

OPPOSITION TO TSARISM: MOVEMENTS

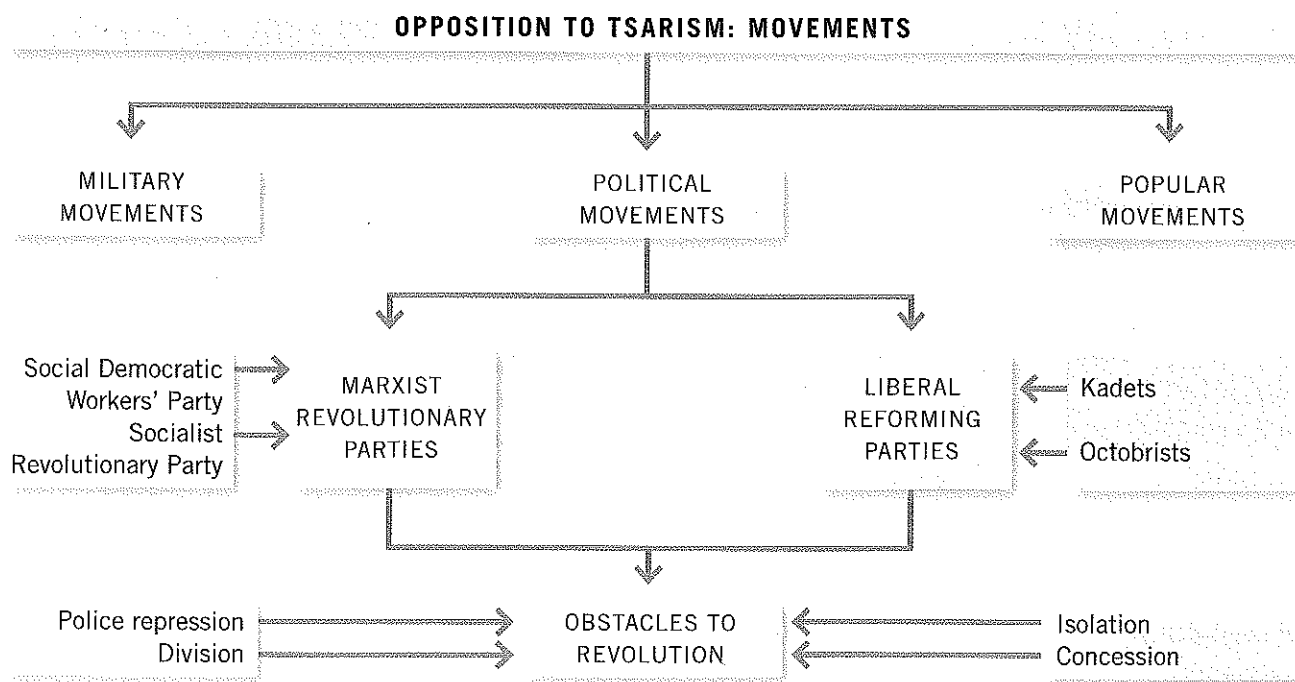
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Overview

'Movements' is a term that cannot be used generally because it has quite varied meanings. While ideas and leaders are important in shaping and directing revolutions, it is movements that typically begin revolutions and provide the force needed to threaten the existing regime. Revolutionary movements can be divided into three key groups in order to develop a specific understanding of this difficult term:

- Political movements – parties, clubs or associations that range from being single-minded in their determination to achieve their goal, to being disorganised and split by different ideological viewpoints. For example, the Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionary Party (see this chapter).
- Military movements – movements need a military organisation to fight their battles in order to complete a successful overthrow of the government. Whoever controls the troops controls power. For example, Red Army and Cheka (see Chapters 12 and 13).
- Popular movements – often spontaneous and less well defined groups of ordinary people that provided the important ground force which the professional revolutionaries needed to win over. For example, the St Petersburg Soviet and mass strikes (see Chapters 4, 9 and 10).

