The Russian Civil War, NEP and the Rise of Stalin
Lenin’s most pressing problem after the November Revolution was to deal with his opponents, who had mounted a full-scale civil war.

These opponents were loosely called the “Whites”, while Lenin’s forces were known as the “Reds”.

Lenin’s army was able to win this war by 1920-21.
The Reasons for the Bolshevik/Red victory:

- The Reds occupied the strategic center of the nation; the Whites were on the fringes.
- The White opposition was ideologically fragmented, including reformists, Mensheviks, Czarists; this wartime coalition proved to be incompatible.
- Trotsky had increased the efficiency of the Red Army, introducing strict military discipline (deserters for example were shot) and making use of Tsarist officers and their military experience.
Lenin made use of Revolutionary Terror (the Cheka – a secret police force) to keep the citizens in line.

They were responsible for killing the czar and his family, including the heir to the throne, Alexei, in 1918.

Overall, there was a period of strict governmental economic control known as War Communism.

The house, where the Royal family was executed
• **Foreign intervention** (eight western nations, notably France, aided the Whites) promoted a sense of nationalism that aided the Reds. Lenin used this as a propaganda device. The intervention of the western nations was based on ideological grounds (a fear of communism) and practical ones (Lenin’s refusal to pay the czar’s debts). This period is often identified as the beginning of the Cold War.

• By 1921, the Civil War was over, but the Soviet land and economy were devastated, leading Lenin into a program of economic reform known as the NEP. He also re-named his nation the USSR.
War Communism

- Purpose was to win the Russian Civil War (1918-1920)
- First mass communist society in world history
- Socialization (nationalization) of all means of production & central planning of the economy
- In reality, the Bolsheviks destroyed the economy: mass starvation from crop failures, decrease industrial output
- Secret police (Cheka) liquidated about 250,000 opponents
Kronstadt Rebellion (1921)

- Mutiny by previously pro-Bolshevik sailors in March at Kronstadt naval base had to be crushed with machine gun fire.
- It was caused by the economic disaster and social upheaval of the Russian Civil War.
- Major cause for Lenin instituting the NEP
The First Great Bolshevik U-Turn
The New Economic Policy (NEP)

- Bolsheviks Haemorrhaging support
  - War Communism not working
    - Workers - unmotivated
    - Peasants - requisitioning
  - Plummeting Industrial and agricultural output
  - Shortages due to World War, Revolution and Civil War
  - Disillusionment of masses (and many Socialists) as
    Communist Utopia fails to emerge
  - International Isolation complete
    - No state willing to support Bolsheviks

- Lenin listens to rightists who call for a ‘temporary’ change in economic direction

- “We are making economic concessions to avoid political concessions” Bukharin
New Economic Policy

• Grain Requisitioning Abolished
  – Surpluses beyond a quota could be sold freely (and at a profit)

• Small businesses allowed to operate
  – Artisans and small concerns were allowed to operate once more.
  – Allowed to produce consumer goods
    • Realised that the state had neglected private consumer goods for state industries
      – No incentives to work if there is nothing to buy!

• Money re-introduced
  – Rationing and barter was proving to be too inefficient and time consuming
  – Entrepreneurs were allowed to buy and sell
    • More efficient use of time as middlemen move goods from place of production to place of distribution

• Industrial Trusts created
  – State kept control of big industries like Steel, Coal, banking etc
  – However, these now had to operate within budgets and set targets
Ramifications of U-Turn

• Most Communist economic policies had been jettisoned by the NEP
• The about-turn was hard for many revolutionaries to accept (left wing)
  – ‘Betraying the Revolution’ was a common phrase heard at the 10th Communist Party Congress in 1921
• What effect did the Kronstadt revolt have on party delegates?
Ramifications of U-Turn

• What effect did the Kronstadt revolt have on party delegates?
  – It made most waverers realise the dangerous forces still at work in Russia.
  – It made most of them rally to Lenin’s insistence that this was a temporary tactical withdrawal
  – They realised that any internal splits could be fatal to the Bolshevik party

• 10th Party Congress agrees to pass a ‘ban on factions’ (This had consequences after Lenin’s death)
  – Once Party Policy had been decided by the Central Committee, then all Communists had to accept it and not form factions to challenge it
  – Penalty for factionalism was expulsion from the party
THE NEW ECONOMIC POLICY

• The USSR faced serious economic issues with the conclusion of the wars.

• Western nations refused to trade with them, and Lenin was at first determined to apply his Marxist principles, which failed.

