Political Dissent and Repression in Early Twentieth Century Russia: A Comparative Analysis of Tsarist Failure and Bolshevik Success

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Introduction

Russia in the early twentieth century was dominated by two oppressive regimes: the tsarist regime, in its last years under Tsar Nicholas II, and the Soviet regime, during its first years consolidating power. That the Soviet regime was the successor to the tsarist one invites comparison, as one wonders in which aspects of rule one regime failed, while the other succeeded, and why. The divide between the success of one regime and the failure of the other is hardly more obvious than in the ways by which the regimes dealt with political dissent. The tsarist regime failed to successfully repress political dissent, while the Bolsheviks succeeded. The central question, then, is: why were the Bolsheviks able to successfully repress political dissent, while the tsarist regime failed?

There are a bevy of factors that contributed to the tsarist regime's failure, and the Bolshevik regime's success, in repressing political dissent. These factors were ideological, political, and socioeconomic. The ideology of the late tsarist regime was ineffective in preventing political dissent, as it was far too rigid for the situation in which Russia found itself. While the country required reform to keep up with the modern world, Tsar Nicholas II clung tightly to autocracy. Although at times the tsar did flirt with moderate liberalism, his forays away from pure autocracy were short-lived, and were not supported by any positive action to implement liberalization. On the other hand, Lenin gave the Bolsheviks an ideological blueprint which allowed them to simultaneously repress dissent and provide the people with a sense of hope.

In the political sphere, those few forays that the tsar made toward liberalism after the Revolution of 1905 hurt him. The existence of some moderate elements in government undermined the singular authority of the tsar, and made government repression less efficient.

Simultaneously, the tsar was widely seen as a weak leader who was unable to administer his country as a good leader should. Furthermore, radical socialist opposition groups used terrorism to weaken the tsarist administration, and other socialist groups helped to organize workers in opposition to the tsar. Following the revolution and civil war, the Bolsheviks were rarely seen as weak. During the first years of their regime, the leadership was unified, and they organized their administration well enough to win the civil war. Moreover, between late 1917 and 1921, Lenin and the Bolshevik leadership required increasing ideological conformity among their party members, which provided party leaders greater control over the governmental apparatus as time went on. As they attained this control, the Bolshevik leadership repressed organized opposition and political dissidents by imposing legal limits on their activities, and enforced them using the secret police.

War dominated the socioeconomic dynamics of both the late tsarist and early Soviet regimes. In the case of the tsarist regime, the inefficiency of Russia's wartime economy caused widespread starvation, and helped to turn large segments of the population, namely soldiers and industrial workers, against the tsar. Forced migrations caused by the war, and the radicalization of peasant-soldiers alienated by military life, further contributed to this intense animosity against the tsarist regime. The Soviet government, on the other hand, employed an economic and social policy which demanded subservience from the population. By terrorizing the Russian populace during the civil war, and tightly controlling the food supply, the Bolsheviks dominated Russian life and guarded themselves against political dissent. When the war ended, the Russian populace was war-weary, ready to return to a state of peace that they had not known for nearly a decade, and could now see only the Bolshevik government as having the power to provide this peace. However, the Russian people could no longer accept Bolshevik economic policies, which led to

their alienation and starvation, so many in both the cities and countryside participated in uprisings against the Bolshevik regime. Therefore, the Bolshevik government implemented the New Economic Policy, which secured the material needs of the people, easing strife across the country.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to isolate political, ideological, and socioeconomic factors from one another in order to designate a single type of factor 'most important' in determining the success of political dissent under either of these regimes. The purpose of this paper is to show, instead, that there is a complex interplay between these factors, and that the government which responds most effectively to this interplay in their specific circumstance has the greatest chance of suppressing political dissent enough to maintain power. In the case of these two governments, the Bolsheviks adapted to their circumstances much more effectively than did the tsar.

Historiography

The historiography of this subject largely reflects the evolution of historical attitudes and methods over the course of the twentieth century. During early scholarship on the subject in late 1940's, the historiography of political dissent in early twentieth century Russia focused largely on the ideology and politics of political leaders. Later in the 1960's and 1970's, scholars shifted to focus more on sociology and economics, therein incorporating a greater number of social groups into study as historical agents. In the 1980's and 1990's, many turned to culture as a central feature of their works. Finally, in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, scholars have sought to incorporate a number of these frameworks into multifactorial historical studies.

When the Cold War began in earnest following the Second World War, western historical interest in the roots of the USSR spiked. Naturally, historians during this time were curious about the nature of repression in Russia, as many wished to justify historically a division between Soviet authoritarianism and western democracy. Many western scholars, such as Waldemar Gurian, found that the brutality of Soviet political repression was based upon Bolshevik ideology, and therefore, regardless of circumstances, a communist state would use violent repression to enforce its will.[1] Late tsarist history was similarly studied from a highly ideological and political point of view which assigned the majority of historical agency to Tsar Nicholas II, and viewed his poorly-run autocracy as the primary reason for his failure.[2]

From the mid-1960's to the 1980's, historians gravitated more towards social and economic approaches. Alexander Rabinowitch, for instance, argued in his work on the July 1917 uprising in Petrograd that workers themselves often dictated the course of anti-government protests. This view pushed back against prior historiography, much of which had presented Lenin as the mastermind behind the protests in Petrograd.[3] Other works, such as Paul Avrich's *Kronstadt*, focused on the way in which economics influenced ideology, rather than studying ideology in a vacuum, as had previously been more common. Avrich argued that economic difficulties led to the Kronstadt rebellion, a viewpoint which followed the new historiographical trend that emphasized material factors.[4]

Later in the 1980's, a greater number of scholars began to contribute to cultural histories. These historians gave a greater degree of historical power to cultural trends, viewing these trends

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[1] Waldemar Gurian, "From Lenin to Stalin," *The Review of Politics* 12, no. 3 (1950): 379-88.
[2] Sir John Maynard, *Russia in Flux*. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951), 169-177.
[3] Alexander Rabinowitch, *Prelude to Revolution: The Petrograd Bolsheviks and the July 1917 Uprising*, (Bloomington, IN; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1968), Preface to Midland Edition.
[4] Paul Avrich, *Kronstadt, 1921*, (New York: Norton, 1974), 3-6, 218-19.

as essential to understanding the dynamic between political dissent and repression. Diane Koenker and William G. Rosenberg, for example, argue that when workers organized and participated in strikes in Petrograd during World War I, they helped to build a culture of opposition to the government among workers in the city, which encouraged workers to engage in political protests against the government and join the most powerful oppositional parties: those of the socialists.[5]

In the 1990's, scholars tended to pursue specific approaches, whether those were ideological, political, cultural, or socioeconomic, rather than interdisciplinary ones, and they tended to avoid extrapolating their arguments to claims of the wider 'Truth,' preferring conclusions of a more limited scope. For example, Frederic S. Zuckerman in 1993 wrote an excellent article on political chaos in the institution of the security police under Tsar Nicholas II during his last years in power. In this article, Zuckerman details the way in which the security police crumbled, and demonstrates the implications of its inability to function, while still leaving room for a variety of other viewpoints.[6] Likewise, *Russia Under the Last Tsar: Opposition and Subversion, 1894-1917*, a collection of essays edited by Anna Geifman, presented in 1999 a number of in-depth studies on the culture, politics, and ideologies of various groups which opposed Tsar Nicholas II, essays which were detailed but still limited in scope and perspective.[7]

In the 21st century, many historians have synthesized cultural, ideological, political, and socioeconomic factors in their work. Scholar Liudmila Novikova exhibits this approach in her

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[5] Diane Koenker and William G. Rosenberg, *Strikes and Revolution in Russia, 1917*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 3-22.
[6] Fredric S. Zuckerman, "Political Police and Revolution: The Impact of the 1905 Revolution on the Tsarist Secret Police," *Journal of Contemporary History* 27, no. 2 (1992): 280, 289-91.
[7] Anna Geifman, *Russia under the Last Tsar: Opposition and Subversion, 1894-1917*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 1-2.

article "Russia's Red Revolutionary and White Terror, 1917–1921: A Provincial Perspective." In this article, she studies the interaction between local culture, political administration, and socioeconomic context in an attempt to understand the nature and effects of terror during the civil war, which she eventually concludes was actually driven by the local people more than many had previously thought.[8] Peter Gatrell, previously known as a socioeconomic historian of late Imperial Russia, has also incorporated cultural factors into his recent work. *Russia's First World War: A Social and Economic History*, emphasizes that shifting perceptions of gender caused by the need for female workers during the First World War helped to dislodge the tsarist patriarchy.[9]

The historiography of political dissent in early twentieth century Russia, therefore, has seen drastic changes from the early Cold War era until today. Historians have shifted from attempting to understand the subject by studying only the ideology and politics of the giants of society, to studying a wide variety of factors across a multitude of social groups. Historians of this subject now incorporate many viewpoints into their analyses, leading to interesting studies on the dynamic interactions between factors. This paper, which analyzes the repression of political dissent from a multi-faceted perspective, adopts the approach of the most recent historiography.

Background

Such a major event as the October Revolution did not, of course, happen in a vacuum. Rather, there was a complicated history in Russia which led up to the eventual socialist seizure

[8] Liudmila G. Novikova, "Russia's Red Revolutionary and White Terror, 1917–1921: A Provincial Perspective," *Europe-Asia Studies* 65 no. 9 (2013): 1756-57.
[9] Peter Gatrell, *Russia's First World War: A Social and Economic History*, (Harlow, England: Pearson/Longman, 2005), 11.

and consolidation of power. While the focus of this paper is the effectiveness of the tsarist and Bolshevik regimes in repressing political dissent, there is a wider context defined by Russia's backwardness in a rapidly modernizing world, its participation in the First World War, the collapse of the autocracy, and the Bolshevik rise to power through the civil war. So, although the time period which this paper focuses on is the early twentieth century, the important context surrounding it begins in the mid-nineteenth century, with the reforms of Alexander II.

