History 104

Europe from Napoleon to the PRESENT

11 March 2009

From the Bolshevik Revolution to Stalinism
Background

The Bolsheviks came to power in Russia in October 1917. Their success was facilitated by:

- widespread popular dissatisfaction with the war
- Lenin’s theory of a “revolutionary vanguard” (which made it possible to imagine the Communist Revolution happening even when most people were still peasants)
- the particular conditions produced by Russia’s rapid industrialization in the period 1880-1914 (enormous factories clustered in a few locations)
1917 popular support for the soviets and Bolsheviks

1930s forced collectivization (>200,000 deaths)
   3,000,000-15,000,000 people held in GULAG* prisons

What was the relation of 1930s Stalinism to the first years of the Russian Revolution?
Was the Soviet Union a communist country in this era?

* Chief Administration of Corrective Labor Camps and Colonies

— class war
— high modernist utopianism
— reversion to autocracy of imperial Russia
— creation of a new ruling class?

Bolshevik Revolution to Stalinism: lecture structure
Russian Revolution: TWO revolutions in 1917 alone

February Revolution

Nicholas II abdicates

Provisional Government and Petrograd Workers’ Soviet

Soviet passes “Order Number One” on organization of military

October Revolution

1918-1922 Civil War

Jan. 1924 Lenin dies

“All workers are brothers” Putilov Factory (Petrograd), 1917

| Members of the 1917 Communist Politburo |
|----------------|----------------|
| Lenin          (d. 1924)  | Sokolnikov (d. 1939) |
| Kamenev        (d. 1936)  | Trotsky        (d. 1940) |
| Zinoviev       (d. 1936)  | Stalin         (d. 1953)  |
| Bukharin       (d. 1938)  |                  |

From Lenin to Stalin: How many Russian Revolutions were there?
Russian Civil War, 1917-1922

Red Army: over 5,000,000 men
(mainly peasant draftees)
50,000 officers from former Imperial Army

White Armies – many distinct armies
supported by Britain, USA, Japan

“Only the close cooperation of worker and peasant will save Russia from desperation and hunger”

Civil War poster

"Great Siberian Ice March", Jan-March 1920
(retreat of White Army led by Vladimir Kappel)
Civil War and the Polarization of Society

…fundamental aims: abolish all exploitation of man by man; the complete elimination of the division of society into classes; the ruthless suppression of exploiters; the establishment of a socialist organisation of society and the victory of socialism in all countries…


From a small group of partisans to a mighty Red Army!

It’s us or them: who are you with? Dmitry Moor, 1920
To have more, we must produce more.
To produce more, we must know more.

If you read books, you won’t forget your grammar.*

* She is reading John Reed, *Ten Days that Shook the World* (1919)
Collectivization, De-kulakization, and Forced Resettlement

*kulak* – “high income” farmers; literally meaning “tight fisted”

Identifying features of a *kulak* (USSR Council of Ministers, 1929)

- using hired labor
- owning a mill, a creamery, or other complex equipment
- renting equipment or facilities (barns, etc.)
- involvement in commerce, money-lending, or other “non-labor” activity

“My aunt grabbed a pitchfork and shouted ‘I won’t let you near the horses!’ She had two horses. And the next day, they came and they dekulakized her, took her things and sent her away to exile. The children died.”

Anonymous woman from southern Russia, quoted in Catherine Merridale, *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Russia* (2000).

*kolkhoz* (collective farmers) marching with banner that reads “we will liquidate the kulaks as a class”
My successes in production work don’t make me happy. A thought I can never shake off… is the question one of my psychology? Can it be that I really am different from the others? … No matter how much you feed the wolf, he still looks to the forest. It’s the same with me. No matter how much I try to re-educate myself, I simply can’t get rid of the habits of a useless person. It’s true that they are small, not even noticeable to an outsider, but to me when I observe myself, everything is noticeable.

Stepan Podlubny, diary entry (March 1932) (son of “kulaks” in the Ukraine), quoted in Jochen Hellbeck, Revolution on my Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin (2006).

We will keep out the kulaks! (1930)

class war and war within individuals
Revolutionary enthusiasm and making of a new world

Hindu and Korean, Englishman, Persian, Frenchman, Chinese, Turk, and all the rest: they all spoke, and spoke of imperialism, which carried away by its greed has dug its own grave and now is drowning in the blood of nations. … In this unanimous funeral dirge for the past, the real meaning was the joyous announcing of the future, summoning the nations to aid resurgent revolutionary Russia… In every speech, there was confidence that Russia, who by the will of history is taking it on herself to be the vanguard of Socialism, will play her great and difficult part with honor and with success.

