

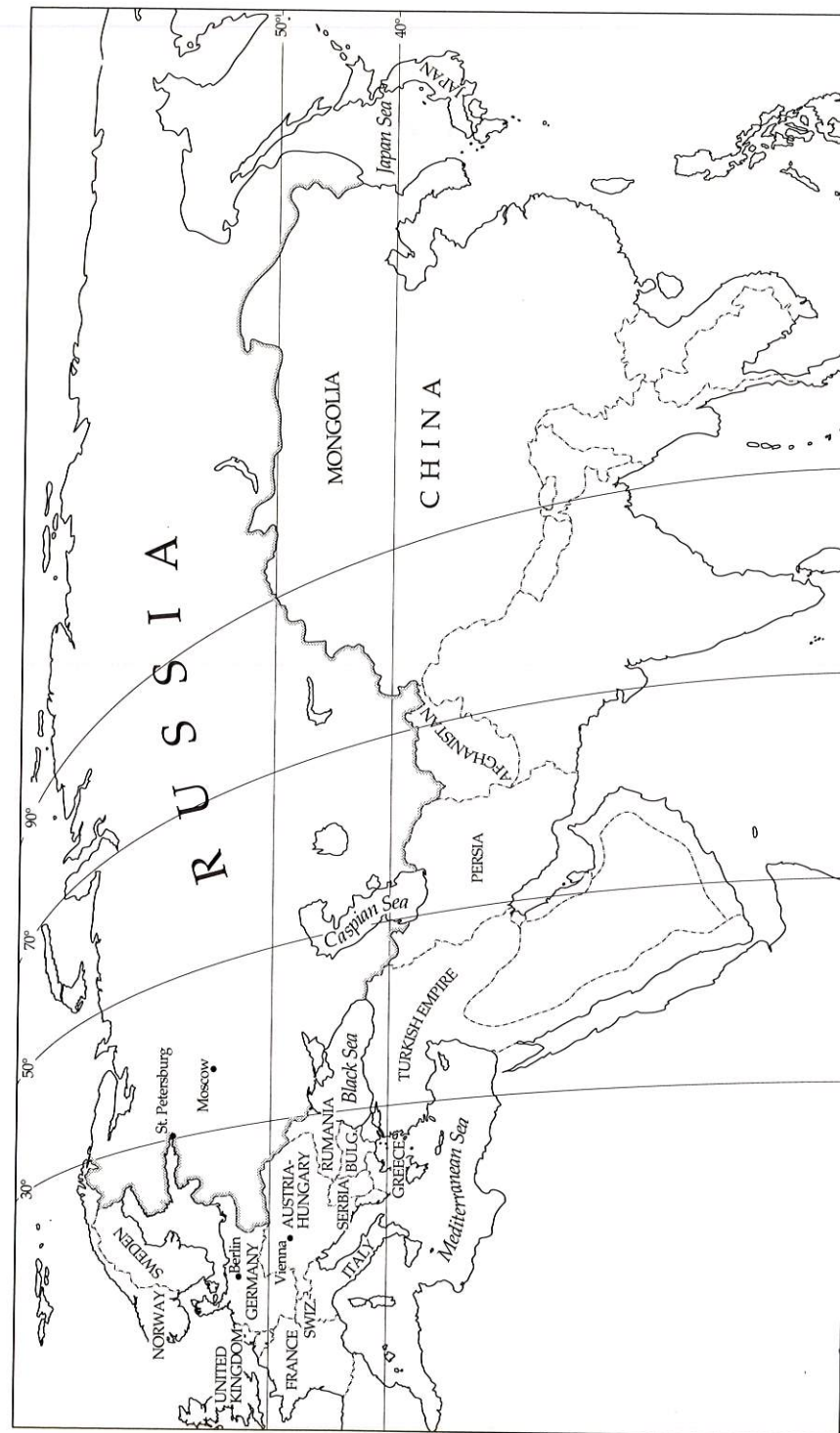
1 Issues and Background

Russia's Past and the Possibilities of its Future

Russia, in 1917, was a backward country in the sense that political, economic and social change had been slower than in other major western European states. Although backward, there had been some developments in the 60 years before 1917. War often accelerates change and Russia had been involved in a massive war since 1914. Would political change be speeded? If so, how would Russia's politics change and how great would it be? Rapid change can lead to instability: if there was quick change, would a period of turmoil follow? With regard to the economy, Russia was late to begin industrialisation but there had been some industrial growth before 1917. Would the pace and form of industrialisation alter, and how would economic and political changes influence society? These are some of the issues which an observer of Russian history would bear in mind. The answers, which are the history of Russia after 1917 (and to this day), are in this book. First, however, what was the condition of Russia in 1917?

Russia

In Russian popular imagination, the country is wide, broad and large. From the sixteenth century onwards Russia was, and still is, the largest country in the world, as far as territory is concerned. During the nineteenth century it was two and a half times the size of the United States and stretched over 5,000 miles (8,600km) from west to east and over 2,000 miles (3,300km) from north to south. Russia was unique in having large parts of its territory in two continents, Europe and Asia. European Russia extended to the Urals mountains and Asian Russia from the Urals to the Pacific Ocean. Most of the population, however, lived in European Russia, and this led to the problem of whether Russia was a European or a Eurasian state. Most of Russia's history has been played out in European Russia, where the original capital, Kiev, and the later capitals of Moscow and St Petersburg are to be found. There was a population explosion in Russia during the nineteenth century and this transformed the country. It grew from about 40 millions in 1815 to about 165 millions in 1913. The government welcomed and regretted this development. On the one hand there were more and more people to inhabit the vast country but, on the other, the Russians had become a minority in their own land by the 1890s. The



Russia, the largest country on Earth

government was shocked to discover that only about 45 per cent of the population regarded themselves as Russian in the 1897 census (millions, according to mother tongue):

The nationalities in Russia in 1897

Great Russians	55.6	Germans	1.8
Ukrainians	22.4	Latvians	1.4
Poles	7.9	Bashkirs	1.3
White Russians	5.8	Lithuanians	1.2
Jews	5.0	Armenians	1.2
Kirgiz	4.0	Moldavians	1.1
Tatar	3.4	Estonians	1.0
Finns	3.1	Mordovians	1.0

The population according to the 1897 census was over 126 millions and the above list of nationalities include only those with over 1 million. There were over 100 nationalities and they included many different races, religions, languages and cultures. The conclusion to be drawn from this was that Russia was an empire and that Russians over the centuries had defeated many native peoples and incorporated them in the empire. This meant that Russia was an imperial, imperialist power and that many nationalities would have preferred, given the opportunity, to be outside the empire and independent. One of the reasons for the expansion of Russia was the desire to improve security. If Russia did not expand into regions which bordered it, other hostile powers might do so. Given the slow communications of the nineteenth century ruling the empire from St Petersburg, perched in the north west corner of the country, was a formidable task. It took weeks to cross Russia, given the few roads. So how was Russia governed?

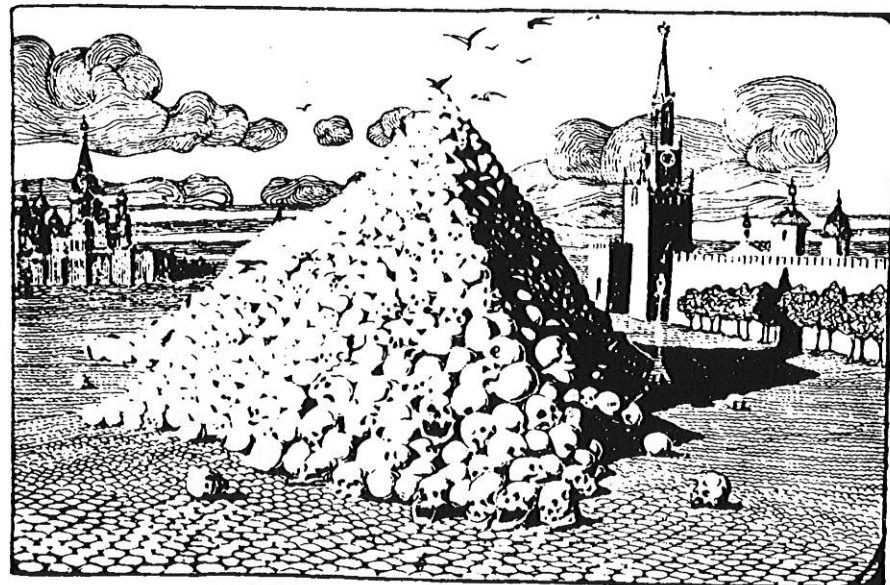
Tsars in the Nineteenth Century and the Extent of Change

Russian tsars claimed absolute power but they faced one abiding question to which they never found an answer. Can absolute power promote enlightenment and economic development without destroying itself? In other words, is it possible to promote modernisation of the state and society within an autocratic framework? Participation by the population in decision making about state goals is called politics. Alexander I (1801-25) initiated reforms but the goal was to exclude the people from politics. The Decembrists, officers and others from the cream of society, attempted to remove his successor, Nicholas I (1825-55), which led to retreat rather than reform. Defeat in the Crimean War (1854-6) laid bare Russia's weakness, so well conceived reforms were set in train and permitted the birth of politics. However, the murder of Alexander II in 1881 convinced Alexander III (1881-94) that the expansion of politics was dangerous. Violence and terrorism was society's response throughout the century, thus making a

dialogue between the rulers and the ruled almost impossible. Russian tsars learned little during the century: at its end they were still claiming to be absolute rulers.