Flow of chapter



Plekhanov
considered the father of
Russian Marxism

Social Democratic
Workers' Party
a revolutionary party
founded by Plekhanov in
1898 on Marxist principles

Martov
a serious disagreement
with Lenin led to the
establishment of the
Mensheviks in 1903 and
Martov was elected their
first leader

Bolsheviks
a revolutionary political
party begun by Lenin
after splitting with the
Mensheviks in 1903

Mensheviks
a Marxist revolutionary
party that was formed,
along with the Bolsheviks,
when the Social
Democratic Workers' Party
split in 1903

Socialist Revolutionary
Party
the most popular Marxist
revolutionary party
in Russia because it
represented the interests
of the peasants

socialism
the stage of history
identified by Karl Marx
as coming after the end
of capitalism that was
necessary before moving
into the classless utopia

Key issues

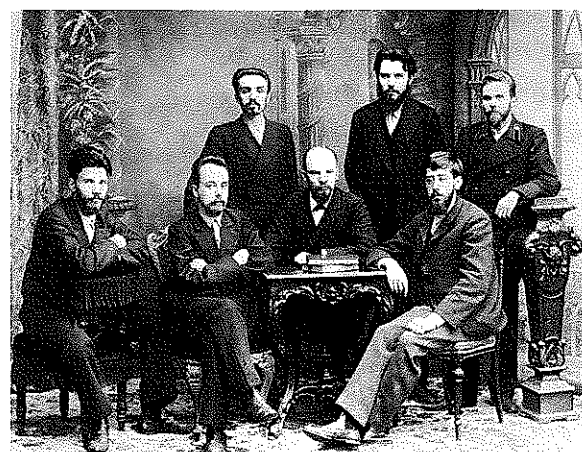
- What were the main revolutionary political movements?
- What were the obstacles to revolution?

What were the main revolutionary political movements?

Marxist revolutionary parties

SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC WORKERS' PARTY

Background – Marxist principles were spreading throughout Russia in the 1890s, prompting George Plekhanov, now considered the father of Russian Marxism, to found the Social Democratic Workers' Party in 1898 on socialist principles. In 1903, delegates met safely in London where Lenin deliberately confronted Plekhanov and prominent *Iskra* co-editor, Martov, on the issue of party membership and organisation. The subsequent series of votes resulted in two factions being formed, Lenin and his supporters, who called themselves the **Bolsheviks** (meaning majority), and Martov and his supporters, who became the **Mensheviks** (minority). These became separate political parties in 1912.



Members of the revolutionary St Petersburg League of Struggle in 1897. Lenin is seated in the centre, Martov on his left.

SOCIALIST REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

Background – The Socialist Revolutionary Party (SR) had the longest political tradition of any party. The Populist movement grew out of the economic reforms of Alexander II in the 1860s and was based upon a type of agrarian socialism. One violent section of the Populist movement formed a group called 'The People's Will' in 1879, which practised terrorism and assassination. During this radical period, the movement lost popularity before reforming in 1901 as the Socialist Revolutionary Party.

Key leaders – Victor Chernov and, later, Alexander Kerensky, who became the Prime Minister of Russia in 1917.

Key policies – Politically, the SR wanted to introduce representative federal and local governments elected by universal manhood suffrage that placed emphasis on rural communities and allowed for regional independence. Economically, the SR proposed the radical plan of socialising all privately owned land and redistributing it to democratically organised communes.

Support base – Peasants and industrial workers.

Political influence – The SR's belief that peasants were crucial to revolution made them a primary political party of rural Russia. Their overwhelming national popularity was demonstrated by their distinct majority in the elections to the Constituent Assembly in November 1917.