In 1861, Tsar Alexander II introduced a number of reforms to Russia as a measure to guard against opposition to his regime. These included reforms of the courts, reforms of the military, and the abolition of serfdom. However, after the abolition of serfdom, the peasants were forced to pay taxes to the state, and rent to the landlord, which they could not afford. Thus, many of the problems of serfdom remained unresolved, and the tsarist regime looked weak in its inability to fix Russia's problems and modernize its society and economy.[10] Still, while the tsar could not solve such concrete problems, his reforms did ease censorship and promoted investment in science and literature, which allowed the intelligentsia to grow in both power and status. As the intelligentsia began to find its footing, many of its members organized into groups with goals distinct from, or opposing, the tsar's. These included populist, socialist, and liberal organizations, which worked against the autocracy by spreading propaganda and, among some of the more radical leftist groups, by committing acts of terrorism against government officials. This culminated in the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881.[11]

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[10] Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 16.
[11] Gregory L. Freeze, "Reform and Counter-Reform: 1855-1890," in *Russia: A History*, ed. Gregory L. Freeze, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 191-96.

This assassination of the tsar by Narodnaya Volya, a radical leftist-populist group which used terrorism to weaken the tsarist government, was only the most obvious representation of what was a growing divide between the people and the state. The specific nature of the abolition of serfdom left the peasantry with little possibility of owning outright the land that they worked, and neither the tsar nor capitalists granted any concessions to industrial workers in Russia's growing capitalist economy. The persistence of these conditions among the workers and peasantry contributed to animosity between the masses and tsar even in the late nineteenth century. In this context of internal tension, Russia went to war against Japan in 1904. When Russia, which was largely assumed by those in the western world to be a great power, could not find success in this war against Japan, a small Asian country previously dismissed by Europeans, the failures of the tsarist regime became even more apparent.[12]

Being fed up with Russia's failure internationally, and with the harm that Russia's fledgling capitalism caused to workers, a group of 120,000 striking workers staged a peaceful demonstration in Petersburg in January 1905. Despite forewarning about the demonstration, however, Tsar Nicholas II was not even in Petersburg during the time of the demonstration, and his nervous and confused soldiers ended up firing upon the crowd in downtown Petersburg. This massacre, known as "Bloody Sunday," led to widespread outrage, especially among the intelligentsia, and contributed to the further radicalization of the educated, pushing many into socialist parties, or else anti-tsarist liberal parties. Further strikes followed the events of Bloody Sunday, and as violent demonstrations began in the countryside, pressure mounted on Tsar Nicholas II to enact the reforms that large segments of the Russian population were asking for.[13]

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[12] Reginald E. Zelnik, "Revolutionary Russia: 1890-1914," in *Russia: A History*, ed. Gregory L. Freeze, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 212.
[13] Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891-1924*, (New York City: Viking, 1997), 175-82.

In October 1905 Nicholas II capitulated, releasing the *October Manifesto*. Though not officially a constitution, this manifesto granted the Russian people basic civil liberties, such as freedoms of speech and assembly, an elected parliament (the Duma), and universal male suffrage.[14] The tsarist regime's release of this manifesto was sufficient to stifle the protests raging across the country for a period of time, and weaken the unity of the opposition. This gave the tsar the room that he needed to activate the government's coercive institutions to violently repress those who still opposed him. Demonstrations by the people continued for over a year past this point, but the tsarist regime made effective use of the military in the countryside, where it forcibly repressed peasant uprisings, and of the security police in the cities, where large numbers of socialist leaders were arrested, and protesters were publicly and viciously punished. Indeed, the tsarist regime's reaction to the 1905 revolution illustrates well the way Nicholas II's regime responded to political dissent. The regime made sweeping use of the Okhrana. Scholar Orlando Figes describes the political repression following the *October Manifesto*, stating: "it has been estimated that the tsarist regime executed 15,000 people, shot or wounded at least 20,000 and deported or exiled 45,000, between mid-October and the opening of the first State Duma in April 1906."[15]

Tsar Nicholas II's regime followed through on few of the liberal promises that it had made with the *October Manifesto*. Those who filled the majority of the seats in the longest-lasting third and fourth iterations of the Duma did not, in fact, represent the interests of the people, but instead represented the interests of the conservative nobility and commercial-industrial class. The Duma did not represent the society because its elections took place

[14] Wikisource contributors, "October Manifesto," *Wikisource,* https://en.wikisource.org/w/index.php?title=October_Manifesto&oldid=6979026 (accessed March 1, 2020).
[15] Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 184, 200-02.

according to a class system, in which the votes of landowners were far more powerful than those of the masses.[16] Furthermore, in matters of importance this Duma lacked real power, which lay instead in the hands of the tsar.[17] Thus, the 1905 revolution was largely unsuccessful for those who wanted real change. However, it did demonstrate that the Russian people had the capacity to rise up in unison against the autocracy, and the failed promises of the *October Manifesto* stimulated the thirst of the opposition for change that would last.

Generally, oppositional groups identified either as socialist or liberal. Liberal groups, most notably the Constitutional Democrats (Kadets), worked within the First Duma, constituting the majority of its delegates, thanks to a boycott of the first Duma elections by the most powerful socialist groups in Russia: The Socialist Revolutionaries (SR's), a group which would later split into left and right wings, and the Russian Socialist Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP), which in 1903 had split into factions known as the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. The Kadets' goal was to turn Russia into a modern capitalist democracy, but when they attempted to achieve this goal by enacting reforms through the Duma, they were sorely disappointed, as Tsar Nicholas II felt that his power was threatened by the Kadets' attempts to use the Duma as an institution with real legislative power. Therefore, Nicholas II dissolved the First Duma, and arrested over one hundred leading Kadets, who, in frustration over the tsar's attempts to block their power, had signed a manifesto calling on the people to rise up against the government.[18] After this, the Kadets continued to play a role in Russian politics as the leading advocates of liberalism, but were allowed little political representation by the tsar.

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[16] Roberta Thompson Manning, *The Crisis of the Old Order in Russia: Gentry and Government*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), 293-94.
[17] Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, 34-35.
[18] Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 218-221.

The SR's and RSDLP participated in the Second Duma, which the tsar also hastily abolished. However, their brief role in government introduced the world to the Russian socialist parties. The RSDLP was a Marxist group, divided between the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks.[19] Although there is a great deal of scholarly debate on the differences between these groups, as the distinction between the two factions was often blurry between 1905 and 1917, scholar Andre Liebich notes that "the earliest self-designation contrasted 'hard' or 'narrow' Bolsheviks with 'soft' or 'broad' Mensheviks."[20] The Bolsheviks were a group led by Vladimir Lenin, a man whose ideology centered on the necessity of revolution to enact socialism, and on the idea that it would be necessary for a party of professional revolutionaries to lead the proletariat through said revolution.[21] The Mensheviks were generally less radical and less dogmatic than the Bolsheviks, yet ideologically supported many of the same Marxist principles. Both groups found the majority of their support over the years among the working class, although both at times appealed as well to segments of the peasantry.[22]

Under the tsarist regime, however, a greater number of peasants supported the SR's than either the Bolsheviks or the Mensheviks. The SR's emerged in the late 19th century as the successor to Narodnaya Volya. As opposed to the RSDLP, the SR's were not Marxist, and instead believed that revolutionary power lay within the peasantry, rather than the proletariat. This gained them considerable support among the peasantry, which helped the group to finance

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[19] The words "menshevik" and "bolshevik" mean "minority" and "majority," respectively. This label stems from an organizational split which was formalized during the Second RSDLP Conference in 1903, when the Bolsheviks adopted the "majority" label by taking advantage of the fact that a number of Mensheviks had walked out of the conference. Between 1903 and 1917, however, the actual status of each faction as the minority or majority differed drastically, depending on time and place.

[20] Andre Liebich, "The Mensheviks," in *Russia under the Last Tsar: Opposition and Subversion, 1894-1917*, ed. Anna Geifman (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 19.

[21] Lars T. Lih, *Lenin*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), 14-15.

[22] Liebich, "The Mensheviks," 20-24.

continued terrorism against tsarist officials. In 1909, the SR's split into right and left wings, as the Right SR's wished to work within the Duma and cease terroristic operations, while the Left SR's continued to strongly oppose the government, and refused to work within its framework.[23]

During this period of time, Russia was certainly on the path to modernization, with a growing industrial sector and a modernizing transportation network. Spurred on by military need, domestic investors, and the government, Russia's economy grew rapidly between 1909 and 1914. However, this growth did not help the tsarist regime combat political dissent, as it enlarged the working class which, gaining class consciousness, fought in a more consistent and organized manner than ever before for better working conditions. And, the lack of political power granted to industrialists led to discontent among that group, whose economic power was increasing.[24]

Thus, the position of the Tsar between the 1905 and 1917 revolutions was incredibly weak, especially after the assassination of Pyotr Stolypin in 1911 destroyed any last hopes that it would move toward agricultural reform, and capitalist development continued to anger and alienate the exploited workers. The tsarist regime continued attempting to repress dissent by use of the Okhrana, but did so without addressing the underlying issues which caused the dissent. Then, after 1914, the socially and economically destructive effects of the First World War undermined the tsarist regime's monopoly on power, and gave the enemies of the tsar an opening which could be exploited.[25]

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[23] Michael Melancon, "Neo-Populism in Early Twentieth-Century Russia: The Socialist-Revolutionary Party from 1900 to 1917," in *Russia under the Last Tsar: Opposition and Subversion, 1894-1917*, ed. Anna Geifman (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 73-75, 83.
[24] Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, 36-38.
[25] Ibid., 51.

