

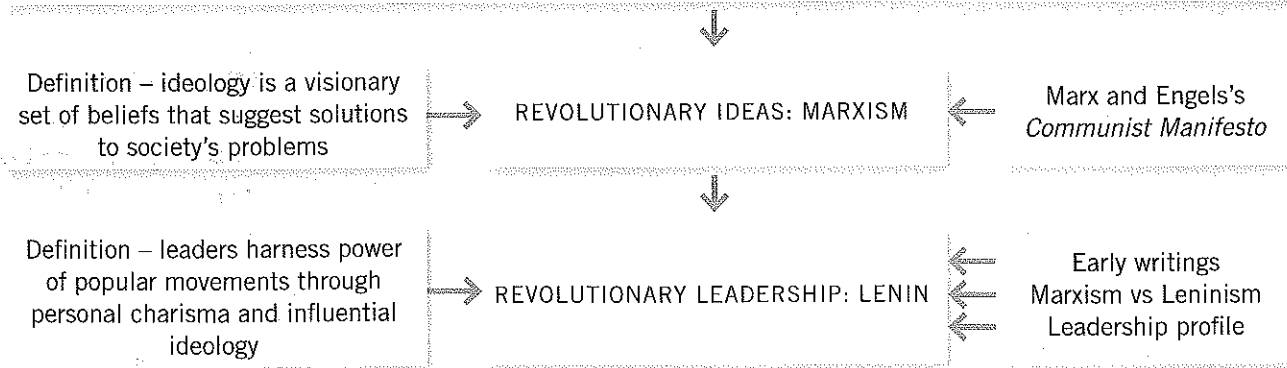
OPPOSITION TO TSARISM: IDEAS AND LEADERS

Overview

The plural name 'Revolutions' suggests that at its deepest level this study provides insights into the distinct patterns that many revolutions have followed. Historians argue about the role ideas, leaders and movements play in causing revolutions. Do revolutions begin because radical ideas become increasingly influential? Or do they arise out of many years of protesting against the current regime by intelligent leaders? Or do popular movements or political parties simply force rapid change? Or perhaps it is the relationship between each of these factors. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on the ideas, leaders and movements who opposed the system of tsarism, so that you can begin to determine for yourself how these factors interlinked. Chapter 8 onwards explores how the threads of revolutionary ideas, leaders and movements combined during the year of revolutions in 1917.

Flow of chapter

OPPOSITION TO TSARISM: IDEAS AND LEADERS



Key issues

- What were the revolutionary ideas?
- How was revolutionary leadership expressed?
- Leadership profile – Vladimir Lenin

What were the revolutionary ideas?

Defining ideology

Ideology is the set of ideas or beliefs that characterise a particular revolutionary movement. Revolutionary leaders often adopt a specific ideology to explain to the masses their dreams for the country's future. Such ideas need to be attractive to the wider population by directly addressing and providing readily achievable solutions to society's problems.

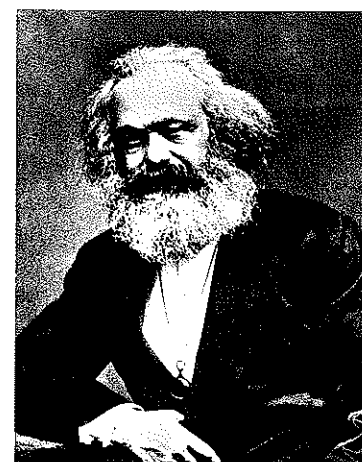
Revolutionary ideologies have a number of important features: they harness mass philosophies, like nationalism, equality or peace; they sometimes deliberately exaggerate or distort the truth; they are often a source for slogans and revolutionary symbols; and they are a means of social control.

Introducing Marxism

A solid understanding of Marxist theory is crucial in understanding the Russian Revolution. An appreciation of **Marxism** helps us to empathise with the revolutionaries who devoted their lives to implementing it in Europe. Writers who lack such historical empathy often describe **communism** as a mere 'experiment', the implications being that it was always a flawed idea, and therefore doomed.

