the 1922 Treaty of Rapallo.

Although Lenin's plans for immediate world domination failed, Russia did manage to hold onto Central Asian and Caucasian territories that had been part of the Russian Empire. His dreams came to a final end in the Russian defeat by Poland in 1921. The Bolsheviks shifted their focus from international communism to rebuilding Russia. By the mid 1920s, a peaceful co-existence with Europe emerged. Soviet diplomats ended Russia's isolationism and created bilateral agreements with other capitalist governments such as the aforementioned Treaty of Rapallo.

Pertinent Questions

1. What should Russia's immediate foreign policy goals be?
2. How should the damage caused by the First World War be rectified?
3. How can the concerns of the city dwellers, the peasants, and the soldiers, be dealt with, without unduly angering any one group?

Topic 2: Government Divisions

Introduction

Although the February revolution might have successfully ended the brutal Tsarist autocracy, the provisional government that formed afterwards to run the country was far from perfectly stable. The divisions between different groups in government may be minor, but they run deep. Our glorious revolution cannot be allowed to fall to infighting.

Bolsheviks and Mensheviks

One of the primary splits within the Russian Socialist movement was between two groups: The Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks (which come from the Russian words for “majority” and “minority”, respectively¹). To understand the why this division existed, and what it meant, we have to go back to 1903, where this schism first took root.

From July 30th-August 10th, 1903, the 2nd Conference of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) is being held, away from Russia, for fear of persecution and arrest at the hands of Tsarist authorities. Two attendees are of particular interest here: Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, better known as Vladimir Lenin, and Yuliy Osipovich Tserba, also known as Julius Martov. During the course of the conference, Martov and Lenin had a minor disagreement, on the topic of how RSDLP membership should work, and who should be considered a member. From this seemingly small difference, -- the difference between their propositions was only a

¹ Although the meaning of their names might suggest otherwise, both the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks held the majority at different points in Russian history.

few words-- the division between Menshevik and Bolshevik originated. That said, the division was more significant than one might think for a difference so tiny in membership proposals. This divide represented something greater, a fundamental difference in the way that the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks approached certain issues.

Important issues on which Martov and Lenin disagreed are numerous, but some of the most important were as follows. First, the Mensheviks were willing to work with the bourgeoisie in order to create a new government (even if this was a capitalist government, the fact that it would be democratic appealed to the Mensheviks), whereas the more absolutist Bolsheviks rejected any compromise with the bourgeoisie (middle class artisans) in favor of creating a new government ruled by the proletariat (the workers), even if violent revolution was the only possible way to achieve that. Second, the Mensheviks disagreed with Lenin's vision of 'Professional Revolutionaries', and instead supported having a larger, less organized revolutionary force. This was in part because it would be more representative of the views of the proletariat, and more accountable to them. Third, the Mensheviks were typically more moderate than the Bolsheviks, and typically also less authoritarian.

The Provisional Government

Following the February Revolution of 1917, which occurred from March 8th-16th 1917 N.S., the last Tsar of Russia, Nicholas II, abdicated the throne. In order to avoid anarchy and chaos, a provisional government was formed in order to govern the country. This government was created by the State Duma, one of the legislative assemblies of the Russian Empire, for the purpose of transitioning Russia into a democratic government. It was headed up by Georgy

Lvov, a prominent Kadet² politician in the State Duma. From the start, the new government was riddled with problems. First and foremost, it was filled with a variety of different political



Kerensky in 1917

parties, with views that tended to favor the intelligentsia and the rich -- which could be seen as a grievous error given that a revolution borne from the proletariat toppled the previous Russian government. Among those represented in this government were the constitutional monarch-favoring Constitutional Democrats (often called Kadets), the Octobrists, who called for the adoption of Tsar Nicholas II's October Manifesto³, and a very small number of Socialists, politicians who supported the views of Karl Marx⁴, including a man named Aleksandr Kerensky, a

politician notable for being part of the leadership of the Petrograd Soviet (which will be covered later) and the Provisional Government. Although it managed to institute basic human rights, such as freedom of speech and of the press, universal suffrage, and equal rights for women, it failed completely at addressing the issues that led to the February Revolution, like widespread famine, war, and poverty. One issue that prevented the Provisional Government from working effectively was the relationship it had with the Petrograd Soviet⁵. Although the Provisional ostensibly

² The Constitutional Democrats (called Kadets), generally favored universal suffrage and citizenship for Russian minorities.