• In Mar. 1921 Lenin relented and introduced the NEP.
  - It was an attempt to rebuild agriculture and industry through a free market system (it was a pragmatic measure – Lenin could not yet take on the peasants; it did cause a rift within the Communist Party) – many dissidents were shipped off to the gulags.

• The NEP did work; Lenin might well have been ready to return to Marxist principles in the future.

• But his health deteriorated after a 1921 stroke, and Lenin died in 1924: this created a power vacuum and a struggle between Trotsky and Stalin.
Was the NEP a success: Agricultural Output

In Millions of Tonnes

Grain

Figures on page 112
Was the NEP a success: 
Industrial Output

Factory Production in millions of Roubles (1926 values)
Figures on page 112
Was the Capitalist-friendly NEP a success

• Annoyingly for the left wing Communists it was
  – Production of most goods reached pre-war levels at least
    • Production doubled between 1920 and 1923
    • State run industries recovered slower than privately run industries!
  – Incentives to work returned
    • Money was more efficient than ration books
    • There were products to buy again
      – More reason to work, buy, sell or trade!

• Return of entrepreneurs and speculators
  – Nepmen!
Nepmen

Scoured villages buying up all produce

Sell foodstuffs at a profit in cities

Buy simple manufactured Goods in cities

Take to country And sell at a profit to peasants
Economic Liberalisation allowed Bolsheviks to clamp down politically

- GPU created from Cheka (Becomes the NKVD in 1934)
  - Arbitrary imprisonment and Death Penalty applied to political rivals
- **Gulags created**
  - Peasant and Kronstadt rebellions crushed
    - Those not executed were sent to prison work camps
- Censorship
  - All non-Bolshevik newspapers closed down
  - Glavlit created (Ministry of literature and publishing)
    - All works of art to be censored before publication
    - Anti-communist artists deported or sent to Gulags
- **Most Independent Republics re-conquered and returned to Communist control**
  - Ukraine, Belorussia, Armenia, Azerbaijan
  - USSR in 1922
  - Georgia reconquered against Lenin’s wishes*
Economic Liberalisation allowed Bolsheviks to clamp down politically

- Orthodox Church Persecuted
  - One of the remaining Tsarist Pillars
  - Priests had criticised excesses of Civil War and Communists
  - 1922 Church ordered to sell relics to help with (War communism inspired) Famine victims
    - Church sends money but refuses to sell holy relics
    - GPU take relics by force
      - Widespread disruption and disturbances
      - Priests and congregation killed, many sent to Gulags
Economic Liberalisation allowed Bolsheviks to clamp down politically

• Show Trials
  – Social Revolutionaries (SRs) accused of plotting to kill Lenin
    • Mainly to hide inefficiencies of Cheka which had not identified Fannie Kaplan assassination attempt
  – Farcical Court System
    • Biased Judges - hostile audience
  – SRs forced to confess guilt in court
    • Most were already in custody when alleged crimes took place.
    • Good Propaganda material
    • Useful for communists to blame failures on counter-revolutionaries
    • All 34 pronounced guilty and to be executed
      – 11 executed
Back in the Economic Sphere: Conspicuous Consumption

• Some people were making huge profits!
  – Nepmen
  – Conspicuously spending their new wealth
    • Cars, drink, fashion, jewellery, clubs, brothels
    • Get rich quick wanted to show off their wealth!
      – Old bourgeoisie had been more subtle!
  • Corruption was endemic
    – Communist party officials were often complicit in allowing Nepmen into and out of cities
The Bolshevik Party’s Unexpected Crisis

• Lenin had a minor stroke in 1921
  – The Central Committee and Lenin’s doctors agreed he work only so many hours a day
  – This frustrated the workaholic Lenin

• He had a slightly more serious stroke in December 1922
  – He had his work rate cut again
  – He had time to consider what the Revolution would be like after his death!
  – Lenin was beginning to distrust Stalin
    • Over his highhandedness, and rights of Nationalities within USSR
    • Stalin was denied access to Lenin by Lenin’s wife
      – Stalin insulted Lenin’s wife
      – When Lenin found out he wrote an addendum to his testament warning the party about Stalin but to no avail.

• Lenin had a major stroke in March 1923
  – This left him without the power of speech. a Virtual vegetable.