BACKGROUND OF MARX AND ENGELS

While Karl Marx was born in Germany, the birth of his revolutionary spirit can be traced to studying the **French Revolution** in Paris where he was working as a journalist. It was there in 1844 that he befriended Friedrich Engels who, earlier, had been sent by his wealthy father from Germany to establish a business in Manchester. Their work was often written together and they need to be considered a team as it is difficult to separate their individual contributions.



Karl Marx



Friedrich Engels

ideology

the set of ideas or beliefs that characterise a particular revolutionary movement

Marxism

the devotion and practice of the communist ideology of Karl Marx

communism

a system of economic and social organisation in which industry, capital, land, and other means of production are owned and controlled by the community as a whole

Marx

Karl Marx was a German theorist who, along with Friedrich Engels, wrote the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848

French Revolution

occurring in 1789, this famous revolution that replaced the absolute monarch with a republic inspired many revolutionaries including Lenin

Engels

the co-writer of the *Communist Manifesto* along with Karl Marx

MARX AND ENGELS'S OBSERVATIONS

Marx and Engels visited factories in northern England to make scientific observations of the real world. Engels described the life of the industrial worker in 1846 at best to be one of 'utter monotony; it is his mission to be bored every day', but at worst 'children [are] deformed, men enfeebled, limbs crushed, whole generations wrecked, afflicted with disease and infirmity, purely to fill the purses of the bourgeoisie.' Since the industrial revolution, the aim of business has been to lower costs and raise profit. As the largest cost was often employee wages, labour was exploited by factory owners. Observation of similar exploitation in Germany convinced Marx and Engels that this was an unjust international problem requiring a radical solution.

Marxist supporters preserved the secret that both Marx and Engels had got women pregnant outside of marriage. Marx's illegitimate child was conceived with his housekeeper, Elena Demuth.

COMMUNIST MANIFESTO (1848)

In 1847 Marx (aged 28) and Engels (aged 26) became two of the founding members of the Communist League. At the League's request, the two drafted a pamphlet criticising the capitalist system and explaining the communist understanding of human history. The pamphlet was only 12 000 words long, written in six weeks, was not drafted and therefore contained lots of errors, and was written hurriedly after the turmoil of the 1848 revolutions. Despite this, Marx was always confident that he had 'solved the riddle of man's existence'. He believed that his writings were scientific because it implied that his ideas were moving closer to certainty. Published in 1848 and called the *Communist Manifesto*, this now universally recognised document revealed their philosophical answer to society's problems – a new political system called communism. Marx wrote that 'The theory of communism may be summed up in one sentence: abolish all private property.'

Part 1 of the *Communist Manifesto* was an analysis of how society had developed and how it would develop, while Part 2 described who communists were and what they should do.

“ Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communist revolution.
The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.
WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES UNITE!

FINAL SENTENCES OF THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO (1848)

Marx never did manual work himself despite writing all about the lives of working families. In fact, he only worked for two years and then was financially supported by his friend Engels.

Communist Manifesto published by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848, it promoted the decline of capitalism and the inevitable rise of communism

Communism inevitable

Marx and Engels's underlying prediction in the *Communist Manifesto* was that the demise of capitalism and the subsequent rise of communism were both inevitable. They believed that capitalists would continue to exploit workers, that neither government nor workers' organisations would significantly improve their situation, and that workers would therefore be forced to revolt. Significant discussion throughout this book is directed at assessing this core belief of inevitability.

Current system: Definition of capitalism

An economic system in which investment in and ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange of wealth is in the hands of private individuals and corporations.

Marx and Engels's system: Definition of communism

A system of economic and social organisation in which industry, capital, land, and other means of production are owned and controlled by the community as a whole.

Stages of history

Marx and Engels considered society to be continually evolving as more efficient methods of production were invented and society's demands changed. This led to their crucial definition of history as a series of class struggles between those who controlled production (employers) and those who did not (employees). Marx and Engels wrote that: 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle.'