The Revolution of 1905-7

The greatest threat to the Romanov dynasty before 1917 came about almost accidentally on 22 January 1905 when a priest, Father Gapon, led a peaceful march of workers and their families to the Winter Palace to present a petition imploring him to improve their wretched lot. The guards misread the procession as hostile, fired on them and the cavalry charged as well, killing many, if not hundreds. 'Bloody Sunday' irreparably damaged the Tsar's reputation as father of the people. Strikes, demonstrations, spread and the SR terrorist wing became active against the government and in the countryside. Peasants seized land in the countryside. A major factor in the weakness of the state's response was that much of the military was in the Far East, being defeated by the Japanese (the war ended in August 1905). A concerted response was not mounted until soldiers arrived back in European Russia along the Trans-Siberian railway. Had the railway workers prevented their transfer or had the soldiers sided with the population, the monarchy would almost certainly have been swept away. This was the view of Witte. In October 1905 the Tsar issued his manifesto and promised a Duma (parliament), civil rights, including freedom of speech, assembly and worship, the admittance of trade unions, and this was enough for the liberals to change sides and declare themselves content



A cartoonist's response to the October manifesto: the future will be no different than the past with the Tsar continuing to control people's lives

Document: The Fundamental Laws of 23 April 1906

- 1 The Russian State is one and indivisible ...
3. The Russian language is the general language of the state, and its use is compulsory in the army, the navy and state and public institutions ...
4. Supreme Autocratic Power belongs to the emperor of all Russia ...
7. The sovereign emperor exercises power in conjunction with the State Council and the State Duma.
8. The sovereign emperor possesses the initiative in all legislative matters. The Fundamental Laws may be subject to revision in the State Council and the State Duma only on His initiative.
9. The sovereign emperor ratifies the laws. No law can come into force without his approval ...
12. The sovereign emperor takes charge of all external relations of the Russian State. He determines the direction of Russia's foreign policy ...
15. The sovereign emperor appoints and dismisses the Chairman of the Council of Ministers and the individual ministers ...
78. Russian subjects have the right to organise meetings for purposes which are not contrary to the laws, peacefully, and without weapons ...
80. Russian subjects have the right to form societies and associations for purposes that are not in contravention of the laws ...
87. If extraordinary circumstances require legislative action whilst the State Duma is in recess, the Council of Ministers may take recommendations direct to the sovereign emperor. Such a measure, however, may not introduce changes to the Fundamental Laws, the statutes of the State Council and State Duma or in the regulations governing elections to the Council and the Duma. Should such a measure not be introduced as a bill into the Duma within two months of the date of its next meeting ... it loses force ...
98. The State Council and the State Duma are summoned annually by edict of the sovereign emperor ...
106. The State Council and State Duma possess equal legislative powers ...

with the concessions, all of which had been among their demands. They could have insisted on more fundamental reforms but were frightened of plunging the country into anarchy. The hastiness of the liberals was revealed when the Fundamental Laws were promulgated in 1906 and stated that the Tsar was still the autocrat. The Duma was not to restrict the powers of the monarch. One of the most significant events of 1905 was the setting up of soviets or councils. They were spontaneously organised by workers, peasants and soldiers and the most prestigious were in St Petersburg and Moscow. Trotsky became leader of the St Petersburg soviet. The government felt strong enough to use military force against them but Moscow did not give in without a fight. The revolution and the formation of the soviets had taken the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks by surprise and this was symbolised by Lenin's return in December 1905 just in time to see the soviet building burning.

The Russian Orthodox Church

Nicholas I said that Russia meant autocracy, Orthodoxy and (Russian) nationality. The Orthodox Church taught the faithful to obey unquestioningly the Tsar who was the head of the Church. Christianity came to Russia in the tenth century from Byzantium but by the fifteenth century the Orthodox Church was free of any foreign influence and regarded Russia as the centre of the true Christian faith. The Russian language evolved out of Old Church Slavonic, used in the Church's beautiful liturgy, and has Old Church Slavonic, Greek and Latin letters. Orthodoxy was not influenced by the renaissance, the enlightenment or any other European intellectual movement. In western Europe there was often tension between the Church and the ruler but not in Russia. By the nineteenth century the Orthodox Church was conservative and impervious to reform ideas but this began to change at the end of the century.

The People

Russia, like other European states, was divided into estates or classes. The 1897 census is very revealing (figures are per cent):

Ruling class (Tsar, court and government)	0.5
Upper class (nobility, higher clergy and military officers)	12.0
Business class (factory owners, merchants, bankers)	1.5
Working class (factory workers and small traders)	4.0
Peasants (rural dwellers and agricultural workers)	82.0

The striking dominance of peasants and small number of workers in Russian society reveal that Russia was only just at the beginning of the industrial era. In Russia industrialisation began during the 1890s. About one-third of rural dwellers were state peasants until the 1830s and then were given land and some freedom but were still taxed. Until 1861 another third of the rural dwellers, called serfs, were the private property of land owners but were then emancipated or freed. They received on average less land than they had farmed for themselves before emancipation and also had to buy the land from the state (which had paid off the landlords). The peasants regarded this as doubly unjust, viewing the land as God's or, in other words, free, and obtaining less land than they had previously farmed. Also remember that population was increasing rapidly so that more mouths had to be fed from the same amount of land. The Emancipation Act was forced on the landowners by the Tsar who feared unrest unless serfs were freed. However, the landlords were successful in revising the original legislation in their favour and this is the major reason why it was so ungenerous. In reality the landlords were storing up trouble for themselves in the future. The land question remained a major political problem. Harvest failures at the turn of the century led to crises and contributed to the Revolution of 1905-7 which saw major changes forced on

the Tsar. Redemption payments were ended and Petr Stolypin, the Prime Minister, placed his 'wager on the strong'.

Industry

Russia's industry before the 1890s was mainly for defence, the production of cannon and other articles for war. The Urals, rich in iron ore, was a centre of the metal industry from the eighteenth century. Moscow and St Petersburg had many textile enterprises. However, Russia was a late starter in the race for modernisation. This was a grave disadvantage from the defence point of view because it meant that other European states, such as Britain, France, Germany and Italy, and also the United States and Japan, were capable of producing better weapons than Russia. War, therefore, now posed a threat to the very existence of the Russian state. Coming late was also an advantage as it permitted Russia to import the most advanced technology without having to develop it itself. The huge size of Russia meant that communications had to develop in order to promote industrialisation. Railway building became a major activity and the network expanded from 21,228km in 1881 to 70,156km in 1913. This outstanding achievement was the result of the efforts of Sergei Witte, Minister of Finance from 1893 to 1903 who consciously attempted to catch up with the more advanced industrial states. Since there was little private capital in Russia, the state played the major role in industrialisation, including the attraction of foreign capital. Russia paid a higher rate of interest for imported capital and the state guaranteed interest payments. The Russian state also negotiated large loans from foreign bankers, mainly British, French and Belgian. Witte took the risk of putting the ruble on the gold standard (rubles were directly exchangeable for gold) and it worked because he imposed high taxes in the home market and high duties on imported goods, partly to protect infant Russian industries from foreign competition. Russia consistently exported more goods than it imported and the surplus was 186 million rubles annually between 1901 and 1910. There were 10 pre-1914 rubles to the pound sterling. Recession hit Russia at the turn of the century and this was followed by the Revolution of 1905-7. Industry again took off in 1909 and, between then and 1913, Russia was a boom economy with average annual growth rates higher than those of the US.