Due to their continued presence in Russia, the socialist parties – most prominently the Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, and SR's – were able to help organize strikes in the major cities to work for political, as well as economic, means. The February Revolution of 1917, in fact, was sparked by a socialist-organized strike by female workers desperate for food, which morphed into a highly political and militaristic anti-war and anti-tsarist protest. Under the organization of local Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, and SR's, workers in Petersburg and other cities across Russia applied mounting pressure to the tsar in the form of protests. At this point, the opposition to the tsar had grown so much that, when workers organized against the tsar, the troops sent to repress the revolutionary dissent, largely composed of peasant-soldiers, refused to follow orders, and many even joined the protests. His last line of defense gone, the tsar abdicated, and the most organized political group in the Duma – the liberals – created the provisional government.[26]

A central characteristic of Russia during the time of the provisional government was the dual power structure. This meant that, while the liberal provisional government ruled *de jure*, councils established by radical socialist parties, called soviets, actually held a great deal of power over the provisional government, because they enjoyed the support of both industrial workers and peasant-soldiers. This was a tense political situation, and the fact that the provisional government not only refused to pull Russia out of the First World War, but delayed all major political and economic reforms until after the completion of the war, made the situation all the more unstable. Continued food shortages and industrial exploitation warranted further protests by industrial workers, and morale at the front continued to decline, leading to massive desertions by soldiers who returned to their hometowns in radical opposition to the government.[27]

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[26] Paul Le Blanc, *October Song: Bolshevik Triumph, Communist Tragedy, 1917-1924*, (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2017), 94-99.
[27] Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, 51-53.

Facing such pressure, and divided internally, the provisional government underwent a number of changes in composition. However, none of its three coalitions were able to meet the immediate needs of the people, and thus the provisional government proved largely unpopular. Leading SR's and Mensheviks joined the provisional government in key positions, which undermined their image as representatives of the people.[28] Since the Bolsheviks were the only major group which continued to oppose the unpopular provisional government, by the fall of 1917 they were able to gain majorities in the soviets and create an image of themselves as the true leaders of the people.[29] Attempts by the provisional government to suppress the Bolsheviks were poorly executed and ultimately ineffective, so when the Bolsheviks forced the provisional government from power in October 1917, they faced little to no opposition.[30]

The new Bolshevik government promised a number of radical policy changes, already formulated and propagated prior to the October Revolution, which promised the people peace, the peasants land, and the workers control of the factories. The Bolsheviks moved quickly to make good on these promises, as maintaining the support of the Russian people would allow the Bolsheviks to effectively consolidate their power. Although they were not able to secure a deal which favored Russia, the Bolsheviks signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany and pulled out of the First World War in March 1918, a move which appeased many, but angered others.[31]

Prior to the October Revolution, Lenin, as the leader of the Bolsheviks, had proposed some conflicting views on the acceptability of dissent in society. First, in his 1903 work *What is*

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[28] Robert Service, *The Last of the Tsars: Nicholas II and the Russian Revolution*, (New York: Pegasus Books, 2017), 68.
[29] Rabinowitch, *Prelude to Revolution*, 41, 222, 235.
[30] Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, 55-62, 65.
[31] Roy A. Medvedev, *The October Revolution*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 121.

to be Done?, he equated freedom of criticism with "freedom to introduce bourgeois ideas and bourgeois elements into socialism."[32] Later, in his early 1917 work *The State and Revolution*, however, Lenin described the state after the socialist revolution as being "the most complete democracy."[33] This ideological groundwork for both the repression of political dissent and for democracy meant that the Bolsheviks had justification for either course of action once they actually gained power.

Soon after the revolution, however, Russia descended into civil war, fought between the Bolsheviks and their supporters, known as the Reds, and those opposing the Bolsheviks, known as the Whites. This war plunged Russia into a state of extreme famine, and it was marked by the brutality of both the Whites and the Reds, who used terror to psychologically undermine their opponents and force the population to support their rule. The Bolsheviks, specifically, used their secret police force, known as the Cheka, and their military forces, in an effective manner to suppress political opposition.[34] However, even during these difficult times the Bolsheviks offered to the peasants, workers, and many of the intellectuals a sense of hope that their radical new policies would remedy Russia's problems. This hope, combined with the fact that the Bolsheviks organized a large and effective army under Leon Trotsky's command, propelled the Bolsheviks to a victory over the Whites, who were forced to capitulate or flee the country by the end of the civil war in 1921.[35]

The Bolshevik victory and consolidation of power over all of Russia was an encouraging prospect for supporters of the socialist vision. However, the Bolshevik government which

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[32] Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, *V. I. Lenin: Selected Works*, Vol. 1, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), 126.
[33] Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, *V. I. Lenin: Selected Works*, Vol. 2, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 250.
[34] Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 791-92.
[35] Sean McMeekin, *The Russian Revolution: A New History*, (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 297-302.

emerged after the conclusion of the civil war was very different from the government established in October 1917. While many of the personalities leading the Bolshevik party remained, the Bolsheviks would no longer share power with other parties, as they had done after the October Revolution with the Left SR's. In fact, the Bolsheviks not only banned other parties from having a role in administration, but they designated any oppositional parties as 'counterrevolutionary,' and made their very existence illegal. Such an attempt to suppress a diversity of thought extended beyond organized politics, as Bolsheviks shut down oppositional newspapers, threw civilians who spoke out against them in jail, and turned democratic institutions, such as the soviets, into instruments of party policy.[36] The Soviet state had become the authoritarian party-state of the Bolsheviks, and would remain an authoritarian party-state for over seventy years.

Politics

Politics forms the particular way by which any regime enacts its policies of repression. Political repression is made possible through institutions of force, such as the security police or military. But in order to wield this force effectively, it is necessary that the regime has a political system in which lower level officers are loyal to the central authority, and in which disagreement among those in political leadership is not too extreme. How a regime uses its force to repress dissent is based upon the regime's ideology, yet is responsive to, and must be adapted to, socioeconomic and cultural factors in society. The tsarist regime was historically repressive, and continued to repress political opposition until the tsar's abdication. However, loyalty within the Okhrana was not absolute, Tsar Nicholas II was a weak leader, and the regime was forced to contend with strong and organized opposition, to which it could not adapt. On the other hand,

[36] Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, 796-800.

the Bolshevik party had enough agreement within its leadership to administer a policy which repressed all political dissidents, filled the Cheka and the military with loyal people, and created an authoritarian party-state that allowed for a great degree of both efficiency and adaptability.

Politics: Late Tsarist Period

The political administration of Tsar Nicholas II's regime during its last years in power was chaotic. Historically, Russian tsars had placed only loyal followers in a strictly autocratic administration, allowing the government to disperse and enforce policies which reflected the singular will of the tsar throughout Russia.[37] By the early twentieth century, however, autocracy was more difficult to execute. Not only were there fewer people than ever who supported the absolute power of the tsar, but the tsarist administration was not prepared to deal with the complexity of modern life. Nicholas II placed some moderates in government after the 1905 Revolution, which undermined the unity of the administration, and made it more difficult to defeat this opposition, yet he did not allow the moderates to actually enact their proposed reforms, which ensured the continuation of uprisings. In the context of the overwhelming difficulties of the First World War, these political factors caused disorder in the tsarist administration, and weakened its defenses against attacks by a population hoping for change.

One of the most important institutions for the repression of political dissent in the tsarist administration was the security police, which contained the secret police branch known as the Okhrana. The purpose of the Okhrana was to arrest and prosecute any and all citizens who openly dissented against the tsarist regime. In the twentieth century, even after the 1905 Revolution, Russian laws were geared to harshly repress political dissent without any

[37] Charles E. Zeigler, *The History of Russia*, 2nd ed. (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press, 2009), 36.

institutional roadblocks. As scholar Jonathan Daly finds, compared to the rest of Europe, "it was easier in Russia to impose the harshest punishments for political crimes because the wording of the laws was often extremely loose, as in the law banning membership in secret societies of any kind."[38] Furthermore, Daly argues that the reason that punishment for political crimes in Russia was so harsh and so common was because "the emperor's personal security was inseparably linked to the foundation of the existing order."[39]

If the entire system of political repression was geared to serve the singular monarchical power of the tsar, then, any attempt to create a constitutional or liberal system would undermine the authority and pragmatic functioning of the institution for repression, in this case the Okhrana. However, in 1905 it was not possible for Tsar Nicholas II to avoid implementing liberal reforms of some sort, as it appeared that, if he did not make concessions to the workers, peasants, and intelligentsia, he would lose his position. Because of the precariousness of Nicholas II's power, the tsar inserted some moderate reformers into his administration, following the assassination of conservative minister of internal affairs Vyacheslav von Plehve by Socialist Revolutionaries.[40] These moderates included Pyotr Sviatopolk-Mirskii, a liberal, who became the minister of internal affairs, and Aleksei Lopukhin, who also leaned left of the tsar and became head of the Russian security police. According to scholar Frederic S. Zuckerman, "Political police bureau chiefs thought little of Mirskii's leadership and condemned his policies as creating 'chaos' by encouraging widespread opposition to the autocracy."[41]

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[38] Jonathan Daly, "Political Crime in Late Imperial Russia," *The Journal of Modern History* 74, no. 1 (2002): 73.
[39] Daly, "Political Crime in Late Imperial Russia," 74.
[40] Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 170.
[41] Zuckerman, "Political Police and Revolution," 281-82.