Class consciousness

The industrial workers (proletariat) are described as prisoners of the state, enslaved by machines and business owners. In order for the proletariat to act as a class, they needed to see themselves as a class with common needs, aspirations and experiences. This development of such **class consciousness** would create a powerful unity and strength which was essential to move from the capitalist stage of history to the desired socialist stage. Marx and Engels wrote that: 'The immediate aim of the communists is the same as that of all the other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class.'

Dictatorship of the proletariat

This stage would involve the overthrow of capitalism and the abolition of private property. The result would be the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', which meant that the means of production and distribution – like factories, railroads,

capitalism

an economic system in which investment in and ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange of wealth is in the hands of private individuals and corporations

class consciousness
the necessary process of the workers developing such a deep discontent with their exploitation that they are willing to unite to create a revolution

Philosopher's corner

Socialism

You have two cows and give one to your neighbour.

Communism

You have two cows; the government takes both and gives you the milk.

Fascism

You have two cows; the government takes both and sells you the milk.

Nazism

You have two cows; the government takes both and shoots you.

Bureaucratism

You have two cows; the government takes both, shoots one, milks the other and throws the milk away.

Capitalism

You have two cows; you sell one and buy a bull.

dictatorship

a system where a single leader has dominant control over the government and country

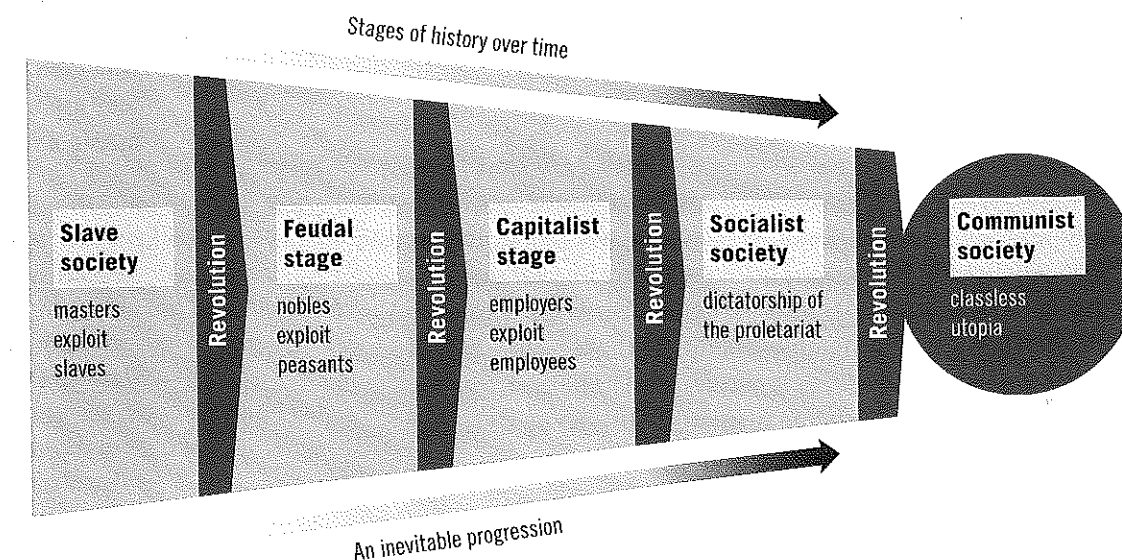
mines, farms and transport – would be controlled by the people rather than by harsh bosses. Marx and Engels wrote that: 'The class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat.'

Classless utopia

The final stage of the communist model is to achieve **utopia**, a perfect society without the problems experienced under capitalism. They argued that if revolution swept away the ruling classes then 'class' as both concept and reality would be abolished, resulting in the disappearance of class antagonism. Marx and Engels wrote: 'From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.'

utopia
a perfect society without
the problems experienced
under capitalism

'Marx's stages of history'



ASSUMPTIONS OF COMMUNISM

Underlying Marx and Engels's writings about communism were five core assumptions. To what extent do you believe each of these is true?