Russia's Place in the World

Russia was not alone in the world, it had to compete with its neighbours and, moreover, defend its independence. Napoleon posed a grave threat at the beginning of the nineteenth century but he was defeated at the battle of Moscow, 1812 (Tchaikovsky's stirring *1812 Overture* celebrates this victory). Russia was popularly depicted in English cartoons as a bear. Until the Crimean War (1854-6) it was a friendly, cuddly bear but afterwards it was a

hostile bear ready to devour the careless. This revealed that Britain feared Russia as a competitor for influence in Europe and also as a threat to India. Fear of Germany led Britain and France to come together with Russia but this meant that Germany, which bordered Russia, was a hostile power. The agreement was that if Russia, France or Britain were attacked by Germany, the others would come to its aid. But what would happen if Germany went to war without declaring war on any of them? What if one of them declared war on Germany? As it turned out all three declared war on Germany rather than the other way round.

Why was it important for Russia to compete with other European powers? What does competition entail? Before 1914 in Europe it was natural to think of resolving conflicts by military means. True, there had not been a war in Europe since 1870 (except in the Balkans) but the belief was that wars would be short and not very destructive. The industrial revolution in France took off in the second quarter of the nineteenth century and in Germany in the second half of the century. Russia only began in the 1890s. Hence, there was a technology gap by 1914. German industry was much more efficient than Russian industry in supplying the military. Some Russian officers in 1914 were so naïve as to believe they could defeat Germany, mainly because they had more men. Throughout the nineteenth-century reform in Russia was driven by military defeat and the fear that if it did not catch up it might become a colony of the European powers. The major reforms of the 1860s and 1870s which transformed the countryside, local government, justice, education and the military all stemmed from Russia's defeat in 1856. The 1905-7 revolution again accelerated reform and by 1914 Russia was rapidly becoming like other European states. In 1914 Russia had a parliament, political parties, a good legal system, a rapidly expanding banking system, an excellent education system and a growing economy. These were the strengths. What were the weaknesses? The main weakness was the tsarist system itself. Had the Tsar had the foresight to implement a constitutional monarchy as in Britain and to a large extent in Germany, had he been willing to follow the advice of outstanding ministers such as Witte and Stolypin, the monarchy could have been transformed and saved. However, Nicholas II, far from seeing the need for reform, bitterly regretted signing the October manifesto and, thereafter, was concerned to claw back as many of the concessions granted as possible. He even contemplated dissolving the Duma in 1914 - one which was causing the monarch few problems. The weaknesses were highlighted by the outbreak of war in 1914. The army was in the middle of a reform (to be completed in 1917), it was unprepared for war, as was the government and bureaucracy (officials who run the state). Military defeat led to Nicholas's decision to become commander-in-chief of the armed forces and leave St Petersburg (now renamed Petrograd because the former name sounded too German) for Mogilev, headquarters of the General Staff

in 1915 was typically ill-judged as he had no military experience and all Russian defeats would be blamed on him. He left the Tsarina, Alexandra, to look after the ship in Petrograd and this was again not a wise move as she, a German, was naturally suspected of not being fully committed to Russia. Ministers who contradicted her were sacked and she was too inclined to take the advice of the monk Rasputin. The kindest thing to say about the government was that it was incompetent and when industrial leaders, in frustration, set up the War Industries Committee, the government would not take its advice.

Was Reform Started from within the Government Possible?

So the conclusion is that Russia had the potential to reform in 1914 but that the monarch, the government and the court did not see any reason to reform. Reform to them meant a loss of power and influence. The Tsar took his oath at his coronation seriously when he had sworn to continue as autocrat. Reform to him meant renegeing on that promise. He was not bright enough to perceive that the management of a state experiencing industrial and agricultural development needs to be continually refined. This was partly due to his entourage who had little interest or competence in economics and regarded physical work as vulgar. The monarchy might have blundered along in peacetime but the advent of war in 1914 was a disaster for it. The sheer incompetence with which it conducted the war sealed its own fate. This was all the more frustrating for the pool of talent which was available and was very eager to deploy their skills. The tsarist government and bureaucracy just could not cope with the demands of a modern war. The monarchy is often viewed as tyrannical and this is suggested as the main reason why it failed. It is more perceptive to regard it as so incompetent that it was not able to save itself. By 1914 hardly anyone had a good word to say about the dynasty, it had alienated the thinking classes, the new factory owners, bankers, the lot. It is also true that the level of brain power in the royal family was not very high and that the best brains in Russia had little contact with the court.

Questions to Consider

- What did the Tsar regard as his main duties?
- Why was there increasing opposition to the Tsar and his regime by 1900?
- What concessions did the Tsar make in 1905 and how successful were they in maintaining his power?
- Was revolution inevitable by 1914?

EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

- 1 Why was Tsarist government able to survive the 1905 revolution?
- 2 Why did the rulers of Russia resort to repression so often c. 1900-29?

- Was Reform Started from within the Government Possible?

Chronology

Note: Until 1 February 1918 the Russians used the Julian (named after Julius Caesar) calendar. In the twentieth century it was 13 days behind the Gregorian (named after Pope Gregory) calendar used in the rest of Europe. All the dates until 1 February 1918 are given in the Julian calendar. If you want to express all these dates in the Gregorian calendar, just add 13 days. The 25 October becomes the 7 November 1917, and so on. Hence the February Revolution took place in March according to the Gregorian calendar and the October Revolution happened in November, by the same token.

1917

- 31 January Strikes and unrest in many parts of Russia, especially Petrograd
- 10 February The last report by the Speaker of the Duma to the Tsar in which he recommends a reshuffle of the government and the appointment of ministers who enjoy popular trust
- 18 February Strike begins in the Putilov works in Petrograd
- 19 February Bread shortages begin in Petrograd
- 23 February Demonstration by women marking the socialist women's congress, and is joined by locked out workers of the Putilov works
- 23-24 February First worker demonstrations in the centre of Petrograd which lead to armed confrontation with the police and army
- 25 February The strike in Petrograd becomes a general strike. The Tsar orders the demonstrations to be dispersed by any means necessary. The troops fire on the demonstrators, causing many casualties
- 26 February Duma members refuse to obey the Tsar's edict to disband
- 26-27 February The Petrograd garrison mutiny and join the demonstrators. This results in the victory of the February Revolution.
- 27 February The Duma elects a 12 member executive committee, with members from all the leading parties, chaired by M.V. Rodzyanko. The Petrograd soviet of workers' deputies convenes for the first time, in the Tauride Palace, Petrograd. It elects a shadow government, a provisional executive committee of the soviet of workers' deputies. It is led by Kerensky and Chkheidze.
- 28 February The provisional Duma committee sets up a military commission and a food commission together with the Petrograd soviet. The first number of *Izvestiya* (news in Russian), the organ of the Petrograd soviet appears. Elections to the Moscow soviet of workers' deputies.
- 1-3 March Soviets of workers' deputies set up in the leading Russian cities.
- 1 March The British and French governments recognise *de facto* (as a fact but not in law, not *de jure*) the provisional Duma committee. The first meeting of the Moscow soviet of workers' deputies. The Petrograd soviet becomes the soviet of workers' and soldiers' deputies after some soldiers join. Order no. 1 of the Petrograd soviet is published and envisages the formation of soldiers' committees in all units to be responsible for the control of weapons.
- 2 March The Provisional Duma committee announces the formation of a