• Lenin dies from a 4th Stroke in January 1924
Stalin Slowly expands his power base

- **General Secretary of Bolsheviks**
  - Many Bolsheviks reliant or thankful to Stalin for promotion or access to officials (apparatchiks)
  - Careerists are particularly thankful

- **Politburo Member**
  - Quietly avoided enemies, followed Lenin’s lead
  - Reputation as a ‘Dependable Bolshevik’

- **Lenin Legacy**
  - Stalin claims that he is just following their great Revolutionary Leader and wishes to continue his work
  - Gives valedictory speech at Lenin’s funeral
  - Trotsky absent
  - He has Lenin’s body embalmed

- **Stalin sidesteps Lenin’s Testament**
  - Other Politburo members not too happy with criticisms of themselves. They quietly agree to bury the document
Trotsky is out of touch with party grassroots

Reputation for being an ‘intellectual’ and difficult to work with or for

Joined Bolsheviks late

He is on the left wing of the party
  He gives speeches attacking NEP
  He criticises growth in bureaucracy
  He wants ‘Permanent Revolution’

How does his left wing ‘Communist’ ideas alienate him from the Bolsheviks?
Trotsky is out of touch with party grassroots

- How does his left wing ‘Communist’ ideas alienate him from the Bolsheviks?
  - He gives speeches attacking NEP
    - NEP was raising living standards for majority
    - NEP allowed corruption opportunities for some Bolsheviks
    - NEP Identified with Lenin (*Temporary*)
  - He criticises growth in bureaucracy
    - Careerists and Communist Party Bureaucracy threatened by Trotsky
    - Bolsheviks had successfully smashed the old order – they needed new staff to run such a vast country!
  - He wants ‘Permanent Revolution’
    - Most Russians tired of war
    - Russo-Polish War disaster of 1920
    - Consolidation process not completed in USSR
Stalin as the voice of moderation

• Lenin Legacy
  – Stalin promises Continuity
  ‘Socialism in One Country’
  – 1924 speech
  – Stalin said that worldwide revolution was not about to happen. Therefore:
    • Bolsheviks needed to build USSR into an example of what Communism could achieve
    • This would be done without any outside help
    • Strongly appealed to Nationalistic/Patriotic Russians

• Stalin Safe Pair of Hands
  – He claimed that Trotsky could represent a divisive figure
  – He managed to convince Politburo to strip Trotsky of his job as War Commissar
Stalin isolates Trotsky

- 13th Congress of Soviets 1924
  - The Triumvirate
    - Stalin, Kamenev and Zinoviev agree to work together in Politburo
      - Kamenev and Zinoviev have leadership pretensions of their own and do not want Trotsky vacuuming up left wing support
  - Trotsky gives brilliantly stirring speeches calling for a return to revolutionary principles
    - Well instructed Stalinist delegates sit impassively and vote as intended
  - Rightists happy to support centralist Triumvirate over Left Wing Trotsky
  - Trotsky threatened with the charge of ‘Factionalism’ if he does not accept the will of the party!
The Left self-destructs

- Zinoviev and Kamenev turn fully on Trotsky questioning his Bolshevik credentials
- Trotsky publishes ‘Lessons of October’ which criticises Zinoviev and Kamenev’s conservatism during the Revolution
- Stalin stays in background allowing left to tear itself to pieces
  - Zinoviev and Kamenev happy to allow Stalin to continue to appoint delegates to further alienate their enemy ‘Trotsky’
Using Fractions to defeat Factionalism, 1926

- Stalin’s Socialism in One Country call becomes popular with Right of Party
  - Tomsky, Bukharin and Rykov are happy to ally with Stalin to isolate the left of the party
- Left realise that they are vulnerable
- 14th Party Congress
  - Zinoviev and Kamenev called for a vote of no confidence in Stalin
    - Delegates packed with pro-Stalin supporters
    - Easily defeated
  - Zinoviev and Kamenev realise that they are dangerously exposed!
The United Opposition

• Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev kiss and make up!
• They want to end the ‘temporary’ NEP and return to world revolution
  – They try to appeal directly to Communist Grass roots
    • Organise demonstrations
    • Publish material, etc…
• They formally present arguments at Central Committee meeting in 1926
  – Stalin and Right defeat them easily
  – Now! They would be vulnerable to the charge of Factionalism
  – They are banned from speaking at 15th Party Congress
• They continue to work in secret
  – GPU monitors and reports on their ‘faction’
Put up or shut up!