- Assumption 1: Conflicts are only *between* classes and never *within* them.
- Assumption 2: Human nature, and therefore human behaviour, is always consistent.
- Assumption 3: Class loyalty is significantly more important than national loyalty.
- Assumption 4: Capitalism is an unstable system that will get worse before collapsing.
- Assumption 5: With the inevitable demise of capitalism, the rise of communism is therefore also inevitable.

How was revolutionary leadership expressed?

Defining leadership

Revolutions become synonymous with their leaders: Robespierre symbolises the French Revolution, Mao, the Chinese, and **Lenin**, the Russian. In reality, the control of revolutionary leaders over events and policies was far more tenuous and fragile than the word itself suggests. Years of planning were not successful in inspiring the outbreak of revolution. Instead, the model for revolutions suggests that after missing the initial outbreak of revolution through exile or imprisonment, the leaders' main role begins in harnessing the power of the crowds after their return. A common perspective among historians is that revolutions are begun by spontaneous popular movements which are then directed by powerful leaders through the use of influential ideas. Historian William Doyle argued that: 'It would be truer to say that the revolutionaries had been created by the revolution.'

Lenin and Trotsky were both of Jewish descent. Lenin's grandfather changed his surname from 'Blank' to 'Dmitrievich' and dropped Judaism for Christianity so he could further his medical career. Trotsky was born into a Jewish family but he changed his name from 'Lev Bronstein' to 'Leon Trotsky' after being badly bullied at school.

While it is recognised that revolutions exist due to the combined influence of several leaders, Lenin and Trotsky were the two most prominent leaders from 1917 onwards, with Lenin being the ideological master and Trotsky the brilliant tactician. The key leaders who embraced Marxism profiled in this book are Vladimir Lenin (below), Alexander Kerensky (see Chapter 9), Alexandra Kollontai (see Chapter 12) and Leon Trotsky (see Chapter 13).

Lenin's real surname was Ulyanov. He used over 160 code names to disguise his writing. He began using the name 'Lenin' consistently from 1901 because it was the most popular of his writing names. The name 'Lenin' may have come from the Lena River in Siberia.

Revolutionary theories – Marxism vs Leninism

The theory of communism was primarily proposed for industrialised countries like Germany, France and England, rather than the semi-feudal agrarian-based Russia. Whereas Marx and Engels simply believed that a classless utopia would inevitably occur, Lenin worked to accelerate the natural progress of economic and social evolution. The *Communist Manifesto* focused on detailing the flaws in the capitalist system, but did not explain how the socialist transition period would work or what the communist utopia might actually look like in practice.

Lenin
the most recognised
Marxist revolutionary who
led the Bolshevik Party and
eventually overthrew the
Provisional Government in
October 1917

exile
many revolutionaries
were imprisoned by the
Tsar in the isolated region
of central Russia called
Siberia, or banished from
Russia altogether

Trotsky
a radical Marxist
revolutionary who joined
with Lenin and the
Bolsheviks in 1917 to form
the new government after
the October Revolution

Siberia
the remote but vast
central area in Russia
whose isolation and
harsh conditions limited
population numbers and
made it ideal for exiling
revolutionaries and other
dangerous prisoners

Leninism
Lenin's suggestions of how Marx and Engels's theoretical ideas should be interpreted and implemented

These understandable omissions meant that Lenin needed to fill in the gaps himself. Lenin's suggestions of how Marx and Engels's theoretical ideas should be interpreted and implemented were called **Leninism**. Lenin himself once said that 'Sometimes History needs a push.' Lenin's writings about revolution and his *April Theses* (see Chapter 9) are crucial examples of Leninism.

Despite being a revolutionary heavyweight, Lenin was only 5 foot 5 inches tall.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 1 Research report

Understanding Lenin's approach to revolution is crucial. Lenin was a prolific writer. Research one of his pre-1917 writings. Some suggested writings include: *What is to be done?* (1902), *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back* (1904) and *Two Tactics* (1905). Use the website listed in 'Reading more deeply'.