- Provisional Government, headed by Prince G.E. Lvov. All ministers are bourgeois (Milyukov as foreign minister, Guchkov as war minister) except Kerensky (SR) as Minister for Justice. Nicholas II abdicates in favour of his son, Alexei, then in favour of his brother Mikhail, who declares he will only accept the crown if offered by the Constituent Assembly.
- 7-12 March In his four 'letters from afar' Lenin protests against the article in *Pravda* by Stalin and Kamenev in which they support the defence of Russia against Germany.
- 8 March Nicholas II is arrested and with his family is taken to Tsarskoe Tselo (now Pushkin).
- 10 March The Petrograd soviet and the Petrograd Society of Entrepreneurs agree on an eight hour day for workers and factory committees are to be set up.
- 12 March Stalin, Kamenev and other Bolsheviks, in exile in various parts of Russia, return to Petrograd. They immediately support the policy of the Petrograd soviet and provisional government.
- 24 March Bread rationing introduced in Petrograd
- 25 March State grain monopoly introduced along with strict price control of food because of the great shortage of food.
- 29 March-2 April A Russian conference of soviets decides to support the Provisional Government to the extent that it implements a 'programme of revolutionary democracy'.
- 3 April Lenin, his wife Krupskaya, and other Bolsheviks return to Petrograd from Zürich
- 4 April Lenin addresses Bolsheviks and members of the soviet on the tasks of the proletariat, known as the April Theses (see page 60).
- 20-21 April Demonstrations in Petrograd against Milyukov's note to the Allies in which he confirms Russia will continue in the war and seek to obtain 'those guarantees and sanctions which are indispensable for the prevention of sanguinary conflicts in the future'. The soviet and demonstrators see this as seeking to obtain foreign territory and eventually force Milyukov to resign.
- 4 May Trotsky arrives back in Russia from exile.
- 7-12 May All-Russian conference of Mensheviks and united organisations of the RSDRP (Bolsheviks) fail to agree.
- 3-24 June The 1st Congress of the soviets of the workers' and soldiers' deputies takes place in Petrograd and is dominated by the SRs and Mensheviks, the moderate socialists. The Bolsheviks, the radical or left socialists, only obtain 35 of the 256 places on the executive committee.
- 10 June The Ukrainian Central Rada (soviet) declares in its 1st Universal that autonomy for Ukraine is its immediate goal.
- 18 June-1 July The Russian army goes on the offensive (the Kerensky offensive) on the south west front, commanded by General Brusilov. By mid-July it has come to a standstill and demonstrations against the Kerensky offensive in Petrograd reveal Bolshevik slogans in the majority for the first time.
- 2 July Trotsky's party, the Mezhraintsy, which was between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks, resolves to merge with the

- Bolsheviks and this adds, among others, A.A. Ioffe and A.V. Lunacharsky, to the Bolshevik cause.
- 3-4 July An armed demonstration of workers in Petrograd causes the Provisional Government to declare martial law, fearing a coup, and to arrest leading Bolsheviks.
- 7 July The Provisional Government occupies the Bolshevik bureau and *Pravda*, Trotsky and Kamenev are arrested and Lenin flees to Finland (11 July).
- 8 July Prince Lvov resigns and Alexander Kerensky becomes Prime Minister.
- 19 July After the débâcle on the south west front, Brusilov is replaced by General Kornilov as Russian commander-in-chief.
- 26 July-3 August The 6th Congress of the RSDRP (Bolsheviks) resolves to drop the slogan 'all power to the soviets' and strengthen the Party as the '*avant garde* in the struggle against counter-revolution'.
- 1 August Nicholas II and his family are moved to Tobolsk.
- 19-21 August German offensive in the Baltic region, eventually taking Riga (3 September).
- 25-30 August Attempt by Kornilov to occupy Petrograd and dissolve the soviet; Kerensky and he discussed this move but Kerensky pulls out and then declares Kornilov a rebel.
- 1 September Russia becomes a republic and a five member directory under Kerensky takes over.
- 8-9 September Bolsheviks obtain a majority in the presidium of the Petrograd soviet, chaired by Trotsky.
- 19 September The Bolsheviks obtain a majority in the executive committee of the Moscow soviet.
- 25 September Trotsky is elected head of the Petrograd soviet.
- 10 October Bolsheviks achieve an absolute majority in the Petrograd and Moscow soviets. A secret meeting of the Central Committee of the RSDRP (Bolsheviks) resolves to launch an armed uprising. Only Kamenev and Zinoviev oppose this.
- 12 October The Petrograd soviet sets up a Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC) to combat counter-revolution. This then permits the Bolsheviks to organise an uprising through the MRC.
- 24-25 October The October revolution takes place during the night when troops and sailors occupy important points in Petrograd.
- 25-26 October During the night Bolshevik units take the Winter Palace, arrest 13 Provisional Government ministers but Kerensky escapes dressed as a female nurse. The 2nd All-Russian Congress of soviets convenes in Petrograd and confirms the seizure of power as Bolsheviks and left SRs are in the majority. Right SRs and Mensheviks leave the congress in protest. The congress then declares that power has passed to the soviets.
- 26-27 October During an all night sitting the congress passes the decree on peace and the decree on land. A provisional Council (Soviet) of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom) is confirmed, headed by Lenin, consisting only of Bolsheviks. It will be provisional until a Constituent Assembly convenes.
- 3 November The Bolsheviks finally take the Kremlin and Moscow.

- 12 November Elections to the Constituent Assembly begin; SRs and Mensheviks obtain 62% of the votes, the Bolsheviks 25%, the Kadets and other bourgeois parties 13%. However, the Bolsheviks are in the majority in the garrisons and in Moscow and Petrograd.
- 22 November In Brest-Litovsk Germans and Russians agree on a 10 day armistice.
- 26 November-5 December The 4th Congress of the SRs decides to expel those left SRs who support the Bolsheviks.
- 2 December Russia and Germany agree on a further armistice of 28 days. The Supreme Council of the National Economy (VSNKh) is set up to supervise the Russian economy and is subordinate to Sovnarkom.
- 9 December The Bolsheviks and left SRs agree to form a coalition government.
- 9-15 December The first round of peace talks between Russia and Germany and its allies at Brest-Litovsk.
- 1918**
- 12 January The 3rd Russian Congress of Soviets adopts the declaration on the rights of workers and the oppressed people, drafted by Lenin, and contains much which is included in the RSFSR constitution of 10 June 1918. Russia is declared a Soviet republic and a federation of national Soviet republics is to be formed. All power rests with the workers and the previous ruling class may no longer participate in the running of the state.
- 15-26 January The Bolsheviks take power in Kiev after a successful uprising against the Ukrainian Central Rada which then moves to Zhitomir.
- 19 January The Polish Legion (25,000 men) declares war on the Bolsheviks and occupies Mogilev, headquarters of the Russian Supreme Command (20 January) and Minsk (22 January).
- 27 January Germany and its allies conclude a separate peace with the Ukrainian Central Rada.
- 1 February becomes 14 February as the Gregorian calendar is introduced.**
- 18 February Beginning of German-Austrian offensive on a broad front after peace talks fail; Russians offer little resistance.
- 23 February The Workers' and Peasants' Red Army is founded. Mass mobilisation to save the socialist motherland.
- 3 March Brest-Litovsk Peace is signed between Russia and Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey. Russia recognises Poland, Finland, Ukraine and the Baltic region as independent. Russia loses 26% of its population, 27% of its arable land, 26% of its railways, 33% of its textile industry, 73% of its iron industry and 75% of its coal industry.
- 6-8 March At the 7th Bolshevik Congress the name of the Party is changed from Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (Bolsheviks) to Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) (RCP(B)). The Congress confirms the Brest-Litovsk Peace, proposed by Lenin, by 30 votes to 12, with Trotsky and Bukharin voting against. A commission is set up to draft a new Party programme, chaired by Lenin.
- 9 March British troops land in Murmansk and begin the Allied Intervention. Trotsky resigns as People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs and on 8 April takes over the military.