³ The manifesto, written by the deposed Tsar, called for the creation of a National Assembly, the guaranteeing of various civil liberties, and universal male suffrage.

⁴ For further reading on Socialist views, see "The Communist Manifesto", written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

⁵ A Soviet here refers to the original meaning of the word: A council elected by workers to represent their interests, much like a modern-day union.

wielded the power of governance over Russia, the reality was that the Petrograd Soviet had true power over a variety of important infrastructure, such that the Provisional Government was often unable to push forward its laws if the Petrograd Soviet disapproved of them. Furthermore, the leadership of Soviets was elected by its members, making them far more democratic than the Provisional Government, winning them additional support from workers and farmers.

Disastrously, the Provisional Government, and Kerensky in particular, supported continuing World War I, an incredibly unpopular move, as Russia was already exhausted from war. This made it far easier for the Bolsheviks to eventually turn a large number of previously moderate workers into Bolshevik supporters. All in all, the divisions both inside and outside the Provisional Government were the primary cause of its collapse, and addressing them is essential to ensuring that it can pass reforms and therefore avoid destruction at the hands of another revolution.

Conclusion

In conclusion, one of the primary factors that doomed the Provisional Government and precipitated the October Revolution were the political and ideological divides that plagued its attempts at governing Russia. These divides can be condensed into the following points. First, internal conflicts between the Provisional Government -- this conflict was dominated by disagreements between varying parties, like the Cadets, Mensheviks, and Octobrists. Second, most of the parties represented in the Provisional Government had more representation in the government than they had support in the Russian people -- this was especially problematic after a popular revolution. Third, the Provisional Government had to vie with the Petrograd Soviet for

its power, which undermined its legitimacy, and its capacity to pass any laws that would have won them popular support. This conflict was mainly between the multi-party Provisional Government and the Bolshevik-dominated Petrograd Soviet. These conflicts, along with other failures of the Provisional Government ultimately led to its failure.

Pertinent Questions:

1. How can political divides both within the Government, and between other organizations be addressed?
2. Does this Provisional Government need to become democratic? And if so, how can that be accomplished?

Topic 3: Famine and Infrastructure

Peasants and Feudal Russia

It has been said that Russia stayed in the 16th Century until the 20th. This has some definite truth. Serfdom was officially abolished by Tsar Alexander II, but was in reality practiced until the Communist Revolution to devastating effect both on the common Russian people and on the national economy.

Serfdom or кріпацтво (kriptsvo) was established in Kievan Rus in the 11th century. Kievan Rus was a Ukrainian empire which stretched west well into modern day Germany, south into Greece, north into Estonia, and east almost to Moscow. The whole region practiced serfdom up until at least the mid 19th Century, in most areas up until the early 20th. The serf was essentially an individual with no freedom. They had no freedom of mobility and no rights under the law. The word of their nobleman *was* the law. A nobleman could do whatever he wanted to a serf. Essentially, serfdom was bad for the people and bad for the economy. Serfdom was very inefficient; serfs and nobles had no incentive to improve their lands. However, it was politically very effective. Nobles rarely challenged the tsar for fear of provoking a peasant uprising. Serfs had lifelong tenancy on their plots so they tended to be conservative as well. The serfs did not revolt until they were granted some small freedoms and the “right” to be conscripted to the military by Tsar Alexander II in the middle of the 19th Century.