It was wonderful to listen to these many-tongued speeches full of a single feeling—and to know that the rationally directed will of the people is capable of working miracles.

The attention of the whole world is intent on the Russian worker-socialist. He appears before the peoples of the Earth as the creator of new forms of life. By the will of history he is teacher and example to millions of men.


Gustav Klutsis photo-montage poster, “Long live world October”
Women’s Rights and Gender Roles in the early Soviet Union

Women’s strike on International Women’s Day begins February Revolution

1917 universal suffrage proclaimed, includes women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>1928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>1931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>1946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>1952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>1971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1990</td>
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</table>

1918-1922 laws mandated:
- equal pay for equal work
- no stigma attached to unwed mothers
- divorce on demand

Worker and peasant women – all should go to the polls!
Gather under the Red Banner with men! Bring fear to the bourgeoisie!
N. Valerianov, 1925

The revolutionary vanguard and modernist utopianism: making the new woman
Self-Righteousness and Bolshevik “Puritanism”

I was very happy. The Bolsheviks planned their economy and had moved from the fetishization of material goods (which, my parents had taught me, was one of the chief ills of our American civilization). I saw that most Russians ate only black bread, wore one suit until it disintegrated, and used old newspapers for writing letters and for various personal functions. I was going to be part of this society. I was going to be one of the many who did not care to own a second pair of shoes, but who built blast furnaces which were their own. It was September 1932 and I was twenty years old.

John Scott, *Behind the Urals: An American Worker in Russia’s City of Steel* (1942).

You, there, don’t trifle with booze
You’d rather thrash it.
Culturally, roughly,
Powerfully, wrathfully,
Smash daily, At your every step,
Give no rest to the enemy. (1930)
Revolution as Modernization

We are advancing full steam ahead along the path of industrialization—to socialism, and leaving the old Russian backwardness behind. We are becoming a country of metal, an automobilized country, a tractorized country. And when we have put the USSR on an automobile, let’s see the esteemed capitalists try to catch up.

Stalin, speech, February 1931.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>less than 2,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>145,870</td>
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The revolutionary vanguard and modernist utopianism: making the new Russia
The First Five-Year Plan: Let’s do it in Four!

A river appears where none existed before, a river one hundred kilometers long. A swamp is suddenly transformed into a broad lake.… Airplanes fly above the Siberian taiga, where in little cabins live people with squinting eyes clad in strange dress made of animal skins. In the Kalmik region, in the middle of the naked steppe, grow buildings of steel and concrete alongside the felt tents of the nomads. Steel masts rise over the whole country: each mast has four legs and many arms, and each arm grasps metal wires. Through these wires runs a current, runs the power and the might of rivers and waterfalls, of peat swamps and coal beds. All this is in the figures, all this is in the book of figures. And this book is called the Five-Year Plan.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metric tons</th>
<th>Actual 1926</th>
<th>Goal 1928</th>
<th>New goal</th>
<th>Last goal</th>
<th>Actual 1932</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>coal</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>64</td>
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<tr>
<td>oil</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>21.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iron ore</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.2</td>
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The revolutionary vanguard and modernist utopianism: making the new Russia
Our children must not have diarrhea!
Until six months of age, breast milk only.
G. Shubina, 1940

Stalin’s care brightens our children’s future!
I. Toidze, 1947

Boris Vladimirski, *Roses for Stalin* (1949)

Planning + patriarchy = return of autocracy?
Making things up and making history

Come, comrades, join us in the collective farm!

Lenin and Trotsky, October 1919

autocracy and the control of information
Whoever understands history even slightly knows that every revolution has provoked a subsequent counterrevolution ... [Take, for example] the general historical reasons for the victory of the Soviet bureaucracy over the revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat. ...It is not the present bureaucracy which ensured the victory of the October Revolution, but the working and peasant masses under Bolshevik leadership. The bureaucracy began to grow only after the definitive victory, swelling its ranks not only with revolutionary workers but also with representatives of other classes... Those of the present bureaucracy who were Bolsheviks in October in the great majority of cases played no role even slightly important in either the preparation or the conduct of the revolution... This applies above all to Stalin himself. As for the present young bureaucrats, they are chosen and educated by the older ones, most often from among their own children. And it is Stalin who has become the “chief” of this new caste ... 

Trotsky, “How did Stalin defeat the Opposition?” (1935)