- 10-11 March The Soviet government moves from Petrograd to Moscow and on 12 March Moscow is proclaimed the capital of the Soviet state.
- 15 March The 4th Congress of Soviets ratifies the Brest-Litovsk Peace and in protest the left SRs leave Sovnarkom.
- 5 April Japanese troops land in Vladivostok and begin their intervention in the Russian civil war.
- 8 April Trotsky is appointed People's Commissar for War. The Red Flag with the inscription RSFSR becomes the national flag.
- 13 April General Denikin takes over command of the Volunteer Army (anti-Bolshevik) after General Kornilov is killed near Ekaterinodar (now Krasnodar).
- 28 April *Pravda* and *Izvestiya* publish Lenin's 'the immediate tasks of Soviet power' which demands a new type of soviet official, the reorganisation of the administration (bureaucracy) and the nationalisation of production.
- 11 June Committees of the poor (*kombedy*) are set up and to be provided with grain and agricultural implements.
- July-February 1919 The Reds (Bolsheviks) defend Tsaritsyn (later Stalingrad, now Volgograd) against the Don Cossacks under Krasnov and the Volunteer Army.
- 4-10 July The 5th Congress of Soviets adopts the constitution of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic (RSFSR). Soviets are simultaneously ruling bodies and social mass organisations of the workers. Workers are given preference over peasants in elections to these soviets. Hostile social elements, the former ruling class, priests, etc. have no vote. There are soviets at all levels, village, city, oblast and at the republican level, the chair of the central executive committee is head of state.
- 6-7 July SR uprising against the Bolsheviks in Moscow and other cities leads to the murder of the German ambassador, von Mirbach, and the arrest of Dzerzhinsky, head of the Cheka, but he is soon released. The Bolsheviks suppress the uprising ruthlessly.
- 16-17 July Nicholas II and his family are murdered by the Bolsheviks in Ekaterinburg, on orders from Moscow.
- 4 August All bourgeois newspapers are banned.
- 15-16 August US troops land in Vladivostok and begin their intervention in the Russian Civil War.
- 13 November The Soviet government annuls the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and opens the way for Soviet troops to enter formerly German occupied areas (the Reds fail to reoccupy the Baltic States).
- 30 November The Council for Workers' and Peasants' Defence is set up to mobilise all resources for the defence of Soviet power. In April 1920 it is renamed the Council for Labour and Defence (STO) and is dissolved on 28 April 1937.
- 1919**
- 1 January The Belorussian Soviet Republic is founded; its capital is Minsk.
- 2-6 March The Communist International, the Comintern or III International is founded in Moscow: Zinoviev is elected President.
- 18-23 March The 8th Congress of the RCP(B) adopts a new programme, the goal

- of which is socialism.
- 30 March Mikhail Kalinin is elected chair of the central executive committee of the soviets in place of Yakov Sverdlov who died. Hence, Kalinin becomes Soviet head of state (not a powerful position as power in reality rests with the leadership of the Communist Party).
- 21 June-7 January 1920 A great offensive of the Reds on the eastern front destroys the White armies of Admiral Kolchak. The Reds capture Perm (1 July), Ekaterinburg (20 July), Chelyabinsk (24 July), Omsk (14 November) and Krasnoyarsk (7 January 1920). Kolchak retreats to Irkutsk.
- 11 October Red offensive against General Denikin stops him at Tula and then rapidly drives him southwards. Voronezh is recaptured on 24 October, Kharkov on 12 December Tsaritsyn on 4 January 1920 and Rostov on Don on 8 January.
- 4-14 November Reds bring resistance of Kolchak's armies on eastern front to an end.
- 8 December The Allied Supreme Council decides that the Curzon Line is the provisional eastern border of Poland.
- 1920**
- 7 February Admiral Kolchak is executed in Irkutsk by the Reds.
- 29 March-5 April The 9th Congress of the RCP(B) lays down the economic tasks of the state and adopts the plan for the electrification of Russia (GOELRO).
- 25 April Polish offensive (led by Josef Pilsudski) against the Soviet government, together with the anti-Bolshevik Ukrainian government of Petlyura.
- 26 May-16 June Red counter-offensive against the Polish forces successful; Zhitomir falls on 7 July and Kiev on 12 June.
- 19 July-7 August 2nd Congress of the Comintern in Petrograd and Moscow brings together 217 delegates from 37 countries. The Comintern adopts the 21 points, drafted by Lenin, for admission to it. The headquarters of the executive committee of the Comintern is to be Moscow. The language of the Comintern was German as it expected to move to Berlin after the successful socialist revolution there.
- 17 November The Reds take Yalta and within 10 days the Crimea is in Bolshevik hands. The Whites flee abroad, mainly to Yugoslavia and France. The Reds have won the Civil War.
- 1921**
- January Menshevik and SR leaders flee abroad and the Mensheviks set up their centre in Berlin and the SRs in Paris.
- 22 February A state planning commission (Gosplan) is established as the supreme planning authority in the country.
- 2-18 March The Kronstadt uprising against Bolshevik rule. The island base, in the Gulf of Finland, was of great strategic importance and the Bolsheviks suppressed the uprising of the sailors with huge losses on both sides.
- 8-16 March The 10th Congress of the RCP(B) is shocked by the uprising and

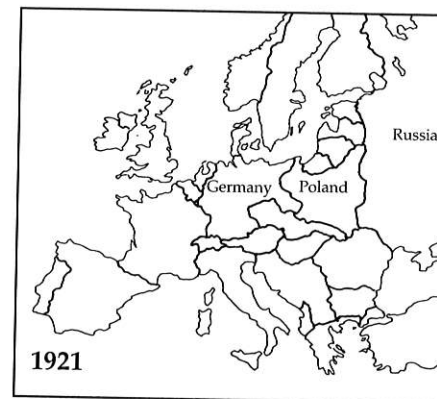
under Lenin's leadership introduces the New Economic Policy (NEP) and bans factionalism (organised opposition) in the Party.
 18 March Treaty of Riga ends war between Poland and Russia.
 22 June-12 July 3rd Congress of the Comintern in Moscow with 608 delegates from 52 countries (including 48 communist parties) attending.

1922

6 February With the Civil War over, the Cheka is replaced by the State Political Administration (GPU).
 27 March-2 April Despite his declining health Lenin delivers the main speech and reports on the successes of NEP and announces more severe measures against capitalists in the country.
 3 April Stalin is elected General Secretary (Gensek) of the RCP(B).
 10 April-19 May Genoa conference on economic affairs fails to resolve problem of Soviet responsibility for Tsarist debts. It is the first time that a Soviet delegation participates in an international conference. Nearby at Rapallo, Rathenau, the German foreign minister, and Chicherin, the commissar for foreign affairs, sign the Rapallo treaty which establishes diplomatic and trade relations.
 30 December The 1st All-Union Congress of Soviets convenes with 2,215 delegates (1,727 from the RSFSR, 364 from the Ukrainian, 91 from the Transcaucasian and 33 from the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republics). They adopt a state treaty to establish the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Kalinin chairs the new Soviet executive committee.

1923

4 January Lenin, very ill, adds a postscript to his Testament, advising that Stalin be removed from positions of power at the centre because of character defects.
 20 April At the 12th Congress of the RCP(B) Trotsky presents a gloomy economic picture and describes the scissors crisis, caused by rising industrial and sinking agricultural prices. (Lenin is absent ill from the Congress, 17-25 April.)



Russia's western border after the Treaties of Brest-Litovsk (1918) and Riga (1921)

15 October The declaration of the 46, signed by left opposition groups, including E. Preobrazhensky, protests against Stalin and calls for free discussion within the Party. It is distributed to members of the Politburo.
 15 December Stalin opens a campaign against 'Trotskyism' in *Pravda* in response to Trotsky's attacks against bureaucratisation (too much bureaucracy) in the Party and the lack of inner Party democracy.

1924

21 January Lenin dies in Gorky, near Moscow, and is succeeded by three men, the triumvirate, Stalin, Kamenev and Zinoviev.
 26 January-2 February At the 2nd All-Union Congress of Soviets Stalin swears to uphold Lenin's legacy and presents himself as the leading follower of the dead leader.
 27 January Lenin's embalmed body is placed in a specially built mausoleum in Red Square, Moscow. (It is still there.)
 31 January The plenum of the Central Committee of the RCP(B) resolves, after the great purge of the Party in 1923, to concentrate on the recruitment of workers. On 1 October 1924 it had recruited 241,600 new members.
 2 February Great Britain recognises, diplomatically, the Soviet Union. Many other European states follow.
 23-31 May At the 13th Congress of the RCP(B), Zinoviev and Kamenev attack Trotsky, with Stalin keeping his counsel. Lenin's Letter to the Congress, in which, he comments on the qualities of the leading Bolsheviks, and his postscript, in which, he speaks of Stalin's character defects, are read to the Congress but it is decided not to publish them (they were first published in the Soviet Union under Gorbachev).

1925

14 January A free labour market is re-established: those wishing to hire labour no longer need to go to official employment bureaux.
 20 January Diplomatic relations established between the USSR and Japan and north Sakhalin is returned to the Soviet Union.
 26 January A Party Central Committee (CC) plenum dismisses Trotsky as chair of the Revolutionary War Council and as People's Commissar for War and appoints Frunze to succeed him.
 1 March A marriage law states that women have the right to retain their surname after marriage but that both partners must agree beforehand on the family name as double-barrelled names are not permitted. They must also agree on the surname of their children.
 10 April Tsaritsyn is renamed Stalingrad
 14 April Bukharin, in an article in *Pravda* encourages the peasants to enrich themselves and states that they need not fear any restrictive measures against them.
 27-29 April At the 15th Conference of the RCP(B) Stalin's concept of socialism in one country is adopted against the opposition of Trotsky, Kamenev and Zinoviev.
 13 May The Turkmen and Uzbek Soviet Republics join the USSR.