Although serfdom was not technically in effect during the October Revolution, its effects on the Russian nation and indeed on the whole of the Slavic world were profound. It was because

of the long life of Russian feudalism that the Russian empire was in such dire economic straits as it was at the beginning of the First World War. Serfdom also created a population very susceptible to the promises of communism, however empty they might prove to be.

Factories and their Effects on the Populace

Like most countries at the beginning of the 20th century, Russia began to invest in factories and other mechanical equipment. Russia began to export large amounts of grain. However, most of the export revenue that flowed into the empire ended up within the pockets of aristocrats and powerful landowners. The unfortunate result of this was that money was not used as capital to develop an industrialised economy. Industrial projects and incentives were often proposed but they were rarely embraced, since they threatened the financial interests of conservative landowners. This meant that Russia fell still further behind. Although there was some heavy industry, mining, steel production, oil and so on, this was inconsequential when compared to Russian rivals like France and Britain.

All of this lacklustre industry meant that Russian factories were unable to produce sufficient amounts of weapons, munitions or machinery. There was very little technical innovation; most of Russia's new technologies were imported from the West. Also, Russian trains and infrastructure were unable to cope with the amount of troops and supplies that needed to be transported for the war.

However, there was a certain degree of industrialization within imperial Russia, leading to a capitalist middle class known as the "kulaks". The formation of this class was caused by the reforms embraced by Alexander II in the early 1860s which were designed to stimulate

transitions in the Russian economy. The main part of these reforms was the aforementioned emancipation the serfs in 1861 was not just a social reform, long overdue; it also released serfs from the land and from the control of conservative land-owners. The goal was to ensure that a large proportion of freed serfs would become a mobile labour force, able to relocate to areas where industrial workers were needed. The other goal of the reforms was to stimulate innovation; peasants with greater freedom are more likely to develop more efficient and productive ways of farming. The kulak class, made up of richer, proto-capitalist peasants that hired landless peasants as labourers used more efficient farming techniques. Unfortunately, these kulak classes turned out to be quite rare; the strength of peasant communes prevented their formation as serfs were stuck to their land by social factors as well as by their lord's will.

The only true significant change that Alexander II's reforms wrought regarded foreign capital inflow. Large amounts of foreign capital, mostly from France and Britain, funded new plants and factories in St Petersburg, Moscow, Kiev and other cities. By 1900 around half of Russia's heavy industries were foreign-owned. However, thanks to all of this foreign investment, the Russia was the world's fourth-largest producer of steel and its second-largest source of petroleum. New railways allowed transport into remote parts of the empire, allowing the construction and operation of factories, mines, dams and other projects there. Russia's industrial economy had progressed more in one decade than it had in the previous century. This period was colloquially called "the great spurt".

Although much of this reform was positive for the Russian people, it indirectly caused the Revolution. The construction of the new factories drew emancipated peasants into the cities in search of work. They formed a new social class; the industrial proletariat, the backbone of the

revolution. This new class was disillusioned and poorly treated and their numbers were growing exponentially. In the early 1800s only two Russian cities (St Petersburg and Moscow) contained more than 100,000 residents; by 1910 there were twelve cities of this size. In the decade between 1890 and 1900, St Petersburg swelled by around 250,000 people. Unfortunately for the tsarists, this growth was not matched with growth of housing, which meant that factory owners had to house workers in ramshackle dormitories and tenements. Most lived in unhygienic and often freezing conditions; they ate meals of stale bread and buckwheat gruel (porridge) in crowded meal-houses. Things were even worse in the factories, where hours were long and the work was monotonous and dangerous. These reforms gave rise to a new working class that was exploited, poorly treated, clustered together in large numbers and therefore susceptible to revolutionary ideas.

Pertinent Questions

1. How can persistent famine and shortages within Russia be addressed?
2. Is industrialization a high-priority goal for Russia? If so, how can it be achieved, and at what cost?

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