The appointment of Mirskii and Lopukhin to leadership of the security police undermined morale within the institution they headed by dividing the liberals and conservatives. This division would serve to destabilize the institution for years to come, as no leader of the secret police after 1905 would be able to reunify the members of the Okhrana, whose split into opposing camps based on political orientation began what Zuckerman describes as an internal "civil war."[42] Such a lack of unity within the Okhrana hurt its efficiency and its ability to infiltrate oppositional groups. Such disunity was compounded once Pyotr Stolypin became minister of the interior, as his vision of peasant land reforms attracted loyalty from segments of the political police, a loyalty which was not shared by the traditional monarchists in its ranks.[43] Thus, many of the lower-ranking conservatives continued to act as they had prior to 1905, which contributed to chaos in the secret police through lack of communication and a lack of willingness to follow orders.[44]

The Okhrana had fragmented into liberal and conservative camps under Stolypin. The most powerful conservatives, unwilling to bow to Stolypin's leadership, began to ignore the communications of the rest of the Okhrana, and entered the tsarist court in an attempt to persuade Nicholas II to remove Stolypin from power. However, after Stolypin was assassinated in 1911 by an SR, the new leadership of the Okhrana found themselves permanently alienated from the lower-level bureaucrats they had previously ignored. Thus, communications between the upper and lower, the central and regional, levels of the Okhrana broke down, and the institution

[42] Ibid., 281.
[43] Ibid., 293-94.
[44] Jonathan Daly, "The Security Police and Politics in Late Imperial Russia," in *Russia Under the Last Tsar: Opposition and Subversion 1894-1917*, ed. Anna Geifman (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 229-230.

thereafter functioned in a highly inefficient manner, led by conservatives who could not adapt to growing political opposition, nor enforce order within their own institution.[45]

The authority and power of the security police crumbled through such political strife during the period when that institution most required unity. It was during the early twentieth century that leftist groups opposing the tsarist regime grew in power and number. By 1907, the Socialist-Revolutionaries had 350,000 members, and openly engaged in terrorist activities against the tsarist regime.[46] Socialist groups ruthlessly attacked the tsarist regime through either violence or propaganda just when the tsarist regime could not effectively defend itself with its security police, or preemptively crush opposition with the Okhrana. The government's inability to destroy the leftist opposition allowed socialist groups, including the SR's, Mensheviks, and Bolsheviks, to remain active and radicalize portions of the population to oppose the tsarist regime. As these groups spread their message widely, they provided a population already hungry for reforms with organized means to oppose the government.[47] The Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, for example, organized the protest by female workers which led to the abdication of the tsar in February 1917.[48]

In sum, the Okhrana's own internal difficulties exposed the government to attacks, and oppositional groups took full advantage of the Okhrana's internal chaos, taking actions which hurt the institution even more. The organized actions of these groups, including the violent terrorism of the SR's and the workers' strikes of the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, forced Nicholas II to make concessions which were inconsistent with his autocratic ideology. In the

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[45] Zuckerman, "Political Police and Revolution," 294-96.
[46] Peter Waldron, *The End of Imperial Russia, 1855-1907*, (London: Macmillan Press, 1997), 25.
[47] Robert C. Williams, "The Bolsheviks," in *Russia Under the Last Tsar: Opposition and Subversion 1894-1917*, ed. Anna Geifman (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 43-5.
[48] Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, 48.

institution of the security police, this took the form of Nicholas II appointing certain moderates into positions of power. This split the Okhrana and undermined its internal coherence, thus giving oppositional groups greater freedom of action than they might have otherwise had.

Politics: Early Soviet Period

Under Tsar Nicholas II, one of the most important political factors leading to the failure of his regime was the rise of oppositional socialist parties which found support among Russian workers and peasants. When the Bolsheviks came to power through the October Revolution, they guaranteed that other socialist parties would have a place in the new order, an order which was to respect the democratic will of the Russian people. After the Socialist Revolutionary Party won the majority of seats in the first free national elections in Russian history, however, the Bolsheviks dismantled the Constituent Assembly, then wrenched power from the elected Congress of Soviets (the VTsIK), shifting it to the central committee of their party.[49] From there, in the context of civil war and foreign invasion, leading Bolsheviks such as Lenin and Stalin progressively crushed legal political opposition in the form of parties and then factions.[50] Having vilified all political positions but their own, the Bolsheviks merged their party with the Russian governmental apparatus, giving them sole control over the country and allowing them to efficiently repress any political opposition using their secret police branch, the Cheka.

During their first days in power following the October Revolution, the Bolshevik leadership proposed a form of government based on universal democratic elections. Russia was to hold elections to the Constituent Assembly, a parliamentary body, on November 25, 1917.

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[49] Ibid., 70-71.
[50] Robert Vincent Daniels, *A Documentary History of Communism in Russia*, (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1993), 109.

Lenin, at first, vowed to respect the results of the election, stating on November 5 that "the Soviets of Peasants' Deputies… are from now on, *pending the convocation of the Constituent Assembly*, vested with full governmental authority in their localities." [emphasis added][51] Handing power to a parliamentary body, however, clashed with Lenin's ideology even before the results of the election were released. On September 14, for instance, Lenin wrote that "a Bolshevik government *alone* will be able to satisfy the demands of the peasants."[52]

The election did not turn out in favor of the Bolsheviks, who were able to win a meager 22.5 percent of the total vote, while the Right SR's raked in over 40 percent.[53] Following the results of this election, the Bolsheviks immediately rescinded their former claim that they would respect the results of the elections to the Constituent Assembly, asserting that the liberal parties who were elected to the assembly intended to use it as "a 'legal' cover for a… counter-revolutionary uprising."[54] The Bolsheviks shut down the Constituent Assembly with this justification and continued to run the government themselves. The fact that the Bolsheviks rejected the legitimacy of a democratic system of government at this time was a key factor in the eventual success of their monopolization of Russian governmental power. Instead of allowing any other groups to gain a foothold on Russia's institutions of authority, the Bolsheviks set a precedent that they were willing and able to forcefully destroy any political opposition that got in their way, and they could justify such repression by claiming that the opposition engaged in counterrevolutionary activities.

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[51] Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, *V. I. Lenin: Collected Works*, Vol. 26, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), 300.
[52] Lenin, *Selected Works*, Vol. 2, 328.
[53] Edward Acton and Tom Stableford, *The Soviet Union: A Documentary History*, Vol. 1, (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2005), 70.
[54] "The Decree on the Opening of the Constituent Assembly and the Banning of the Kadet Party," in *The Soviet Union: A Documentary History*, Vol. 1, ed. Edward Acton and Tom Stableford (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2005), 71.

With this blueprint in hand, the Bolsheviks whittled away at legal political opposition. Having first forcefully closed the doors on the Constituent Assembly – effectively shutting out the bourgeois parties – the Bolsheviks were, in a sense, assisted in their rise to power by the Right SR's and Mensheviks. Soviets, which were city and provincial advisory bodies, existed at this time as a powerful institution of socialist power, and had been so throughout the period of the provisional government's rule. While Lenin proposed that the new government should take a form in which all power lay in these soviets, Mensheviks and Right SR's refused to work within the soviets as long as Lenin was the leader.[55] This effectively removed the most powerful socialist opposition parties from the legal political sphere, which kept power within the hands of the Bolsheviks, gave the Bolsheviks almost exclusive use of the governmental apparatus (allowing for efficient government-directed repression), and helped the Bolsheviks demonstrate that the other socialist parties were weak.

The Bolsheviks presented this weakness on the part of the other socialist parties when they banned all parties, save themselves and the Left SR's, from legal political participation in 1918. The Bolsheviks, in this case, followed a similar line of rhetoric as they had with the Constituent Assembly in order to justify their program of repression. In a decree on June 14, 1918, the Bolshevik Central Executive Committee stated that "it is clear that representatives of the Socialist-Revolutionaries (of the Right and Center) and the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party (Menshevik)… are guilty of organizing armed attacks against the workers and peasants, in association with notorious counter-revolutionaries."[56]

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[55] Leonard Schapiro, *The Origin of the Communist Autocracy: Political Opposition in the Soviet State, First Phase, 1917-1922*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 66-67.
[56] "One-Party Dictatorship," in *A Documentary History of Communism in Russia from Lenin to Gorbachev*, ed. Robert Vincent Daniels (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1993), 80.

During this time, oppositional parties did, indeed, attempt to usurp Bolshevik power. Yet, they consistently failed to present a serious challenge to the Bolsheviks. For instance, the Left SR Party, which was the only party that had joined into a coalition with the Bolsheviks after the October Revolution, became disgruntled in March 1918 following the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, and withdrew from a governing coalition with the Bolsheviks, yet continued to work with the Bolsheviks in various official capacities. However, Left SR resentment of Bolshevik leadership grew into the summer. Finally, in an attempt to push Russia back into the war and mobilize popular uprisings against the Bolsheviks, the Left SR's in July 1918 assassinated the German ambassador to Russia. The plan failed, as the people were not willing to return to international war so quickly after the establishment of peace. The Bolsheviks then forced the Left SR's out of government, and became the single political party in power.[57] With the political apparatus at their disposal, the Bolsheviks had full license to operate a secret police force, the Cheka, which they used effectively to suppress first oppositional politicians, then to terrorize ordinary people. In a context of oppositional weakness, the Bolshevik party created and used the Cheka to successfully repress organized political dissent, using the Cheka to kill over 10,000 people in this vein during the "Red Terror."[58]

Opposition to Bolshevik leadership was not confined to the Left SR uprising. During the civil war, SR's, Mensheviks, and Kadets went so far as to create a separate "All-Russia Provisional Government" in Siberia. In the view of scholars Edward Acton and Tom Stableford, however, this government "lacked popular legitimacy, had neither reliable coercive force nor substantial tax revenue, and failed to establish effective governmental authority."[59] The story of

[57] Acton and Stableford, *The Soviet Union: A Documentary History*, Vol. 1, 105-06.
[58] Ibid., 117-19.
[59] Ibid., 107.

this failed oppositional government exemplifies the story of the oppositional socialist parties as a whole. Generally, these parties were hesitant to use force and disagreed with one another on a number of key points.[60]