- 10 July TASS is set up (the telegraphic agency of the Soviet Union) as the official information source of information.
- 12 October German-Soviet economic and trade treaty is signed, affording the USSR long term credits.
- 18-31 December The 14th Party Congress in Moscow adopts Stalin's views on industrialisation, a new Party statute (renaming the Party, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)), condemns Kamenev and Zinoviev (new opposition) in their protest against Stalin's socialism in one country concept.

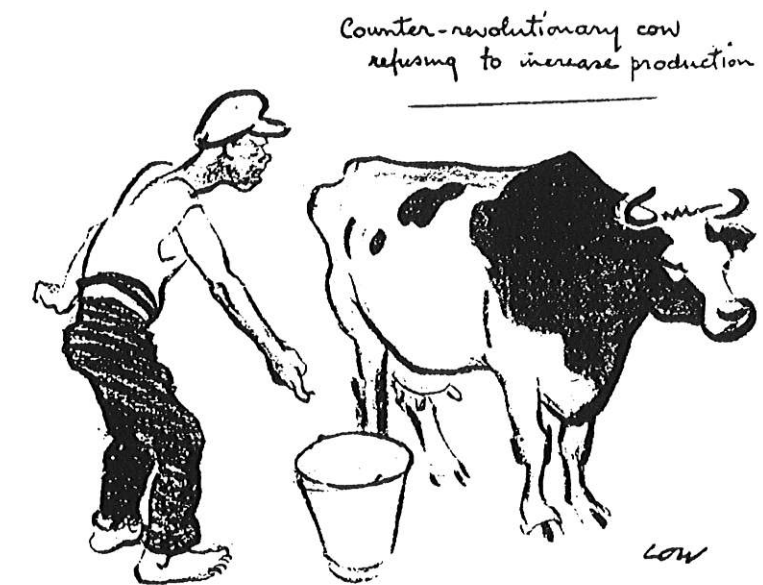
1926

- 1 January The CPSU(B) has 1,078,185 members (638,355 full members and 439,830 candidate members), of which 750,000 are in the RSFSR, 167,000 in Ukraine and 16,000 are in Belorussia.
- 4 January Zinoviev is replaced by Sergei Kirov as Party leader in Leningrad.
- 10 February Kamenev, who lost his position as deputy chair of Sovnarkom after the 14th Party Congress and was made commissar for trade, publishes a new economic programme which corresponds to the resolutions of the Congress.
- 6-9 April At a CC plenum Trotsky and Kamenev argue for the more rapid growth of industry against the official Party line.
- 14-23 July At a joint plenum of the CC and the Central Control Commission (CCC) Trotsky presents the declaration of the 13, opposing the Stalin group in the leadership. The argument for more rapid industrialisation is rejected and Zinoviev is removed from the Politburo.
- 23 and 26 October At a joint plenum of the CC and the CCC Trotsky is voted off the Politburo, Zinoviev ceases to be head of the Comintern and Kamenev is removed as a candidate member of the Politburo.
- 17-31 December The first Soviet census reveals that the population is 147 million or 13 million more than in 1923: 18% of the population is urban and 82% rural. There are only 31 cities with a population of over 100,000 but the rapid growth of the urban population, it grew annually at 5% over the years 1923-6, reveals the rapid economic changes underway.

1927

- 1 January * Russian industrial production is now 11% and heavy industry 22% above that of 1913. Privately owned factories only account for 24% of the global output. Agriculture is still below the 1913 level despite the fact that the arable (cultivated) area is now 110.2 million ha, compared to 105 million ha in 1913. However, 28.3% of the 25 million farms have no draught power (horses, oxen) and 31.6% have no agricultural implements or equipment.
- 12 May * The British police raid the Arcos (All-Russian Co-operative Society) building in London searching for incriminating evidence. There are anti-British demonstrations in Moscow and this results in Britain breaking off diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union (re-established on 3 October 1929).
- 9 August After 12 days of debate in a joint plenum of the CC and CCC,

- Trotsky, Kamenev and Zinoviev defend their views and the exclusion of Trotsky and Zinoviev from the CC is overturned but they receive a severe reprimand.
 - 3 September The leaders of the opposition again send a letter to the CC, signed by 13 of them, criticising the Party leadership and demanding a debate within the Party.
 - 21-23 October At a joint plenum of the CC and CCC Trotsky and Zinoviev are expelled from the CC because of their continuing opposition to Party policy.
 - 12-14 November A joint plenum of the CC and CCC expels Trotsky and Zinoviev from the Party and Kamenev and others from the CC and the CCC.
 - 2-19 December The 15th Party Congress confirms the expulsion of Trotsky and Zinoviev from the Party and Kamenev and another 74 opposition figures lose their Party membership and the same fate is meted out to 23 members of the 'anti-revolutionary' group lead by Sapronov. The Congress decides on the collectivisation of agriculture and the drafting of a five year plan for the Soviet economy. The main victor is Stalin.
- 1928
- 10 January The GPU deports 30 members of opposition groups from Moscow.
 - 16 January Trotsky is told to leave Moscow and go to Verny (later Alma Ata, now Almaty), Kazakhstan, on the Soviet-Chinese frontier.
 - 27 January Kamenev and Zinoviev confess their errors in *Pravda*, declare they no longer belong to the opposition.



Agricultural production in 1927 was still less than in 1913

- 18 May-6 July Moscow trial of 53 engineers and technicians from the Donbass accused of anti-Soviet activities ends with five death sentences and long periods of imprisonment for others. The trial reveals the growing tension between the state and specialists.
- 1929**
- 18 January Stalin succeeds in the Politburo in forcing through the banishment of Trotsky from the Soviet Union, against the opposition of Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsy. Trotsky leaves Alma Ata on 22 January and is to cross the Soviet-Turkish border to Constantinople. On 10 February he leaves Odessa by boat accompanied by his wife and his elder son.
- 16-23 April A CC plenum agrees measures against the Right Opposition in the Party and prepares a purge of members.
- 23-29 April The 16th Party Congress adopts the first Five Year Plan (FYP) for the development of the economy (eventually the first FYP ran from 1 October 1928 to 31 December 1932) and condemns the right deviation (Bukharin and Rykov) as a great danger to the Party.
- 25 November Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsy declare that they will obey the CC.
- 1930**
- 30 January A CC decree on the liquidation of kulak farms and the speeding up of collectivisation. Kulaks are not allowed to join kolkhozes (collective farms) as they are regarded as hostile social elements and must leave areas which have been collectivised. All kulak property can be confiscated without compensation.
- 2 March In an article in *Pravda*, 'Dizzy with Success', Stalin chastises those who have forced peasants into collectives and permits them to leave if they so desire. They rush out of the kolkhozes but Stalin's move is only tactical as his goal was to ensure that the spring sowing would not be interrupted. Later the peasants are re-collectivised.
- 1 April The number of unemployed is 1,081,000 or 700,000 less than a year earlier when unemployment reached its peak.
- 26 June-13 July The 16th Party Congress confirms rapid collectivisation and measures against right deviationists.
- 4 November The homes of Rykov, Bukharin and Tomsy are searched by the GPU.
- 25 November-7 December Trial of 'industrial party' members who are accused of promoting armed foreign intervention (especially by France).
- 19 December Molotov succeeds Rykov as chair of Sovnarkom.
- 1931**
- 1-9 March Moscow Menshevik trial involving former leaders of the right wing of the RSDRP (Sukhanov and Groman), accused of conspiring with *émigré* Mensheviks against the Soviet Union, results in long prison sentences. David Ryazanov, a well known Marxist theoretician and director of the Marx Engels Institute is dismissed and expelled from the Party.
- 8-17 March The 6th Congress of Soviets elects Bukharin, Rykov, Tomsy and