Leadership profile – Vladimir Lenin

Portrait of a revolutionary

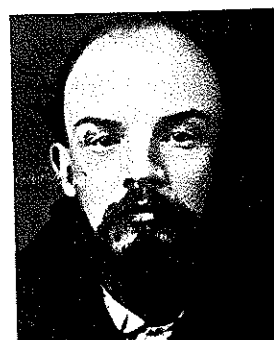
1870–89



Lenin, 1887 (aged 17)

- Born into a middle-class family in the province of Kazan in 1870 as Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov.
- Excelled throughout high school, with one report card reading 'Quite talented, invariably diligent, prompt and reliable'.
- Revolutionary impulses developed after brother hanged in 1887 for assassination attempt on Tsar Alexander III.
- Was on the Tsar's list of 'dangerous persons' from the age of 17 onwards.
- Managed the family farm in Samara from 1889, where he once successfully sued the neighbouring peasant family for letting their cattle walk over his crops.
- Was officially reported to the Ministry of Education while at Kazan University for 'secretiveness, inattention and impoliteness'.
- Graduated as a lawyer.

1890–99



Lenin, 1896 (aged 26)

- Avid reading of Marx had turned him into a committed Marxist revolutionary.
- During the 1891–92 famine he was not in favour of providing aid, hoping it would 'cause the peasant to reflect on the fundamental facts of capitalist society' and 'destroy his faith in the Tsar'.
- Did only two years' paid work, 1892–94, as an assistant to a barrister. Lived off his mother's pension, a party salary, and private supporters. Writings and newspapers brought only meagre income.



Lenin, 1910 (aged 40)

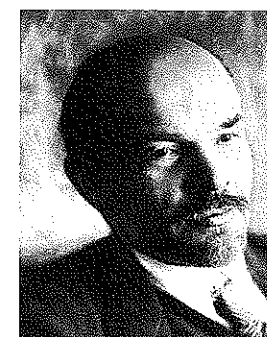
1900–09

- Arrested in St Petersburg for 'subversive activity' in 1895.
- Exile to Siberia, 1895–99, provided the opportunity to study and write.
- Adopted the pen name 'Lenin' (the most famous of his 160 revolutionary aliases).
- Met and married Nadezhda Krupskaya in Siberia in July 1898, but had no children with her.

- Released from exile in 1900 and began revolutionary newspaper called *Iskra*, meaning 'Spark', taken from a phrase used by the Decembrists of 1825, 'a spark will start a big blaze'.
- Published *What is to be done?* in 1902.
- Led the Bolshevik faction of the Social Democratic Party in 1903.
- Played no role in the 1905 Revolution and only returned to St Petersburg in December.
- Exiled again from 1906 through to 1917.

Krupskaya
Lenin's wife; they met in Siberia after she had also been exiled there for her own revolutionary activity

Iskra
Lenin began this revolutionary newspaper in 1900, meaning 'Spark', taken from a phrase used by the Decembrists of 1825, 'a spark will start a big blaze'



Lenin, 1918 (aged 48)

1910–17

- Began a relationship with the young and enthusiastic Inessa Armand in Paris from 1910, forming an accepted trio with Lenin's wife.
- Began a daily newspaper called *Pravda*, meaning 'Truth' in 1912.
- Badly shaken by his mother's death in July 1916.
- Returned to Petrograd in April 1917 after the February Revolution and then initiated the Bolshevik takeover of October 1917.

Armand
Inessa Armand was a passionate revolutionary who met Lenin in Paris in 1910 and became his mistress

Pravda
Lenin's daily newspaper, meaning 'Truth', begun in 1912

REVOLUTIONARY FORTUNES: MARX AND LENIN

By design or destiny, Lenin's life mirrored Marx's in several ways. Both studied law, which developed their reasoning and logic. Both were exiled from their country of birth for the majority of their adult lives. Both became popular through controversial writings that illuminated the fundamental problems underlying European society. Both considered the capitalist system unfair because it produced rich individuals while others remained poor. A critical difference, however, was that whereas Marx died in exile in 1883, Lenin finally witnessed his philosophies implemented in Russia after 1917.