Not only did the oppositional socialist parties fail to successfully challenge Bolshevik power, but Russian people were predisposed to tolerate government suppression of their potential freedoms. The Russian people had long been the subjects of a brutal, autocratic regime. Therefore, after the tsarist regime collapsed, many decided to support the Bolsheviks, who, though repressive, were also the only hope of stability, and equality, in the near future. Government use of violent repression was, in fact, so common in Russia that when the Bolsheviks used the Cheka to terrorize the Russian people during the civil war, many normal Russians joined in, using violence themselves to settle personal scores. Scholar Liudmila Novikova argues that "in many cases public initiative was a crucial factor in the genesis of terror."[61] For many Russians, it was simply difficult to imagine what 'freedom' would mean. So, when the Cheka came knocking at their door during the Red Terror, many participated in the violence, often by joining the army, rather than fighting back. Because of this, the Red Army grew large, and gained an undue amount of influence in party culture, leading the party to become more hierarchical, and even less tolerant of dissent.[62]

After the civil war, the Bolsheviks made their final move to secure a party-state by banning factionalism within their own party. In early March 1921, a number of sailors stationed at Kronstadt, a naval base just off of Petrograd, rejected Bolshevik authority and rebelled against

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[60] Ibid., 105.
[61] Novikova, "Russia's Red Revolutionary and White Terror," 1756.
[62] Mosche Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 199-201.

it. These sailors stated that "the Communist-usurpers… instead of freedom offer the toilers the constant fear of falling into the torture-chambers of the Cheka."[63] The sailors' statement was accurate, as the Cheka was the primary instrument through which the Bolsheviks repressed their opposition. However, the Bolshevik leadership viewed such open criticism of their authoritarian rule as unacceptable, and thus repressed this rebellion using military force. After quashing the revolt, they released the resolution "On Party Unity," which dissolved all groups within the party "formed on the basis of one platform or another," and threatened the use of "all Party penalties" for nonobservance. Although factionalism was only meant to be banned while bourgeois elements existed in the country, in practice the ban on factionalism became a permanent feature of the Soviet political system.[64]

From that point forth, the Soviet state claimed to represent a monolithic political vision, and attempted to enforce this by repressing diversity of thought. There were three major factors which facilitated Bolshevik creation of such a political system. First, the other socialist parties were not unified, and were not willing enough to use brutal measures to fight back successfully against the Bolsheviks. Second, the Russian people had grown accustomed to living under a regime that regularly suppressed dissent, and therefore many joined the military, seeing participation in repression as the safer option. The weakness of oppositional parties and the permissive, often participatory culture of the people allowed the Bolsheviks to create and use the Cheka to suppress political opposition, which was the third political factor enabling their success. Thus, following the October Revolution the Bolsheviks were able to successfully create a party-state by taking advantage of a political situation characterized by oppositional weakness.

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[63] "The Kronstadt Revolt," in *A Documentary History of Communism in Russia from Lenin to Gorbachev*, ed. Robert Vincent Daniels (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1993), 107.
[64] Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, *V. I. Lenin: Selected Works*, Vol. 3, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 522.

Ideology

In western historiography, ideology has often been understood as the building block upon which a government constructs its political and administrative system. This view no longer holds as much sway as it once did, since most historians now acknowledge that there exists a complex interplay between ideology, culture, politics, and economics which can be difficult to organize in a causal hierarchy. However, even in this more complicated and multifaceted view, ideology is still seen to play a key role in societal changes. Ideology was an important factor in the tsarist government's failure to repress political dissent during the early twentieth century. Likewise, ideology played a key role in the Bolshevik government's *ability* to repress political dissent during its first years in power. Tsarist ideology was rigid and autocratic, absolutely unable to respond to the population's appetite for change necessary in the modern era. Bolshevik ideology was at times similarly dictatorial, which allowed for the violent repression of dissent, but it also gave the Russian people hope that the Bolsheviks would actually work to fix the problems which the Russian population faced.

Ideology: Late Tsarist Period

In the modern world, autocracy is still a viable option for running a country efficiently. However, this modern version of successful autocracy requires adaptability to the rapidly changing nature of the modern world, and the ideology which Tsar Nicholas II used was unadaptable. Although the tsar toyed with certain reforms that were favored by the population after the uprising in 1905, these reforms were never carried through. Thus, in the face of unrest the tsar continued to cling to rigid autocratic principles, and offered nothing to the population in return for their subservience – not even hope for the future. In the face of this rigidity, his disingenuous efforts to introduce liberal policies only angered the population more, signaling just

how stale his autocratic ideology had become, especially as the ideology of upstart leftist opposition – both socialist and liberal – offered to many a much more appealing alternative to the tsarist autocracy.

The overarching ideology of the tsarist administration was for years quite simple – at all costs, maintain the singular power of the tsar.[65] Despite, especially in the nineteenth century, numerous occasions when the maintenance of such an ideology displeased segments of the population and hurt Russia's image on the world stage, from the perspective of the tsar, this ideology was successful; the tsarist system remained intact long after other European monarchies collapsed or were drastically limited in real power. However, European modernity clashed with Nicholas II's conservatism in the early twentieth century. As scholar Aleksandr Bokhanov notes: "there was an urgent need to develop up-to-date political mechanisms and ideas adequate to the new times and capable of resisting the liberal challenge and radical demands."[66]

Such a need for adaptation to modern circumstances came to a head during the 1905 revolution, when people in both the cities and the countryside rose up against the tsar out of desperate need for reform. Tsar Nicholas II capitulated, releasing the *October Manifesto*, which granted basic civil freedoms, universal suffrage, and a legislature.[67] Almost immediately after releasing the document, however, Nicholas II declared himself against universal suffrage, and otherwise had the *Manifesto* written loosely, so as to not actually commit the regime to the liberal principles it had outlined.[68] Having revealed his distaste toward the liberal concessions in

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[65] Zuckerman, "Political Police and Revolution," 293.
[66] Aleksandr Bokhanov, "Hopeless Symbiosis: Power and Right-Wing Radicalism at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century," in *Russia Under the Last Tsar: Opposition and Subversion 1894-1917*, ed. Anna Geifman (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 202.
[67] Wikisource contributors, "October Manifesto."
[68] Marc Ferro, *Nicholas II: Last of the Tsars*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 94.

the *October Manifesto*, the tsar began a counterrevolution. The security police cracked down upon the leaders of the opposition, first arresting socialists in Russia's cities, and then proceeding to ban the expression of political opinion altogether. The security police enforced tsarist conservatism in practice, arresting and imprisoning over 70,000 people in the seven months following the *October Manifesto*.[69]

The liberalism of the *October Manifesto*, then, proved disingenuous, and the tsar's conservatism continued to inspire resistance among the lower classes. The industrial workers in Russia, in particular, had been calling better working conditions.[70] While strikes were technically legal after 1905, they were often harshly repressed, especially in the case of strikes in which the workers' demands were political.[71] The onset of World War I prompted the tsarist regime to ban organized workers' meetings altogether, outlaw strikes, and crack down on the circulation of revolutionary literature among the working class.[72] As various socialist groups interacted with the Russian industrial workers at this time, the tsar's refusal to grant the workers liberal rights drove them directly to anti-tsarist radicalism. As an Okhrana (Russia's secret police) officer explained:

> The ban on workers' meetings, the closure of trade unions, the arrests of active members of the medical funds, the closure of the labor press, etc. have forced the working masses, who are led in their actions and sympathies by the most conscious, even revolutionary elements, into a sharply negative attitude to the government and into protest of every kind against the further continuance of war.[73]

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[69] Zuckerman, "Political Police and Revolution," 288-290.
[70] 100 Glavnikh Dokumentov Rossiskoy Istorii, "Petitsiya rabochikh i zhiteley Sankt-Peterburga," in *100 glavnikh dokumentov rossiskoy istorii*, http://doc.histrf.ru/20/petitsiya-rabochikh-i-zhiteley-sankt-peterburga/ (Accessed March 8, 2020).
[71] Koenker and Rosenberg, *Strikes and Revolution in Russia*, 68-71.
[72] S.A. Smith, "Workers and Civil Rights in Tsarist Russia, 1899-1917," in *Civil Rights in Imperial Russia*, ed. Olga Crisp and Linda Edmondson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 162.
[73] *Rabochee dvizhenie v Petrograde v 1912-17: Dokumenty i materialy*, (Leningrad: 1958), 484.

Thus, the heavily reactionary ideology of the tsar radicalized the workers through its inability to meet their needs and the harsh repression which it permitted against their protests.

The peasantry was in a similar situation regarding tsarist ideology during the early twentieth century. The peasantry was in desperate need of agricultural reform, as the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 had left the peasants in a situation where land was distributed unfairly. Although peasants were no longer serfs, as most of them had been prior to 1861, their release from serfdom locked them into contractual agreements with the state and with their landlords. These agreements forced the peasants to pay their landlords for the land they received after the abolition of serfdom, which the peasants generally could not afford to do, and restricted peasant movement from the countryside to the cities, which limited both peasant opportunity and Russian industrialization. Because of this situation, the peasants yearned to own outright the land on which they worked.[74]

Historically, the peasants had been apolitical, respecting the position of the tsar as their supreme ruler. However, such respect for the tsar's authority had eroded by 1917. One of the reasons for this was the tsar's adamant refusal to grant the peasants outright ownership of the land on which they worked. This issue came to a head already in 1905, when peasants around the country participated in uprisings against the regime. A 1906 resolution by peasants in the village of Byl'tsino, Vladimir Province, for instance, stated that their "main need [was] a lack of land," since the scant amount of land that they had made it "impossible to run [the] peasant

[74] George Vernadsky, *A History of Russia*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 219-20.

economy."[75] Thus, after years of apolitical passivity, the situation grew so dire that the peasants began to openly blame the government for their difficult situation.

