TERM 1: STUDY NOTES
GRADE 11 Topic 1: Communism in Russia
1900 to 1940
What is communism?

A social, political and economic ideology that aims to establish a stateless and classless society.

In a stateless society, the citizens rule themselves and the government.

In a classless society there are no classes and everyone is regarded as equal.

Each person contributes and receives according to their ability and needs.

Communist thinkers believe this can happen if the people take away the power of the bourgeoisie (the ruling class, who own the means of production) and establish worker control of the means of production.
The writings of Karl Marx

• Karl Marx wrote a book called the *Communist Manifesto* with Friedrich Engels in 1848

• Karl Marx published *Das Kapital* in 1867 - a critical analysis of capitalism

• Capitalist society - minority are wealthy, majority are poor

• The middle class (the bourgeoisie) own the land and factories and exploit the labour of the working-class (the proletariat) to maximise profits

• Society would inevitably move from democracy to socialism to communism because of a continuous class struggle where workers rise up against the capitalists and bourgeoisie

• New society – classless, workers benefit directly from labour
1905 Revolution

Long term issues that led to the revolution:

- Discontent amongst the peasantry who suffered horrendous living and working conditions which led to riots, strikes and protests
- Discontent amongst industrial workers: terrible working and living conditions
- Economic downturn in early 1900’s – less jobs / income
- Unpopular Tsarist policies opposed by liberals and radicals
- Development of Marxism
- Adoption of Marxist and Populist beliefs by Socialist Revolutionaries and Social Democrats
1905 revolution

Long term issues that led to the revolution:

- Humiliating Russian defeat in war with Japan = Tsarist government incompetent
- Grain and fuel shortages
- Plehve (establisher of legal trade union) assassinated 1904
- Bloody Sunday: peaceful industrial protest brutally put down by Russian soldiers (200 people killed)
- Short-lived revolution – Tsar lost control of large areas of Russia
The link between the 1905 and 1917 revolutions

- 1905 revolution spread dissatisfaction to all workers and peasants
- 1905 revolution showed importance of mass strikes and workers’ councils
- Lessons from 1905 helped Marxists develop theory and organisation
- Lenin watched from exile and developed revolutionary theory: shifted focus from bourgeoisie revolution to united workers’ uprising
- Trotsky’s took part in 1905 revolution, set up St Petersburg Soviet of Workers’ Deputies (workers council) which led to more Soviets
- Trotsky went into exile 1906 but led 1917 Revolution with Lenin (carried out Bolshevik seizure of power)
The February and October revolutions of 1917

Political causes:

• Tsar Nicholas II reluctant to make changes after 1905 Revolution
• Stolypin (Prime Minister) carried out policy of repression (persecution of Jews, harsh treatment of political activists); assassinated Sep 1911
• Growing discontent amongst Russia’s smaller states
• Rise of nationalism (demand for local self-government), but protests brutally suppressed
• Tsar Nicholas II suspended Duma and announced that he would lead the Russian armies himself
• Tsarina Alexandra (wife of Tsar) unable to rule effectively in Tsar’s absence and subject to Rasputin’s (the peasant-monk’s) inappropriate influence
The February and October revolutions of 1917

Economic causes:
- War brought economic turmoil to Russia – food shortages, high prices, low wages and high unemployment
- Central Powers (Germany, Austria & Italy) blocked Russian products reaching outside markets
- Poor wheat harvests due to war-damage in wheat-growing region Ukraine > hunger > strikes
- Factories forced to make military goods
- Inadequate transport to move goods or troops
The February and October revolutions of 1917

Social causes:
- Social upheaval – movement of peasants between rural villages and towns carrying city culture to villages
- Overcrowded housing
- Insanitary conditions (no running water)
- Factory workers worked long hours
- Poor wages
- Unsafe working conditions
- Harsh discipline in factories
The Civil War and War Communism

• Civil war in Russia (1918 > 1921) between the Bolsheviks who controlled the government, led by Lenin, and various opposition groups

• Trotsky led the ruthless Red Army representing the Bolsheviks who caused terror and fought against the poorly organised White Army, made up of various opposition groups supported by Britain, France and the USA

• Bolsheviks implemented economic policy called War Communism - to ensure towns and armies were fed, but it destroyed the Russian economy

• Food requisitioned, banks and factories were nationalised, workers conscripted, discipline was extremely harsh

• By 1921 there was terrible drought and famine and increase in robbery.

• The Red Army put down mutiny of loyal sailors from Kronstadt Naval Base executing those who surrendered
By 1921 Lenin and the Bolsheviks had seized control of the state, created a highly centralised, disciplined body of revolutionaries called the Vanguard (head) of the Proletariat.

- Bolsheviks called themselves Communists (after 1919); renamed Russia the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1923.
- No opposition to Communist Party was allowed.
- Religion banned.
- All citizens could vote - but only one party to vote for.
Lenin’s interpretation of Marxism: Marxism-Leninism

- Lenin believed that capitalism could only be destroyed by violent revolution which upheld Marx’s message of unending class conflict.

- Unlike Marx, Lenin believed revolution was possible in a majority peasant population where capitalism was not fully developed.

- Lenin believed a successful revolution needed an elite group of full-time revolutionaries and intellectuals to control the workers’ party.

- Lenin believed human leadership was more important than historical forces.

