**RUSSIAN REVOLUTION: BACKGROUND**

By 1917, most Russians had lost faith in the leadership ability of Czar Nicholas II. Government corruption was rampant, the Russian economy remained backward, and Nicholas repeatedly dissolved the Duma, the Russian parliament established after the 1905 revolution, when it opposed his will. However, the immediate cause of the February Revolution–the first phase of the Russian Revolution of 1917–was Russia’s disastrous involvement in [World War I](http://www.history.com/topics/world-war-i) (1914-18). Militarily, imperial Russia was no match for industrialized Germany, and Russian casualties were greater than those sustained by any nation in any previous war. Meanwhile, the economy was hopelessly disrupted by the costly war effort, and moderates joined Russian radical elements in calling for the overthrow of the czar.

## FEBRUARY REVOLUTION: 1917

The February Revolution began when demonstrators clamoring for bread took to the streets in the Russian capital of Petrograd (now called St. Petersburg). Supported by huge crowds of striking industrial workers, the protesters clashed with police but refused to leave the streets. On March 10, the strike spread among all of Petrograd’s workers, and irate mobs destroyed police stations. Several factories elected deputies to the Petrograd Soviet, or council, of workers’ committees, following the model devised during the 1905 revolution.

On March 11, the troops of the Petrograd army garrison were called out to quell the uprising. In some encounters, regiments opened fire, killing demonstrators, but the protesters kept to the streets and the troops began to waver. That day, Nicholas again dissolved the Duma. On March 12, the revolution triumphed when regiment after regiment of the Petrograd garrison defected to the cause of the demonstrators.

The imperial government was forced to resign, and the Duma formed a provisional government that peacefully vied with the Petrograd Soviet for control of the revolution. The next day, March 15, Czar Nicholas II abdicated the throne in favor of his brother Michael (1878-1918), whose refusal of the crown brought an end to the czarist autocracy.

## BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION: 1917

In the aftermath of the February Revolution, power was shared between the weak provisional government and the Petrograd Soviet. Then, on November 6 and 7, 1917 (or October 24 and 25 on the Julian calendar, which is why this event is also referred to as the October Revolution), leftist revolutionaries led by Bolshevik Party leader [Vladimir Lenin](http://www.history.com/topics/vladimir-lenin) launched a nearly bloodless coup d’état against the provisional government. The Bolsheviks and their allies occupied government buildings and other strategic locations in Petrograd, and soon formed a new government with Lenin as its head.

Lenin became the virtual dictator of the first Marxist state in the world. His government made peace with Germany, nationalized industry and distributed land, but beginning in 1918 had to fight a devastating civil war against anti-Bolshevik White Army forces. In 1920, the anti-Bolsheviks were defeated, and in 1922 the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was established.