It is possible that moderate reformer Pyotr Stolypin would have remedied the peasant situation. As Russia's prime minister, from 1906-1911, he worked to grant the peasants the right of private land ownership. Though his reforms were based on western models, and were thus opposed by many peasants in traditional communal society of the *mir*, Stolypin appeared to be modernizing the rural economy. Before he could finish his work, however, he was assassinated, and the peasants were left in the same unsatisfactory situation.[76] Eventually, the peasants found their heroes in the socialist parties, who promised to give them the land and rights that they wanted.

Throughout the early twentieth century, then, the tsar's ideology either radicalized or alienated some of the largest social groups in the country. His promises of liberalism and his appointment of reformers such as Stolypin after the 1905 revolution proved false or short-lived, and showed to the population that Russia would never undergo true change under a tsar with such rigid ideology. The industrial workers and the peasants, their wishes again ignored or suppressed, looked instead to the political left to satisfy their needs. Therefore, the tsar's ideology worked to undercut much of his support and turn the masses against him.

Ideology: Early Soviet Period

If the ideology of Nicholas II weakened the position of the tsarist regime, during the first years of the Soviet regime, Bolshevik ideology had the opposite effect, strengthening the

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[75] "Resolution by Peasants in Byl'tsino (Vladimir Province) 27 February 1906," in *From Supplication to Revolution: A Documentary Social History of Imperial Russia*, ed. Gregory L. Freeze, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 275-76.
[76] Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, 35-36.

government's hold on power. Like the tsar's ideology, the Bolsheviks' outlook permitted the brutal repression of those who openly opposed the government. Unlike tsarist ideology, however, the Bolsheviks offered the image of hope to the Russian people. While the Russian people had been worn down by the monarchy over the years, the Bolshevik regime promised radical change from the rigid hierarchy of the old order. In the Bolshevik image of the new order, the peasants would receive the land they had long hoped for, the workers would receive the rights for which they had loudly called, and society would become a place in which freedom and equality were the key values, if only for the workers and peasants. By using these positive images while allowing the repression of those who dissented, the Bolshevik ideology weakened dissent while strengthening their power.

That the Bolsheviks inspired hope among the people was clear immediately after they overthrew the provisional government in October 1917. As soon as they came into power, the Bolsheviks sprang into action, issuing a number of decrees which granted the Russian people exactly those things they had long been hoping for. As scholar Ronald Suny states: "All civil ranks, special social privileges, and class distinctions that had marked off nobles from merchants, peasants from townspeople were abolished."[77] Such immediate destruction of the old, hated system signaled to Russians that under the new government the future had unlimited potential.

In more specific terms, as well, the Bolsheviks set about enacting those reforms for which Russians had called under Nicholas II. In November 1917, the new government issued a decree which stated that "workers' control is introduced in all industrial, commercial, agricultural (and similar) enterprises."[78] After the tsar rejected their demands for years, the industrial workers

[77] Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, 71.
[78] "Industrial Democracy," in *A Documentary History of Communism in Russia from Lenin to Gorbachev*, ed. Robert Vincent Daniels (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1993), 69-70.

were pleased that the Bolsheviks appeared to grant their wishes so quickly. Because the Bolsheviks appeared to wholeheartedly support working people, industrial workers largely threw their support behind them. This eliminated many industrial workers, whose strikes and uprisings had been such a nuisance to Tsar Nicholas II, from dissenting against the Bolsheviks during their first years in power.[79]

Similarly, the Bolsheviks issued a decree which at first glance seemed to meet the demands of the majority of the peasants. Understanding the uniquely communal nature of the countryside, the Bolsheviks did not follow in Stolypin's footsteps and divide the land into private plots. Instead, they stated that "*private ownership of land shall be abolished forever*" [emphasis in original] and that "the land shall be distributed among the toilers in conformity with a labor standard or a consumption standard, depending on local conditions."[80] As the workers had been, the peasants were, in general, jubilant that the government finally gave them full control of the land, without any concessions to the landlords. Indeed, although most of the peasants did not know what 'socialism' actually meant, after the revolution they generally greeted it with open arms, as it seemed to meet their needs where the monarchy never had.[81] Because of Bolshevik reforms, the peasants as well as the workers did not at first become a major source of political dissent, and the future under this government appeared promising. Indeed, as Ronald Suny states: "three million landless peasants received land, and the gentry land was virtually eliminated. By 1919, 96.8 percent of all agricultural land was in the hands of the peasants."[82]

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[79] Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, 70.
[80] "Bolshevik Revolutionary Legislation: Decree on the Land," in *A Documentary History of Communism in Russia from Lenin to Gorbachev*, ed. Robert Vincent Daniels (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1993), 64.
[81] Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 530-31.
[82] Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, 102.

Despite the fact that socialist ideology preemptively decreased opposition using positive images and steps toward the implementation of reforms, the Bolsheviks still faced a great deal of political dissent. For these opponents, Bolshevism encouraged the brutal repression of any and all political dissent. In fact, immediately after the October Revolution, the Bolshevik leadership stated that they would shut down any newspapers which came out in opposition to the new Bolshevik regime.[83] They were able to justify this move, which protected their monopoly on state power, with Leninist ideology. One of Lenin's most important writings, *The State and Revolution*, is an essential text because it justifies the suppression of the opposition by the now empowered socialist revolutionaries after the revolution has taken place. Lenin describes how "the 'special coercive force' for the suppression of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie… must be replaced by a 'special coercive force' for the suppression of the bourgeoisie by the proletariat (the dictatorship of the proletariat)."[84] Such a statement, though originally made as a legitimate argument for the repression of counterrevolution, can be taken after the fact to justify the suppression of any and all opposition.

In the years after seizing power, the Bolsheviks sought to create a single, official ideology in practice throughout all aspects of the society. This is most evident in their attempt to enforce ideological conformity through the 'Red Terror.' Committing brutal acts of violence against members of the Russian population was a common practice for both the Whites and the Reds during the civil war, as this was an effective method of enforcing conformity among those who lived under a given administration's rule. This terror worked as a counterbalance to the positive images presented by the Bolsheviks, and was, as scholar James Ryan puts it "officially

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[83] "Bolshevik Revolutionary Legislation: Decree on the Suppression of Hostile Newspapers," in *A Documentary History of Communism in Russia from Lenin to Gorbachev*, ed. Robert Vincent Daniels (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1993), 65.
[84] Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, *V. I. Lenin: Collected Works*, Vol. 25, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), 402.

and widely proclaimed, and its purpose was indeed to terrify and to educate as well as to excise through execution or confinement to concentration camps harmful elements believed to be irreconcilable to the new Soviet order."[85] At least 10,000, and as many as 140,000, people were killed by the Red Terror, and many more were placed in forced labor and concentration camps set up across the country by the Cheka.[86]

Such massive violence against those opposing the Bolshevik regime, justified by Leninist ideology, which found that the dictatorship of the proletariat had the exclusive right to violently repress counterrevolution, reached its peak during the civil war. However, the use of violence as a tactic to enforce Bolshevik rule did not stop after the conclusion of the war. Instead, the Bolsheviks continued to use the Cheka to violently suppress, arrest, or exile Soviet citizens who openly opposed the Bolshevik regime. In the words of scholar Peter Holquist: "the Soviets… employed violence as a technique to fashion society in their own image. And the Soviet state did so as an explicitly ideological regime."[87]

The Bolsheviks thus used their ideology as both the carrot and the stick in order to coerce the Russian populace to act in accordance with Bolshevism. The positive images that they provided to the society offered a change of pace from the tsar's stale refusal to meet the people's needs. Giving the people hope for a better future, the Bolsheviks were able to preemptively eliminate opposition from certain segments of the population who were at first enthralled with what the Bolsheviks had promised them. Simultaneously, the Bolsheviks employed a systematic

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[85] James Ryan, "The Sacralization of Violence: Bolshevik Justifications for Violence and Terror during the Civil War," *Slavic Review* 74, no. 4 (2015): 809.
[86] Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, 83-84.
[87] Peter Holquist, "State Violence as a Technique: The Logic of Violence in Soviet Totalitarianism," in *Landscaping the Human Garden: Twentieth Century Population Management in a Comparative Framework*, ed. Amir Weiner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 25.

program of terror, justified by their concept of the proletarian dictatorship, to eliminate open opposition to their regime. With an ideology that opened the door to a better future while shutting down alternative options, the Bolsheviks positioned themselves as the singular authoritative group in Russia.

Socioeconomics

In order for a regime to successfully repress political dissent, it is necessary that political leaders craft and administer an effective political apparatus, and that their ideology can both justify repressive measures and provide hope for a better future. Yet, an administration can maintain power through these political and ideological factors only in the right socioeconomic context. The administration must enact economic policies which provide for at least the minimal material needs of its population in order to avoid uprisings by a disgruntled population. And, the regime cannot lock most of the population into socially alienating or destructive roles, as this too can lead to a degree of dissent which overwhelms the regime. The tsarist regime under Nicholas II did not react to its socioeconomic context in such a way that would preserve its power; instead the tsarist regime avoided reforms and succumbed to the socioeconomic difficulties brought by the First World War, all of which left the tsar with little to no support. The Bolshevik regime, instead, adapted to its socioeconomic situation by enacting reforms, controlling material life of Russians during the civil war, and then feeding the population after the war.

Socioeconomics: Late Tsarist Regime

Before the First World War began, the tsarist regime was already teetering. Quickly after the start of the war, it became apparent that Russia was incapable of carrying on a protracted war. Not only did Russia lack the industry necessary to fight in a modern war, but the regime

did not effectively balance resources between the cities, countryside, and front, resulting in escalating inflation and widespread famine, which was compounded by poor labor productivity in agriculture.[88] Furthermore, Russia experienced a series of defeats in the war, Russian officers were particularly harsh on their soldiers, and there was an inconsistent supply of necessary goods to the front, all of which decreased military morale. Altogether, soldiers and civilians from many walks of life all had cause to be upset with the tsarist regime, which helped to turn popular opinion against the tsar, to such a degree that Nicholas II did not have the necessary support to effectively repress massive political dissent by 1917.