- Lenin wanted a government that represented majority of the population, but prepared to use force to control any opposing minorities.
The New Economic Policy: the adaptation of Marxism

- Lenin wanted compromise to save the Bolshevik Revolution and argued for some form of capitalism to remain.
- New Economic Policy introduced in 1921 replacing War Communism – peasants could sell surplus grain for a profit; peasants could pay tax in money not crops – farming incentivized and tax income produced.
- Agriculture recovered; new class of *kulaks* formed (wealthy peasants).
- Western investment and foreign aid encouraged.
- Grain export brought foreign capital.
- Improved rail network.
- Problems with NEP: unaffordability of products; dismissal of surplus workers > unemployment; inadequate road infrastructure.
Women and the Russian Revolution

- WW1 – men away in army, women moved into industrial jobs
- Female peasant workers took over running of farms
- Female soldiers, often disguised as men
- War nurses
- Equal rights given by Provisional Government
- Active role in 1917 Revolution – mass protest on International Women’s Day sparked off February Revolution
- 50,000 – 70,000 female soldiers in Red Army
- More rights under Bolshevik rule: voting; equal treatment in workplace; divorce available on request; own property and earnings; political education; literacy classes; children born in or out of marriage given the same rights
Death of Lenin – effect on Russia

- Lenin died 1924 from a series of strokes
- Power struggle ensued 1924-1927: nationalism (Stalin) versus internationalism (Trotsky)
- Stalin strong in the Party; believed in independent socialist state; cultivated appearance of being close to Lenin
- Trotsky had little Party support; believed that socialism in one country only was impossible; Lenin favoured Trotsky rather than Stalin as successor
- Stalin worked with Kamenev & Zinoviev to keep Trotsky out of power
- Once in power Stalin removed Zinoviev and Kamenev, exiled Trotsky 1929
- Trotsky assassinated by USSR Government 1940
Stalin’s interpretation of Marxism-Leninism

- Stalin believed in Socialism in One Country vs Bolshevik idea that revolutions would be required across Europe to sustain the Russian Revolution
- Stalin believed successful revolution in Russia would inspire international revolution
- Five Year Plans for industry and agriculture to develop economy
- Strong bureaucracy put own interests above working class
Collectivisation and Industrialisation

- Stalin pushed for modernisation and industrialisation to survive against the West
- Collectivisation introduced 1929
  - Agriculture – larger, more productive collective farms and state-owned farms
  - More peasants would be released from farms to work in industry
  - More food would be produced to feed industry workers
  - Raise capital for industrialisation by selling surplus food abroad
  - State farms failed
  - Kulaks resisted collectivisation; were brutally punished and sent to labour camps (Gulag). Forced collectivisation continued – complete by 1941.
- Great famines of 1930 and 1932-33
Collectivisation and Industrialisation

• Industrialisation: Series of Five-Year Plans (1928-1941) with production targets developed by the State Planning Commission (Gosplan)

• Plans for heavy industry, agriculture, consumer goods, communications infrastructure, health, education, welfare

• Workers suffered (much forced labour), motivated by propaganda

• Five-year plans emphasized quantity over quality (inferior goods and shortage of consumer goods; shortage of housing; millions dead in Gulag)

• Steady growth rate > major industrial power; able to withstand German invasion WW2 in 1941

• Five year plans transformed Russia but at great cost to Russian people
Political terror 1930’s

• Mid 1930s opposition to Stalin’s policies growing; call for Trotsky to be reinstated
• Stalin wanted critics arrested and executed
• Politburo led by Kirov voted against him doing this
• Kirov shot dead 1934 by Nikolayev – start of PURGES
• SHOW TRIALS 4 years of 2017 revolutionaries being accused of treason/executed or sent to gulags (labour camps)
• Leading political figures tortured, forced to confess - crimes not committed
• 1934-1939, 93 of 139 Central Committee members executed
Political terror 1930’s

- 1937 Stalin began purge of Red Army – suspected army officials plotting against him with Germany
- Commander in Chief & 7 leading Generals shot
- 1938>1939, all admirals and half of army officers executed / imprisoned
- Stalin turned against NKVD (Secret Police) who had carried out terror
- Claimed NKVD were fascists who had murdered innocent people
- Appointed Beria as head
- Beria had all senior NKVD people executed
The effect of Stalin’s policies on the Soviet people

- People lived in fear – terrified of being accused of treason and being purged or tried in show trials > imprisoned / tortured / killed
- Writers, intellectuals > prison and concentration camps
- 20 Million ordinary people denounced > Gulag (half died)
- Loyal party members (apparatchiks) rewarded
- Censorship and propaganda; Stalin demanded continuous praise
- Prior to WW2 forced removals 1941-1949 (3 Million people – half died of disease/ malnutrition)
Women in the Soviet Union under Stalin

- Positive and negative effects on women
- Divorce / child support, if unmarried, difficult
- Abortion illegal, but access to prenatal care / hospital births
- Equal education and same employment rights as men
- Women needed in workforce, so creches and day-care centres set up
- 40% of workers in industry were women (by 1937)
- Discrimination: women given lower positions than men and had higher rates of illiteracy
- Wives and children of accused men were also condemned in purges
The coming of the Second World War

• Stalin wanted USSR to remain neutral; he hoped other countries would become financially and politically exhausted by war which would make USSR greatest power in world

• Non Aggression Pact signed with Germany (agreement to divide Poland between Germany and USSR): important economic relationship but both sides suspicious of each other

• 22 June 1941 Hitler attacked Russia (3 Million soldiers, 3500 tanks)

• Stalin entered WW2, siding with Britain and France

• Eastern front battle, 20-30 Million casualties >1945 German surrender