Marx is buried in a prominent position in Highgate Cemetery in London. Ironically, his grave screams of capitalism with a massive granite tomb complete with his head modelled in bronze. Inscribed in gold letters are the words: 'Workers of all lands unite: philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways – the point however is to change it.' Interestingly, visitors to his grave peaked during the global economic recession in 2008.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 2 Historian's perspective

The purpose of these sections is to provide extracts that reveal a specific point of view, or historian's perspective. Use of these in your writing can make it richer and more challenging.

“Revolutions in short are made in the name of the proletariat, not by it, and usually in countries where the proletariat hardly exists. What is more, these revolutions do not bring the triumph or dictatorship of the proletariat. They bring the dictatorship of a new managerial class, or sometimes the old class under a new name. In any society, a few men will aspire to run things, and the great majority will allow them to do it ... The Communists, from Marx onwards, were the chosen few who really knew what the proletariat wanted. They knew only because they said they knew. This was enough to convince them that they would always be right. Someone called Marxists 'god's prompters'. Lenin was the most persistent of those prophets.”

AJP TAYLOR IN HIS INTRODUCTION TO THE *Communist Manifesto* (PENGUIN), P. 46

- 1 According to Taylor, what is the problem of revolutions?
- 2 What does Taylor argue about revolutionary leaders?
- 3 In one sentence only, summarise Taylor's main point of view in this document.

THE STORY SO FAR...

- 1 Opposition to tsarism was not new in the 1900s. The fortunes of revolutionary ideas and leaders rose and fell throughout the 1800s.
- 2 The key idea that inspired many revolutionaries was Marxism, an economic theory proposing that history was a series of class struggles inevitably resulting in the downfall of capitalism and the victory of the workers (called the proletariat).
- 3 Lenin, leader of the Bolshevik Party from 1903, had been politically active and agitating for revolution since his brother's death and spent nearly all of the period before 1917 in exile.

CHAPTER REVIEW

Developing clear definitions

Write explanations defining each of the following in pre-1917 Russia.

Key concepts	Key publications	Key leaders
Ideology	<i>Communist Manifesto</i> (1848)	Marx and Engels
Capitalism	<i>What is to be done?</i> (1902)	Vladimir Lenin
Communism		
Proletariat		
Leninism		

Practising paragraph answers

- 1 Describe Marx and Engels's reflections on the way society operated.
- 2 What is communism?
- 3 Explain why Lenin's background made him an ideal revolutionary.

Essay question

'The autocratic ideas and leaders of tsarism were totally opposite to the Marxist ideas of the revolutionary leaders. It was impossible for both to exist in the same society.' Discuss this view, providing evidence to support your answer.

Reading more deeply

1 EASY

Documentary – *Lenin* (Granada)

An excellent documentary called *Lenin* produced by Granada as part of their 'Men of Our Time' series. Narrated by James Cameron, it outlines how Lenin's experiences at university, Samara and his brother's death contributed to the development of his revolutionary world perspective. It continues through to his death in 1924, and is a good introduction to Lenin's role in the revolutionary period of 1917–24.

2 MODERATE

www.marxists.org

Click on the title 'Marxist Writers' on the home page to access several excellent primary sources from the period. This site is very useful for research reports.

3 CHALLENGING

Shlyapnikov, A 1984, *On the Eve of 1917: Reminiscences from the Revolutionary Underground*, Allison & Busby. Chapter 4, especially pp. 110–14

Shlyapnikov was an important Bolshevik before 1917 due to his roving role as the link between the Bolshevik organisations in Russia and the Bolshevik leaders in exile. This unique first-hand perspective outlines his visits to the leaders in exile, the logistics of smuggling documents to their hiding places, and some of the divisions between exiles.