Prior to the beginning of 1914, it appeared to many that Russia's economy was on the path to modernization. Scholar Norman Stone finds that "by 1914, the delineations of the future Russian 'super-power' were clear to all who knew [Russia]," thanks in large part to the fact that, even by 1909, "Russia had become the fourth industrial Power in the world, having overtaken France in indices of heavy industry – coal, iron, steel."[89] Despite Russia's political backwardness and the population's persistent calls for reforms, Russia was rapidly industrializing. Still, when the First World War broke out in 1914, Russia had not arrived at modernity. The extreme specialization and division of labor experienced by more advanced western capitalist economies could not be found in Russia, as the economically inefficient workers and peasants "accounted for 90 percent of Russia's population but only 24 percent of its national wealth."[90] Russia's agricultural productivity, though massive in absolute terms, was

[88] Gatrell, *Russia's First World War*, 4-6.
[89] Norman Stone, *Europe Transformed, 1878-1919*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 197.
[90] Gatrell, *Russia's First World War*, 62.

low, which reduced its flexibility during times of crisis, and industry relied on inefficient labor as well, which made adaptation to varied conditions difficult.[91]

These problems were fully exposed and compounded once the First World War began. To begin with, the conscription of men into the army was a blow to both agricultural and industrial productivity. Economic historian Peter Gatrell explains that, in the cities, "the very success of conscription caused great difficulty, because industry quickly found itself deprived of skilled workers."[92] Such harm to Russia's industrial capacity damaged its ability to produce necessary goods for the front, such as clothing and medicine. The shortages faced by those at the front, in turn, contributed to declining morale among the Russian military's rank and file.[93] Not only economic but social issues, as well, plagued the cohesion of tsarist troops during the war. Orlando Figes explains that, within the military hierarchy, "the fact that the mass of the soldiers were peasants, and that many of their officers were noble landowners (often from the same region as their men), added a dimension of social conflict; and this was exacerbated by the 'feudal' customs between the ranks."[94] Therefore, the soldiers had not only a material incentive to leave, but a psychological one as well, thanks to the animosity between soldiers and their commanding officers. Such a loss of morale by soldiers proved to be a major problem for the tsar, as by 1917 soldiers were deserting in massive numbers, and began to participate in uprisings and mutinies, culminating with segments of the Russian army participating in the February Revolution, which forced the abdication of the tsar.[95]

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[91] Ibid., 4.
[92] Ibid., 23.
[93] Ibid., 64.
[94] Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 265.
[95] Ibid., 265-66, 313.

Even those soldiers who did not desert exerted some influence on civilian society. In 1915 the Russian army retreated back into Russia, having suffered a number of defeats at the hands of the Austrian army.[96] The army's withdrawal through the western portion of the Russian Empire brought the war to the civilian population living there. Throughout the first years of the war, the Russian army employed a 'scorched earth' policy for their retreating troops, which, in the words of scholar Joshua Sanborn, spurred "newly invigorated mass politicians who sought control over the destiny of the nation and the war effort [to lambast] the tsar's bureaucrats and his military staff for their inhumane policies."[97] Put generally, industrial and organizational failures in the army led to social disaster that then turned people against the tsar.

Still, famine was perhaps the most important socioeconomic effect that the war had on political dissent. The issue was not that Russia did not produce enough food to feed itself. Instead, says Dominic Lieven, "the difficulty was to distribute [food] to the swollen population of the towns in Russia's northern industrial regions and to the huge army concentrated in the empire's western borderlands." Russia simply did not have the infrastructure to move the grain where they needed it to go, had too much bureaucratic inefficiency, and maintained an "industry [that] could not simultaneously supply the army and produce consumer goods at a price and quantity that would persuade peasants to sell their grain."[98] Therefore, neither the army nor the cities had an adequate supply of food.

The food shortage occurred, furthermore, in the context of increasing inflation after 1916. There were limited supplies of goods in the country, yet it was economically necessary to pay

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[96] Ferro, *Nicholas II*, 162-63.
[97] Joshua A. Sanborn, "Unsettling the Empire: Violent Migrations and Social Disaster in Russia during World War I," *The Journal of Modern History* 77, no. 2 (2005): 314.
[98] D. C. B. Lieven, *The End of Tsarist Russia: The March to World War I and Revolution*, (New York: Viking, 2015), 345.

workers sufficiently for the goods that they were producing, and to pay peasants enough to buy their grain. The government attempted to remedy this difficulty by printing extra paper money. Because of this, prices for the scarce food in urban areas rose.[99] Workers, unable to support themselves without increased wages, began organizing greater numbers of strikes with the aim of raising their wages. Economic strikes grew in number from 34 in the last five months of 1914 to 1,046 economic strikes in 1916.[100] In early 1917, as the tsarist regime crumbled, the workers turned these strikes into political protests, as many now saw ending the autocracy to be a precursor to fixing their economic situation.[101]

The First World War brought a host of socioeconomic changes to Russia, many of which contributed directly to increasing the divide between the Russian people and the tsar, bringing about political dissent in segments of the population where it previously had not been. Soldiers mobilized against the tsar after being forced into humiliating social hierarchies in the military, where they lived in poor conditions, owing to the inability of Russia's industrial sector to provide them with sufficient quantities of military supplies. The army suffered numerous defeats, forcing it to retreat into Russia, where its disruptive presence displaced millions and damaged the rural economy, souring the relationship between the tsar and the countryside. Russia's transport system was too weak, and its bureaucracy too fragmented, to move food from the countryside to the cities, which resulted in famine, and the government's attempts to remedy its economic issues led to inflation, causing workers' strikes which quickly turned political as the tsar's position became weaker. Thus, tsarist economic and military policy during the First World War

[99] Gatrell, *Russia's First World War*, 144-46.
[100] Koenker and Rosenberg, *Strikes and Revolution in Russia*, 69.
[101] Ibid., 70-72.

led to socioeconomic disaster that turned almost the entirety of Russia against the tsarist regime by 1917.

Socioeconomics: Early Soviet Period

As the First World War drove socioeconomic changes during the last years of the tsarist regime, the civil war likewise drove socioeconomic changes during the early Soviet period. These changes during the Russian Civil War, however, did not lead to a situation in which dissent absolutely overwhelmed the new Bolshevik government. The Bolsheviks enacted three different economic policies during their early years in power, which proved effective in allowing them to secure their political dominance. Ronald Suny best describes these three periods, so I will quote him at length:

> *October 1917 to July 1918* – The period before the civil war broke out in earnest when the Soviet government attempted to maintain economic production through a policy of 'state capitalism.'
>
> *July 1918 to March 1921* – The period of the civil war during which the Soviet state expanded its role in the economy, nationalizing industry, requisitioning grain from the peasantry, suppressing markets, and conscripting labor, in order to win the war. This period would later be known as 'War Communism.'
>
> *March 1921 to the end of the 1920's* – The period following the Civil War, when the Communists made a strategic retreat back to 'state capitalism' in what they called the New Economic Policy, or NEP… Markets were reintroduced; much industry was denationalized; peasants were allowed to sell their grain in the market… and workers were free to move from job to job.[102]

This first period was essential for the Bolshevik government, as it was a mounting concern for the Russian people that the new government be able to restore their economic stability and food supplies. In April 1918, Lenin felt the pressure of necessary economic

[102] Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, 74.

restoration so heavily that he abandoned socialist economic principles, stating: "It becomes immediately clear that while it is possible to capture the central government in a few days… the *capital* solution of the problem of raising the productivity of labor requires, at all events (particularly after a most terrible and devastating war), several years." [emphasis added][103] The importance here lies in Lenin's admission that it was necessary for the new socialist government to implement a sort of capitalism, defined by the use of 'bourgeois experts' and Taylorism in factories, in order to raise industrial productivity and thus raise living conditions in the country.

In this period before the start of the civil war, the Bolsheviks hardly had time to restore the economy to pre-1914 levels. Still, the *way* in which the Bolsheviks shifted their economic policy is key. Bolshevik revolutionary Victory Serge defined an essential feature of this shift in the government's economic policy, stating that "the management of large-scale industry demands unity of will, 'the subordination of the will of thousands to the will of one.'"[104] Even though the Bolsheviks could not cure Russia's economic woes immediately after taking power, then, in their attempt to do such they established greater control over industry, taking control of factories out of the hands of the workers and giving it to the central government, by way of these bourgeois specialists. As scholar Paul Le Blanc states, Lenin did not "see workers' control as involving the workers in actually operating or managing the enterprise."[105] Whether or not this was an intentional effort by the Bolsheviks to give themselves more power and guard against potential dissent by workers, this policy in economic organization gave the central government greater control over industry, so workers had less leverage to protest. Moreover, the Bolsheviks'

[103] Lenin, *Selected Works*, Vol. 2, 601.
[104] Victor Serge, *Year One of the Russian Revolution*, (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2015), 243-44.
[105] Le Blanc, *October Song*, 152.

pseudo-capitalist policy provided the cities with enough food that immediate rebellion against the Bolsheviks did not occur.[106]

Although it did not solve all of the economic issues in Russia, and led to famine throughout Russia which occurred on a scale far greater than the famine during the First World War, the period of War Communism benefitted the Soviet central government directly by providing the Red Army with the resources it needed to win the war, while forcing the population to obey. The purpose of the policy of War Communism was therefore twofold – economic and psychological – both of which helped to secure the power of the Bolshevik government against political dissent.