Chernov
a revolutionary who was
involved with the Socialist
Revolutionaries and later
the Mensheviks

Constituent Assembly
the name given to an
elected political group

	Bolsheviks	Mensheviks
Key leader	Vladimir Lenin	Julius Martov
Key influence	Marx's writings	Marx's writings
Stages of history	Believed they could bypass capitalist stage and move straight to socialist society.	Believed that capitalist stage was necessary before evolving into a socialist society.
Party organisation	Membership for dedicated workers only and decisions made by leaders alone.	Membership open to all workers and decisions made after open debate and majority vote.
Attitude to proletariat	Party needs to plan revolution and seize power as the 'vanguard of the proletariat'.	Party needs to educate workers to develop a class consciousness that unleashes a spontaneous struggle for equality.
Political influence	Due to their small numbers, perhaps only as high as 10 000 members before 1914, the Bolsheviks were not influential. Lenin was also in exile, leaving the party without direct leadership.	It was in fact the Mensheviks, not the Bolsheviks, who were most closely monitored by the <i>Okhrana</i> as the major revolutionary threat to tsarist authority.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 1 Lenin's *What is to be done?* (1902)

Lenin was a prolific writer. Given that he was nearly in constant exile from 1895 to 1917, his writing became his main and most influential form of communication with other revolutionaries. This document was written in the context of a debate with the Mensheviks as to what type of group would be most likely to achieve the goal of revolution.

“A small, tight, solid nucleus of the most dependable, experienced and hardened workers having trustworthy representatives in the main regions and connected by all the rules of secrecy with the organization of revolutionaries can quite capably, with the widest support of the masses and without any formal organization, fulfill all functions of a professional organization, in a manner desirable to a Social-Democratic movement. Only in this way can we secure the consolidation and development of a Social-Democratic trade-union movement ...

The moral from this is simple: if we begin with a solid foundation of strong organization of revolutionaries, we can guarantee the stability of the movement as a whole and realize the goals of Social-Democracy and of trade unions. If we, however, begin with a wide workers' organization, supposedly the most accessible to the masses (but in fact is the most accessible to the gendarmes, and makes revolutionaries most accessible to the police) we shall not achieve one goal nor the other ...

FROM WWW.MARXISTS.ORG TRANSLATED BY JANE SCALES

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- 1 According to Lenin, what are the characteristics of a professional revolutionary group?
- 2 What are the problems with having a 'wide workers' organization' with open membership?
- 3 Using your knowledge from this chapter, explain the conflict and differences between the Bolshevik and Menshevik revolutionary parties.
- 4 What are the strengths and weaknesses of this document?

The Bolshevik Party quite openly stole in order to get money to survive. Young Joseph Stalin was responsible for bank robberies, the most well known being when he captured a wagon going to the bank and ran away with bags of money while firing over his shoulder.

ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 2 Research report

Early revolutionary groups were made up of both men and women. Thirty per cent of the populist movement of the 1870s were women. The leader of The People's Will from 1881 was Vera Figner (1852–1943), described by a fellow activist as 'an ideal revolutionary, a woman with an iron will'. She was arrested in 1883 and imprisoned for 22 years. Another female activist was Vera Zasulich who was an assassin who helped found the Social Democrats. Research a revolutionary woman from pre-1917.

Liberal reforming parties

There was also a growing liberal movement in Russia which argued that the dire need for change did not require an overthrow of the tsarist system. They advocated reform rather than revolution, continuity with the past rather than a painful break from it. The movement was welcomed by the progressive middle class of industrialists, lawyers and financiers that had emerged from Witte's industrial reforms of the 1890s. There were two main political parties that emerged during 1905 that subscribed to this liberal approach.

KADETS

Background – The Constitutional Democratic Party, or **Kadets** for short, was the largest of the liberal parties whose main policy was promoting a system of constitutional monarchy.

Key leaders – Paul Miliukov, a strong opponent of Rasputin and the war who became the Foreign Minister in the Provisional Government in February 1917; Prince Lvov, who became Prime Minister in March 1917.

Main policies – Strong advocates of a democratically elected constituent assembly which would limit the power of the Tsar. This representative body would then be able to address Russia's problems by introducing reforms like universal education, civil rights for all citizens, the legalisation of trade unions and striking, and the cessation of censorship.

Support base – Smaller industrial entrepreneurs and landlords.

Political influence – The Kadets were a powerful voice in the First Duma and were central in forming the Provisional Government.