- United Opposition is officially labelled as a danger to the Revolution and is outlawed
  - Kamenev and Zinoviev agree to make humiliating retractions in Pravda
  - Trotsky refuses to back down and goes into exile
    - Central Asia and eventually leaves the USSR
    - For many he did represent the true revolutionary spirit and many communists will call themselves Trotskyites in his honour!
Stalin turns on the Right

- Stalin’s new 5 Year Plan 1928 - 1933
  - Rapid industrialisation
    - NEP not coordinated enough, not fast enough
    - Need Economies of Scale
  - Strategic concerns
    - Hostile Capitalist world!
  - Political advantages
    - End of ‘temporary’ capitalistic NEP
    - Return to Revolutionary Principles
      - Left no longer a threat for Stalin!
  - Requires food!
    - For increased workforce
    - To sell abroad to raise capital for industrial investment
    - Collectivisation! Needed to industrialise agricultural production and sell the produce on the world market to raise capital for the 5 year plans!
Stalin turns on the Right

• Right Opposition formed to fight Collectivisation Proposals
  – Bukharin, Tomsky and Rykov
    • Argued that Persuasion and incentives were better than force

• The role of Peasants
  – Stalin claimed that they were a bourgeois class who did not want socialism or revolution
  – Right claimed that they were a rural working class party

• Stalin took support from remainder of left
  – Happy to see a return to revolutionary principles

• He took some support from the right
  – Promises of a strong Industrial USSR that could defend itself fully

• Bukharin made a convincing defence of the NEP but outvoted by Stalin’s delegates
Charging the Right With Factionalism

• Right Opposition named as a danger to the Revolution
  – Bukharin and Tomsky charged with factionalism and lost Politburo seats in 1929
    • Bukharin lost his jobs as editor of Pravda and head of Comintern
  – Rykov remains for a year longer before he was removed from his seat.

• Stalin places ‘Yes men’ into vacated Politburo seats

• By 1930 Stalin is in complete control of the Bolshevik Party and therefore of the USSR
Stalin prevailed over all opposition, and Trotsky was eventually assassinated in Mexico City in 1940.

Stalin went on to condemn all deviation from the party line and proclaimed himself *vözhd* (*Vözhd* literally means leader, but in politics it is inextricably linked with the personality cult of Joseph Stalin)

- This *Revolution from above* saw the emergence of totalitarianism in the USSR
- His style of leadership was that of an “office dictator”, very different from Mussolini’s charismatic style – Stalin relied on his *apparatchiks*
- He also created a “*Cult of Lenin*” and worked to connect himself to the fallen leader
STALIN AND THE FIVE YEAR PLANS

- the Dec. 1927 Party Congress saw the end of the NEP
- the 5 Year Plans were Stalin’s own vision – they were intended to re-organize Soviet industrial/agricultural. and to overhaul the economy and catch up with the West
  - unrealistic production quotas were set, and tremendous sacrifices and ruthless methods were used to reach them
  - in agriculture collectivization was implemented – with the state selling food to other counties to raise money for industrial development.

    collective farms
    - peasant opposition was crushed/starved
    - after some protest, the kulaks were liquidated, starved in order to feed urban workers (the “terror famine”)
    - by WW II, the peasants were largely regimented
– industrial/urban growth was also stunning, but to achieve it, significant investment was needed along with a decline in consumption

• as people sacrificed, the standard-of-living declined
• the plans did not emphasize consumer goods; preference was given to megaprojects
• workers were praised as “heroes of Soviet labour”, dealing with long hours and horrid conditions
• living conditions also deteriorated: overcrowding, food and housing shortages (and women who had gained status following the revolution again lost their freedoms – the Zhenotdel (women’s affair office) was abolished)
• Stalin was able to do this, unlike Lenin, because the government was firmly in place and all threats had been eliminated/reduced through state terror/propaganda
  – Stalin combined communism and dictatorship in this time, setting the tone for future communist leaders
  – By 1941, the USSR was among the top 3 economic powers
Congress of Victors

• 17th Party Congress, 1934
  – Stalin advertised this congress as proof of the success of the Socialist model
    • He wished to ask for a redoubling of efforts

• Stalin’s Unexpected Shock!
  – Elections for the Politburo were seen as a mere formality.
    • However, Stalin was shocked to discover that he did so poorly in the election.
      – Kirov (Leningrad Boss) got 1222 out 1225 delegates
      – Stalin got the support of only 900 delegates!
    • Lazar Kaganovich and Stalin fixed the election results denying Sergey Kirov the position of General Secretary, as a result Stalin won the election.
  – This was a serious shock to Stalin who thought that he had packed the delegates with his own supporters.
  – This is what may have prompted Stalin’s Purges
Kirov’s Mysterious Murder

December 1\textsuperscript{st} 1934

Kirov went to his Leningrad Office without his normal bodyguard.