War Communism, defined by forceful and coerced government monopoly over the economy for military means, by nature went hand in hand with the Red Terror. Indeed, Orlando Figes acknowledges that "the policies of War Communism were seen by the Bolsheviks as an instrument of struggle against their social or 'internal' enemies."[107] An essential element of War Communism was the government requisitioning grain from peasants. The Bolsheviks imposed a harsh penalty on all peasants who did not turn over grain to the government. This penalty, in essence, enforced political compliance among the peasantry, creating a precedent wherein those who did not obey government orders were punished harshly.[108]

While punishment was at first enacted only in those cases where peasants withheld grain, by setting a precedent which punished those not compliant with the regime's demands economically, it was easy enough for the Bolshevik government to begin punishing those who

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[106] Medvedev, *The October Revolution*, 140-41.
[107] Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 615.
[108] "All-Russia TsIK Decree Granting Emergency Powers to the People's Commissariat for Food," in *The Soviet Union: A Documentary History*, Vol. 1, ed. Edward Acton and Tom Stableford (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2005), 91.

did not comply *politically*. Once the civil war began in the summer of 1918, the Bolsheviks began to utilize the Cheka and the military to harshly punish any who were even suspected of opposing the Bolshevik regime. The use of terror became especially widespread after a Right SR attempted to assassinate Lenin, shooting him in the neck in August 1918, which triggered a great deal of paranoia among the Bolshevik leaders, paranoia which in practice took the form of state terrorism in the Red Terror.

The Cheka killed at least 10,000 people within weeks of the Red Terror's beginning, in September 1918, a reign of violence which was openly celebrated in the Bolshevik press.[109] The fact that the Bolsheviks successfully and openly utilized terror during this period was helped by their policy of War Communism, as both solidified the singular power that the government had over the people, showing that autonomy was unacceptable. Contemporary Left SR I.Z. Steinberg noted the connected nature of the economic and political aspects of government domination during this period, stating that "what at first shook, pained, and sickened us later became commonplace, inevitable and almost comprehensible, in the same way as we got used to an ever decreasing bread ration."[110]

By the end of the war, the government had successfully used their police powers in the Cheka and the People's Commissariat for Food to take control of every aspect of the lives of Russian citizens, forcing the people to depend exclusively on the government for both their economic and political wellbeing. However, absolute dominance is meaningless if there is no population to dominate. When the civil war ended in 1921, famine was widespread across Russia, thanks to the policy of forced grain requisitioning, and the Bolsheviks needed an

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[109] Acton and Stableford, *The Soviet Union: A Documentary History*, Vol. 1, 119.
[110] "I.Z. Steinberg's Reflections on Terror as a System," *The Soviet Union: A Documentary History*, Vol. 1, ed. Edward Acton and Tom Stableford (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2005), 118.

economic policy which could both allow them to retain the Bolshevik-governed party-state and fix the economy; feeding their citizens and providing employment.

The NEP (New Economic Policy) solved most immediate economic issues for the Bolsheviks. It is the case, on the one hand, that there were a number of leftists in government who saw Lenin's proposal to open markets and privatize certain industries as a capitalist mistake. A group called 'Workers' Truth,' for example, publicly stated that, due to the NEP, "the party has more and more lost its tie and community with the proletariat."[111] However, this was the period during which the Bolsheviks, fearing a split, banned factionalism within the party. Hence, they were in position to suppress the opposition using the GPU (successor to the Cheka) and pursue the New Economic Policy without overt criticism. With the implementation of this policy, the government ceased forced grain requisitions, and, although large industries remained within the hands of the government, smaller private markets were permitted. These measures were effective, and, says Ronald Suny, "the standard of living for most gradually rose," though the Soviets retained a secret police force to continue repressing political opposition.[112] The famine ended, and in such relative prosperity the people did not find reason to overthrow the Bolshevik dictatorship.

Each of the three periods of Soviet economic policy in the first five years following the Bolshevik Revolution benefitted the Bolshevik party in their ability to repress political dissent. In the months immediately after the Bolsheviks took power, their implementation of certain capitalist measures, such as using bourgeois specialists, and their decision to permit certain private food markets to stay open boosted the economy and staved off famine just enough to

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[111] "Appeal of the 'Workers' Truth' Group," *A Documentary History of Communism in Russia from Lenin to Gorbachev*, ed. Robert Vincent Daniels (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1993), 116.
[112] Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, 154-55.

prevent economic-based anti-government rebellion among the populace. Once the civil war began in mid-1918, the Bolshevik policy of War Communism gave the government greater control of the material aspect of people's lives, and the Red Terror gave them greater control of the psychological aspect, so the Bolsheviks became the dominant possessor of power in Russia. After the civil war ended in 1921, the Bolsheviks introduced the New Economic Policy, saving the country from famine and therefore preventing further dissent without relinquishing the singular power that the Bolshevik party had in Russia.

Conclusion

Russia in the early twentieth century was largely defined by political dissent. Political dissent brought the tsarist regime to its knees; in a different form, it was the enemy against which the Bolshevik party fought in those first years after the revolution in order to secure their power. Ideological, political, socioeconomic, and cultural factors all influenced the nature of the political dissent that arose, the degree to which this dissent was dangerous to the government, and how the government responded. In the late tsarist period, most of these factors worked against the tsar. Nicholas II was ideologically committed to autocracy. But this was simply not an effective ideology for the time period. The Russian people desperately needed reforms in both the countryside and the cities. To stave off a full-blown revolution, in 1905 Nicholas II seemed willing to concede reforms at first, but after his *October Manifesto* turned out to be a farce, many Russians ceased to see him as the legitimate authority. Between 1905 and 1917, the tsar's authority remained weak, and underground socialist groups took advantage of this situation by organizing and politicizing both workers and peasants, offering them an alternative to the tsarist regime.

In this situation, where the gap between the people and the tsarist regime was already large, Russia entered into the First World War. Russia did not have the economic infrastructure to participate as an equal player in a modern war, and Nicholas II mismanaged what Russia did have, leading to starvation in the cities and on the front. This lack of adequate food and supplies, combined with a military social culture which alienated the rank-and-file, weakened Russia's position in the war, and as the military retreated back into Russia, millions of citizens were forcibly displaced. All of this anger on the part of the soldiers, the peasants drawn into war, and the workers was directed against the tsar, who had already lost the trust of many.

Therefore, the tsar had little support as dissent grew. The only way that he could protect himself was by use of the military, which at this point largely opposed the him, and the security police, Russia's traditional institution of repression. However, the security police were fragmented, as Nicholas II had filled some of its positions with moderates following the 1905 revolution. Furthermore, terroristic socialist groups such as the Right SR's hounded the security police by assassinating its administrators, while other socialist groups such as the Bolsheviks helped workers organize strikes and exposed them to socialist ideology. The security police, then, were at their weakest when the whole country had lost faith in the tsar, so when the organized protests in February 1917 overwhelmed them, and the Petrograd military refused to protect him, Nicholas II had nowhere to turn, and was forced to abdicate.

By February 1917, the populace, including much of the army, no longer found authority in the tsar. So, when socialist-organized workers moved to overrun the tsar's weakened repressive institutions, the Russian monarchy found no support, and collapsed. Yet, the Russian people had long been dominated by an oppressive government. An effective administration which met the material needs of the people, provided hope for a better future, and maintained a

strong repressive institution could certainly limit the amount of political dissent that the population would enact and forcibly repress the dissent that did arise. After the October Revolution, the Bolshevik party became this effective administration.

While the tsarist ideology had been rigid, alienating the people due to its refusal to provide the reforms that the populace craved, the ideology of the Bolsheviks provided an image of a better future, where the peasants would own their own land, the workers would run the factories, and Russia would withdraw from war to build a new, socialist, society. Such a hopeful image convinced many that things would get better under the Bolsheviks, so they did not have cause to rebel. However, Bolshevik ideology did not preclude the violent repression of those who did dissent. In fact, for the Bolsheviks violence was seen as a strategic tool, through the use of which they could force subservience from the population while cementing themselves as the singular authority in Russia.

Prior to the civil war, the Bolsheviks rarely had to use violence in a widespread manner, as their semi-capitalist economic policy fed the population enough to avoid starvation, and they propagated their image of a better future, both of which placated the population somewhat. Once the civil war began, however, the Bolsheviks had to compete with the Whites for authority. They therefore used terror extensively to control people's behavior, and physically dominated Russia's food supply chains using the Cheka, a strong, loyal, and omnipresent secret police force. Through such measures, the Bolshevik administration dominated all aspects of Russian life. Once the Bolsheviks won the civil war, they implemented the New Economic Policy, preventing starvation but retaining their authority. Of course, the Bolsheviks were only able to implement their policies with such efficiency due to the fact that they banned their opposition,

allowing them to form a centralized party-state, the ideal form of government for effective repression of political dissent.

This analysis may appear to be saying that the factors which allowed one regime to successfully repress political dissent, and the other to fail, are largely dependent on the circumstances. To a degree, this is true. The culture of violent political opposition in Russia was specific to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Russian empire, and the interaction between the specific stage to which the Russian economy had developed and the necessities of the First World War was likewise unique. However, factors internal to the government separated the ability of these two regimes to repress political dissent more than external factors did. Tsar Nicholas II was a poor leader, his administration was poorly organized, and his ideology was unpopular. The call for reforms came from the people, but his administration in no way responded to the call well. The provisional government, despite its liberal policies, similarly did not meet the needs of the people, and were thus overthrown by the Bolsheviks, whose policies appealed to many.

The Bolsheviks, for such a small party, did an effective job in handling the situation that they were given. They provided both the carrot and the stick to the Russian people; they offered an image of a future in which all of the reforms for which the Russians yearned would be realized, and they terrorized the people, controlling every aspect of life to repress dissent and consolidate power. The Cheka was prepared and able to execute any and all orders from above. For all the complexity, the most important difference lay between authoritarianism well done, which gave hope for a better future, and autocracy poorly done, which did not. In both cases, unfortunately, the Russian people suffered.

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