- Krupskaya (Lenin's widow) and other members of the former opposition to the central executive committee after Stalin declares that the struggle against the Right Opposition has ended.
- 15 June A CC plenum decides on the construction of the Moscow underground, the Metro. Work begins in 1932 and the first stretch (11.6km long with 13 stations) is opened on 15 May 1935.
- 1932**
- 21 January-25 July The Soviet Union seeks to establish friendly relations with all states along its borders and resolve all existing problems. This policy had already produced results with treaties of friendship and neutrality having been signed with Turkey (17 December 1925), Lithuania (28 September 1926), Iran (1 October 1927) and with Afghanistan (24 June 1931). Further treaties are signed with Finland (21 January 1932), Latvia (5 February), Estonia (4 May) and Poland (25 July). The treaty with France (29 November) gives the Soviet Union indirect access to the Little Entente in east Central Europe and the Balkan Pact in south east Europe.
- 20 February *Pravda* published a decree of the central executive committee of the Soviets depriving Trotsky and a group of *émigré* Mensheviks of their Soviet citizenship because of counter-revolutionary activity and prohibits them from ever returning to the Soviet Union.
- 9 October Twenty members of the Ryutin group are expelled from the Party for conspiring with kulaks to restore capitalism.
- 27 December Internal passport system is introduced in cities so as to clear them of kulaks and speculators. The system is run by the GPU. Those in the countryside were not given internal passports until the 1960s. It was illegal to move to another place of residence in the Soviet Union without a passport.
- 1933**
- 19 April British Metropolitan Vickers engineers are sentenced after a trial in which they were accused of industrial sabotage. Britain imposes economic sanctions on the Soviet Union and, as a result, their sentences are quashed. Normal economic relations resume on 1 July.
- 16-17 November The USA and the Soviet Union agree on the establishment of diplomatic relations after long negotiations between President Roosevelt and Chicherin, the foreign affairs commissar.
- 19 December The Politburo decrees a reorientation of Soviet foreign policy because of the threatening situation in Europe and the Far East. It decides to join the League of Nations and join collective security pacts.
- 1934**
- 1 January The second FYP (1933-7) is published which foresees the completion of socialist reconstruction.
- 12 January The Party purge reveals that about 300,000 members in Siberia and the Soviet Far East (15.6% of the total membership) have been expelled.

- 18-23 January The 12th Congress of the Communist Party of Ukraine resolves to move the capital from Kharkov to Kiev.
- 26 January-10 February The 17th Party Congress (the Congress of the Victors) meets in Moscow and Stalin delivers the main speech and states that the Soviet Union has been transformed from an agrarian country into an industrial state.
- 16 April The title Hero of the Soviet Union is introduced.
- 10 July The reorganisation of the GPU into the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) begins. The new commissariat is responsible for the domestic police and security abroad.
- 18 September The Soviet Union joins the League of Nations and is made a permanent member.
- 1 December Sergei Kirov, Party leader in Leningrad, is murdered and Stalin uses this act to begin a period of mass terror.
- 16 December Kamenev and Zinoviev are arrested in the wake of Kirov's murder.
- 29 December The murderer of Kirov and 13 others are sentenced to death and executed.
- 1935**
- 15-17 January Kamenev, Zinoviev and others are accused of treason but Kamenev only gets five years' imprisonment and Zinoviev 10 years. 76 supporters of Zinoviev are exiled to Siberia.
- 21 March The NKVD states that 1,074 persons from Leningrad have been exiled for life to Siberia.
- 23 March Japan and the USSR sign a treaty in which the Soviets sell their railway in Manchuria (the Chinese Eastern Railway) to the government of Manchukuo (a Japanese puppet state) for 140,000,000 yen.
- 29 March British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden (later Lord Avon) arrives in Moscow to see Stalin, who attempts to convince him and the western powers to enter a collective security system against Hitler.
- 25 July-20 August The 7th Comintern Congress meets in Moscow, attended by 510 delegates. The dangerous international situation leads to the adoption of a popular front strategy.
- 30 and 31 August Aleksei Stakhanov, a miner, creates a new record by mining 102 tonnes of coal in one shift, equivalent to 13 norms. The Stakhanov movement is used to promote rising labour productivity during socialist construction. (It is admitted under Gorbachev that the record was a sham as many workers helped him and all the machinery functioned.)
- 22 September Ranks are introduced in the Red Army (they were abolished on 16 December 1917).
- 1936**
- 14 January The exchange of Party books permits another purge of Party members.
- 18 June Maksim Gorky, the writer, dies in Moscow and is buried in the Kremlin wall on 20 June.
- 27 June Decree banning abortion and promoting the family. The family becomes again the basis of society.

- 19-24 August First Moscow show trial (the trial of the 16) against the terrorist Trotsky-Zinoviev centre. The main defendants are Kamenev and Zinoviev and are sentenced to death and executed, Tomsy commits suicide on 23 August.
- 26 September G. Yagoda is replaced by N. Ezhov as People's Commissar for Internal Affairs and this begins a purge in the police and security forces.
- 25 November Germany and Japan sign the Anti-Comintern Pact in Berlin which includes the agreement not to sign a treaty with the Soviet Union without the permission of the other country.
- 5 December A new Soviet constitution is adopted at the 8th Congress of Soviets which abolishes the three class elector system (workers, peasants, intelligentsia) and introduces the general and equal right to vote and direct elections to all soviets. The USSR Supreme Soviet is to consist of two houses, Soviet of the Union and Soviet of Nationalities. The number of Soviet republics increases from seven to 11 with the dissolution of the Transcaucasian Federal Socialist Republic and the appearance of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia as Soviet republics. Kazakhstan and Kirgizia are upgraded from Autonomous Republics to Union republics.
- 1937**
- 1 January The ruble which has hitherto been based on the French franc (1 ruble = 3 francs) is now based on the US dollar (1\$ = 5 rubles 30 kopeks).
- 23-30 January Second Moscow show trial against 17 members of the 'anti-Soviet Trotskyist parallel centre'. 13 are sentenced to death and shot (1 February) and the others to 10 years' imprisonment.
- 11 June The arrest of leading military officers (Marshal Tukhachevsky, deputy people's commissar for defence, and six generals) is announced. In a secret trial they are sentenced to death and executed. This begins a mass purge of the military.
- Early September Soviet troops move into the Mongolian People's Republic to protect it against a possible Japanese attack.
- 16 December Eight Soviet officials, mainly leaders of national minorities (Jews, Armenians) are accused of spying and treason, sentenced to death and executed.
- 1938**
- 12-19 January First session of the newly elected USSR Supreme Soviet. M.I. Kalinin is elected chair of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet (head of state). The central executive committee of the USSR is then dissolved, having been the supreme state body between Soviet Congresses since 1922.
- 2-13 March Third Moscow show trial against the 'anti-Soviet bloc of the right and the Trotskyists' involving 21 defendants, including Rykov and Bukharin. On 13 March 18 are sentenced to death and executed on 15 March.
- 14 April The Trans-Siberian railway can no longer be used for international trade and no visas will be issued for travel on it.

- 29 June First non-stop flight from Moscow to Vladivostok (7,600km covered in 24.5 hours).
- 29 July-11 August A Japanese attack around Lake Khasan, near Vladivostok, is repulsed by the Red Army. (The Japanese attack was in response to the Soviet occupation of a part of Manchuria.)
- 1 December After the appointment of Anastas Mikoyan as people's commissar for trade, the Soviet Union plans a rapid expansion of foreign trade with the Baltic States, Finland, Poland and Iran.
- 8 December N. Ezhov, notorious for his role in the Moscow show trials, resigns as people's commissar for internal affairs and is succeeded by Lavrentiya Beria.
- 15 December A decree on the income of kolkhoz members states that the amount of kolkhoz income to be distributed as wages is the sum left over after all kolkhoz expenses have been met. This leads to a rapid decline in kolkhoz members' incomes.
- 27 December The title, Hero of Socialist Labour, is introduced.
- 29 December A decree on raising labour discipline withdraws many of the social gains of the previous years (reduction of wages and holidays, including maternity leave, and the removal of benefits from those who change jobs twice). All workers and employees are to be given labour books (a record of their work performance).
- 1939**
- 15 January The Party CC adopts various measures to raise labour productivity in agriculture. In the Machine Tractor Stations bonuses are to be introduced to increase incentives. (This reveals the great difficulties encountered by the authorities to motivate those in the countryside.)
- 17-26 June Second Soviet census reveals a population of 190,687,000 on 17 June.
- 10-21 March The 18th Party Congress (the Party Congress of the completion of the victory of socialism) adopts the guidelines for the third FYP and a new Party statute. Stalin states that the goal is to catch up and surpass the developed capitalist countries and the construction of a classless socialist society.
- 3 May Litvinov (a Jew) resigns as people's commissar for foreign affairs and is succeeded by Vyacheslav Molotov.
- 11 May Beginning of battle of Khalkin-Gol, on the Soviet-Mongolian border, with Japan, Moscow emerges the winner on 15 September.
- 11-23 August British and French military officials negotiate in Moscow and they agree that in case of war the Soviet Union may occupy the Baltic States. No overall agreement is reached as Poland refuses to allow Soviet troops to cross its territory.
- 23 August Molotov and von Ribbentrop, German foreign minister, sign in Moscow the German-Soviet non-aggression pact, having already signed a trade and credit agreement (19 August). In a secret protocol the two sides divide up east central Europe. The Soviet Union acquires Finland, the Baltic States (except Lithuania), eastern Poland and Bessarabia. On 28 September 1939 another agreement gave Moscow Lithuania. (The existence of this secret protocol was

