

Introduction

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Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union (1855–1924)

This book is designed to prepare students for *Imperial Russia, Revolution and the Establishment of the Soviet Union (1855–1924)*. This is Topic 12 in HL Option 4, History of Europe for Paper 3 of the IB History Diploma examination. This option examines the conflicting parts played by modernisation and conservatism in Tsarist Russia and explores reasons for the eventual collapse of the Tsarist autocracy in 1917. It explores continuity and change through the revolutions of 1917, the Civil War and the rule of Lenin. There is a particular focus throughout on the interaction of the social, economic and political factors responsible for change.



Figure 1.1: This 1853 illustration shows Nicholas I, father of Alexander II, being driven through St Petersburg; at this time, the Tsar was all-powerful.



Figure 1.2: The 1924 funeral procession of Vladimir Lenin, attended by four million people. By 1924, Russia had undergone huge changes and was a communist state.

Themes

To help you prepare for your IB History exams, this book will explain the specified content for *Imperial Russia, Revolution and the Establishment of the Soviet Union (1855–1924)* as set out in the *IB History Guide* and explore major themes with regard to change and continuity, causation and consequence, significance and perspectives. These cover:

- the emancipation of the serfs and the other military, legal, educational and local government reforms of Alexander II (1855–81)
- the nature of Alexander II's rule and the extent of tsarist reaction in his later years
- the nature of tsardom and policies under Alexander III (1881–94), including the drive towards economic modernisation
- the growth of opposition movements in the last quarter of the 19th century

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- the policies of Nicholas II (1895–1917) and the various factors, including the Russo–Japanese War, that led to the revolution of 1905
- the work of Stolypin and the experiment with the *dumas* (elected town councils)
- the impact of the First World War (1914–18) on Russia
- the causes and impact of the February/March revolution in 1917 and the issues faced by the Dual Power and the Provisional Government
- the parts played by Lenin and Trotsky in the build-up to – and the carrying out of – the October/November 1917 revolution
- the type of state created by Lenin (1917–24), including the impact of the Russian Civil War, economic policies such as War Communism and the New Economic Policy (NEP), terror and coercion, and the Soviet state's foreign relations.

Terminology and definitions

Since the title of this topic is *Imperial Russia, Revolution and the Establishment of the Soviet Union (1855–1924)*, it might be helpful at the outset to have some idea of the changing nature of the Russian state. The book begins with Russia as an Empire under a hereditary ruler known as a Tsar, which means Emperor. This Empire collapsed in 1917 when 'revolution' – a complete overthrow of the old political, economic and social system – took place. The Russian Revolution brought to power a Bolshevik government, named after the group which led it. The Bolsheviks were Communists, following the ideology of Karl Marx and in Chapter 4 you will read more about the Marxist stage theory of history and how the Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Lenin adapted communism to suit the circumstances they found themselves in. Imperial Russia became the USSR (the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), sometimes known as the Soviet Union, in 1922.

In the course of this book, you will find references to groups and parties on the right- and left-wings of politics. The political spectrum below will help you to appreciate the various groupings that form those 'wings'.

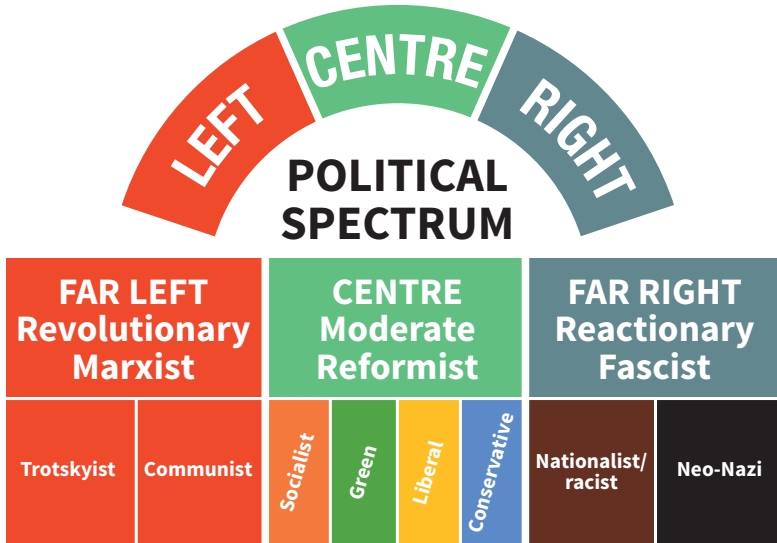


Figure 1.3: The political spectrum: Left/Centre/Right.

In this book, you will meet a number of key terms that are particularly pertinent to the study of Russian history between 1855 and 1924. The most important of these are provided here for reference:

- **Autocracy:** complete power in the hands of one man
- **Communism:** an economic and social system in which everyone works together for the common good
- **Duma:** an elected council at municipal or state level
- **Kulak:** a wealthy peasant
- **Mir:** a village commune where peasants worked
- **Soviet:** an elected council, usually of workers, soldiers, sailors and sometimes peasants controlling an area
- **Zemstva:** elected local government assemblies.

Key Concepts

Each chapter will help you to focus on the main issues, and to compare and contrast the main developments that took place during the various periods of Russian history between 1855 and 1924.

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In addition, at various points in the chapters, there will be questions and activities which will help you focus on the six Key Concepts – these are:

- change
- continuity
- causation
- consequence
- significance
- perspectives.

KEY CONCEPTS ACTIVITY

Change and continuity: The state you will be studying is variously described as imperial Russia, tsarist Russia, the Russian autocracy, the Dual Power, the Soviet state and the USSR during the years 1855 to 1924. Try to find definitions for these terms and draw a timeline showing Russia's political progression through the different regimes from 1853 to 1924.

Theory of Knowledge

In addition to the broad key themes, the chapters contain Theory of Knowledge links, to get you thinking about aspects that relate to history, which is a Group 3 subject in the IB Diploma. The topic, *Imperial Russia, Revolution and the Establishment of the Soviet Union (1855–1924)* has several clear links to ideas about knowledge and history. As you study the material in this book, try to think about the nature of power, what is meant by 'the state', what forces move history forward and what forces hold it back. You should also reflect on the importance of different ideologies, particularly the impact of Marxism in Russia.

The Soviet state became a strongly ideological communist regime after 1917. International travel was restricted, and a strict system of censorship was imposed. Writers and historians were given limited access to state archives and were not permitted to write about controversial subjects, particularly anything that implied criticism of the government. Instead, they often found themselves having to produce propaganda on behalf of the Russian state. This has made it difficult for historians, even in