The normal guards were missing

Leonid Nikolayev was waiting in a toilet near Kirov’s office

- He shot Kirov and then fainted
- Rumours (not proven, that Kirov had been having an affair with his wife
- However, how had he got into one of the most secure buildings in Russia?
- Stalin personally interrogated Nikolayev
- Stalin was most likely behind the assassination
The Consequences of the Kirov Murder

The Kirov murder provided Stalin with an excuse to act ruthlessly to suppress counter-revolutionaries in the Communist Party itself.

Stalin’s December 1st Law
Based on Hitler’s Enabling Act

Trial of accused to take place within 10 days
Executions without any appeals
Anyone suspected of counter-revolutionary activity could be detained!
The Consequences of the Kirov Murder

• Leningrad Party Purged of ‘terrorists’
  – Victims were interrogated and tortured to reveal names of acquaintances and possible motives
  – Links were made to Trotsky, Kamenev and Zinoviev (Notable past politburo members)
  – The Left Opposition was blamed with trying to launch a counter-revolution to restore Trotsky!
  – Any Communists who had supported the Left Opposition in the 1920s were now in serious danger
  – Show Trials used extensively
    • Zinoviev and Kamenev confessed in court to the murder of Kirov
      – They had been promised lenient sentences and safe conduct for their families
      – Promises were broken – They were shot the next day and families sent to Gulags
The Purges Gain Momentum

• The more left opposition members rounded up the more names that they revealed. This led to more prisoners releasing yet more names.
  – Targets and quotas were set for finding wreckers, counter-revolutionaries and Trotskyites
  • Keen to prove loyalty, authorities would reveal extra long lists of suspects who themselves would reveal names to try and get themselves out of trouble
Yezhovschina
(period of the most intense purges)

Nikolai Yezhov was the head of the NKVD

Bloody or Poison Dwarf! 4 ft 11 1/2 in
He had been criticised for not finding all of these so called terrorists quickly enough

Stalin demanded a speeding up of arrests within Communist Party.

Turned on the Right!
They were against the 5 Year Plans
Useful to blame failures to achieve targets on internal critics of regime

A Trotskyite-Rightist Bloc was creatively invented
Tomsky committed suicide before they got to him
Bukharin and Rykov Show Trials and executions
Purge of Red Army

• Spanish Civil War going badly
  – Trotskyites involved from other countries
• Stalin impressed by Hitler’s Night of the Long Knives
• Stalin had diverted a lot of resources to army and needed to be sure of their loyalty!
  – Tukachevsky beaten into confessing a plot to overthrow Stalin.
  – Denunciations speed up as victims try to save their skins.
  • 35,000 officers shot or arrested
    – Mostly senior officers
Purge of the NKVD

- Stalin realised that denunciations were running out of control
- He needed a scapegoat for the worst excesses of the purges
- ‘dizzy with success’ article in Pravda
  - Perhaps some communist officials have become carried away with the plot
- 3,000 NKVD personnel were executed
- Yagoda (Former head of the NKVD) was executed in 1938
- Yezhov was executed in 1939
- Lavrenti Beria takes over and calms things down
Benefits to Stalin

• Destroyed internal opposition to Stalin
  – e.g. 90% of delegates to 17th Congress of Victors died in Purges
  – Left and Right Opposition members eliminated
  – Politburo packed with compliant yes men.
  – Armed Services ‘loyal’ to Stalin
  – He could blame economic failures on others
  – Stalin blamed excesses on over keen local communists
  – NKVD purged of those who did most of the killing

• His power was now complete
1936 Constitution

• At the height of the purges, Stalin advertises that he has introduced the most democratic constitution in the world.
  – Freedom from arbitrary arrest
  – Freedom of speech and of press
  – Right to demonstrate
  – Respect for privacy of the home and of personal correspondence
  – Employment for all
  – Universal suffrage

• It was written by Bukharin and Radek who both died in the purges!

• For international consumption only!
  – Saying one thing and doing another.
Questions

Watch the video “Red Flag” and use the accompanying handout to answer the following questions.

1. Outline the economic and social impacts of the New Economic Policy and Five Year Plans.

2. What role did collectivization play in the modernization of the USSR (Russia)?

3. Were Soviet citizens better off under communist rule than that of the Tsar’s? Explain.

4. Describe the methods Stalin used to exercise control over the Soviet people.

5. Was there any justification for the use of these methods in a communist society? Explain.