- denied by Moscow until the late Gorbachev era.)
- 1 September Germany attacks Poland and penetrates up to the line agreed in the secret protocol and the Second World War begins.
- 17 September Soviet troops begin their march into eastern Poland (as agreed by the secret protocol). Lvov falls to them on 21-22 September.
- 21-23 September German troops withdraw to the agreed demarcation line.
- 28 September Molotov and von Ribbentrop sign in Moscow a new German-Soviet border and friendship treaty which lays down a new demarcation line on the Bug on the river Vistula. Lithuania becomes part of the Soviet zone of influence.
- 28 September-10 October The Soviet Union signs agreements with Estonia (28 September), Latvia (5 October) and Lithuania (10 October) which permit Soviet bases on their territories. A similar agreement with Finland is not reached (11-12 October).
- 26-28 October The Soviet occupied west Ukraine, formerly in east Poland, votes to introduce Soviet power and to join the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. The Belorussian population of former east Poland do the same and become part of the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic on 28-30 October.
- 16 November German-Soviet agreement on the return to Germany of Germans from the former east Poland, now in the Soviet Union.
- 27 November After the failure of Finnish-Soviet negotiations to establish a mutual assistance pact (Finland refused to permit Soviet bases on its territory), Moscow declares the non-aggression of 21 January 1932 null and void and breaks off diplomatic relations on 28 November.
- 30 November-12 March 1940 The Soviet-Finnish (or Winter) war begins with an air raid over Helsinki and the march of Soviet troops into Karelia. A Finnish People's Government, composed of Finnish *émigré* communists, headed by Otto Kuusinen, is announced by Molotov. Had Finland fallen, this government would have taken over the country.
- 14 December The League of Nations rules that the Soviet Union was the aggressor in the war with Finland and excludes it from the League.
- 1940**
- 11-12 March Finland concedes Soviet demands at peace negotiations in Moscow. Finland gives up Vyborg and a part of Karelia. Hangö is rented as a military base to the Soviet Union for 30 years.
- 10 April The Soviet Union judges the German occupation of Norway as a defensive measure against Great Britain.
- 7 May The Soviet Union introduces the ranks of general and admiral in its armed forces.
- 12-17 June Soviet demands to Lithuania (12 June), Estonia and Latvia (16 June) to permit more Soviet bases and to elect governments according to Soviet wishes leads to the transformation of the Baltic States into Soviet republics (21-22 July) and then as part of the Soviet Union (3-6 August).
- 26 June The Soviet government demands that Romania secede Bessarabia and northern Bukovina to it. When Romania does not concur,

- 21 July Red Army units occupy both regions on 28 June. Field Marshal von Brauchitsch, commander in chief of the army, is ordered by Hitler to begin preparing for war against the Soviet Union. Hitler envisages a five month campaign in the spring of 1941.
- 2 August The occupied areas of Bessarabia and north Bukovina join the Soviet Union as the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic.
- 21 August Trotsky dies in Mexico after an attempt on his life (20 August). It is widely assumed the killer was Stalin's agent.
- 12-13 November Molotov arrives in Berlin for negotiations concerning the division of the world. Moscow wants Finland, Romania and Bulgaria.
- 18 December Hitler signs instruction no. 21, Operation Barbarossa, which envisages all preparations for an attack on the Soviet Union to be finished by 15 May 1941.
- 1941**
- 3 February A people's commissariat for state security is separated from the NKVD. Beria remains NKVD head.
- 13 April The Japanese ambassador in Berlin, Matsuoka, returning to Tokyo, breaks his journey in Moscow (8 April) and signs a neutrality treaty with the Soviet Union which recognises existing territory and borders and, in the case of war with third parties, the signatories will remain neutral. Japan also recognises the independence of the Mongolian People's Republic.
- 30 April Operation Barbarossa is postponed from 15 May to 22 June.
- 6 May Stalin becomes chair of Sovnarkom (Prime Minister) with Molotov as his deputy. The latter remains commissar for foreign affairs.
- 6 June The German army provides instruction on how to deal with communist commissars (the commissar order). Captured Red Army commissars are to be executed.
- 22 June German units attack the Soviet Union across a broad front without a declaration of war. Over 3 million men are involved and behind the army come state security units whose task is to eliminate the Jewish population. Churchill offers Stalin help as does Roosevelt (23 June). Molotov, not Stalin, announces to the Soviet people that Germany has invaded.
- 22 June-20 July The Soviet defenders of Brest capitulate after 20 days.
- 23 June Hungary breaks off diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and Slovakia declares war on Moscow and provides Germany with two divisions.
- 26 June Finland declares war on the Soviet Union.
- 27 June Hungary declares war on the Soviet Union.
- 30 June The State Committee for Defence (GKO) is set up and Stalin becomes its head (1 July).
- 3 July Stalin, in a radio broadcast, proclaims the Great Patriotic (Fatherland) War and orders that no territory shall be conceded to the enemy.
- 12 July Great Britain and the Soviet Union sign an agreement on mutual aid against Germany. Unilateral peace negotiations or armistices are ruled out.

- 18 July Stalin, in a telegram, demands the establishment of a second front against Hitler. The Soviet Union and the Czechoslovak government in exile, sign an agreement in London establishing diplomatic relations and mutual aid against Germany, including Czechoslovak units on Soviet territory. Similar agreements are signed with the governments in exile of Yugoslavia (22 July), Poland (30 July), Greece (5 August), Norway (5 August), Belgium (7 August) and France (20 September).
- 19 July Stalin assumes control of the people's commissariat for defence and becomes commander-in-chief.
- 2 August The US begins providing the Soviet Union with material help and, during the next three months, provides goods worth \$145 million.
- 5 August The Germans take Smolensk and 300,000 Soviet prisoners.
- 6 August Polish prisoners of war in the Soviet Union form units, commanded by General Anders.
- 8 August The Red Army loses Uman and 103,000 prisoners.
- 14 August Soviet-Polish agreement freeing Polish prisoners taken in 1939 to form the Anders army.
- 17 August Narva and Novgorod fall.
- 21 August Hitler decides that his main goals are in the south and not Moscow.
- 28 August Volga Germans are to be deported to Siberia because they are a security risk and the Volga German Autonomous Republic is dissolved.
- 8 September-20 January 1944 Nine hundred day siege of Leningrad.
- 16 September Hitler orders that for every German killed in the occupied areas, 50-100 communists are to be shot.
- 26 September The battle of Kiev ends with 665,000 Red Army prisoners.
- 29 September-1 October British, American and Soviet officials in Moscow debate military and economic aid for the Soviet Union. The US commits itself to providing in 1942 aid worth \$1,015 million (1.015 billion). The first Lend Lease Agreement is signed on 1 October.
- 30 September-20 April Battle for Moscow. The German offensive comes to a stop in December and on 5 December a Soviet counter-offensive forces the Germans back.
- 3 October In appealing for warm winter clothes for German troops, Hitler declares that the Soviet Union has already been beaten.
- 16 October The Soviet government and diplomatic corps moves from Moscow to Kuibyshev (now Samara) but Stalin stays in Moscow.
- 6 November Stalin, on the eve of the 24th anniversary of the October Revolution, puts Soviet losses at 350,000 dead, 378,000 wounded and over a million missing.
- 7 November President Roosevelt informs Eduard Stettinius, the head of Lend Lease, that the defence of the Soviet Union is of vital importance for the security of the US. The US, Great Britain and the USSR sign an agreement in Washington providing Moscow with an interest free loan to acquire war equipment worth \$1 billion, to be repaid five years after the end of the war.
- 4 December Finnish units reoccupy Hangö after Soviet troops withdraw.
- 9-20 December Soviet offensive drives German troops back along a wide front.