OCTOBRISTS

Background – Given their name because of their readiness to accept the *October Manifesto* in 1905. Their loyalty to the Tsar meant that they embraced the Dumas as a significant constitutional reform. More conservative than the Kadets.

Key leaders – Mikhail Rodzianko, who was the chairman of the Fourth Duma from 1912 to 1917 and Alexander Guchkov, who became the first Minister for War in the new Provisional Government in 1917.

Key policies – Limited objectives primarily focusing on constitutional and legislative reform.

Support base – Industrialists and landowners.

Political influence – Primary influence was in the Dumas where they were commonly voicing serious concerns about the incompetence of the government.

liberal movement argued that the dire need for change did not require an overthrow of the tsarist system

Kadets
a conservative revolutionary group which played an important role in the First Duma in 1906 and in the Provisional Government in 1917

Miliukov
a member of the conservative Kadet Party who opposed Rasputin and became a leader in the Provisional Government in 1917

Rasputin
a Siberian peasant who had great influence over Tsarina Alexandra and Tsar Nicholas II

Provisional Government
a temporary committee formed during the February Revolution but becoming the new government after Tsar Nicholas II abdicated

October Manifesto
the document produced by Tsar Nicholas II in 1905 promising to grant an elected Duma in return for an end to the general strikes that had paralysed the economy

Duma
the Russian word for elected parliament

Rodzianko
the head of the Fourth Duma (1912–17), who formed the Provisional Government after the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II

Revolutionary Parties					
LEFT WING (radical revolutionaries)			RIGHT WING (moderate revolutionaries)		
SOCIAL DEMOCRATS Split in 1903 into					
NAME	BOLSHEVIKS	MENSHEVIKS	SOCIALIST REVOLUTIONARIES	KADETS	OCTOBRISTS
SUPPORT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Urban working class• Soldiers in the army during First World War	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Urban working class• Some lawyers and other professionals• Cautious socialists	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Peasants• Some moderate urban socialists	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Progressive landlords and industrialists• Many lawyers and other professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wealthy land and factory owning monarchists
PERSONALITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vladimir Lenin	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Julius Martov	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alexander Kerensky	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Paul Miliukov• Prince Lvov	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mikhail Rodzianko
POLICIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alliance between working class and peasants• Rapid overthrow of the Tsar and the middle class to attain socialism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cooperation with the middle class to overthrow the Tsar, followed by steady progress to socialism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Land reform to benefit the peasants	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A constitutional monarchy, like the English model	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supporters of the 1905 <i>October Manifesto</i>• A Duma, but with the Tsar retaining most power

What were the obstacles to revolution?

It was very difficult for political movements under tsarism because political parties in the modern sense did not exist. Gaining support, influence and power was problematic because of the obstacles to change that existed in Russia which had the effect of strengthening the status quo, in this case tsarism.

Even the expression 'The Russian Revolution' presents a problem because we know that a revolution did actually occur. It is too easy to look for evidence to prove that it was obvious that Nicholas's regime was going to collapse. The existence of professional revolutionaries like Lenin, socialist groups like the Bolsheviks and SR, and alluring ideologies like Marxism do not mean that revolution was necessary or inevitable. As history is based on the unpredictability

of real people, it is never that simple. If political disillusionment, economic hardship and social inequality were the sole criteria for revolution, most societies would be in revolution most of the time. Instead, it is more valuable to reflect on the significant obstacles that limited the likelihood of revolution under tsarism.

Obstacle 1: Police repression – The *Okhrana* played a vital role in dispersing opponents of tsarism through stringent policies of social control. Censorship, imprisonment, exile and execution all limited the degree to which criticism of tsarism was spread. Chapter 5 describes Prime Minister Stolypin's severe repression of Nicholas's enemies between 1906 and 1911.

Obstacle 2: Division – It is inaccurate to assume that the underground socialist movements were unified. Leaders often had disagreements, exemplified by the divisions between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. Divisions weaken power.

Obstacle 3: Cohesion – The role of the revolutionaries was to convince the majority of the general population that they were a better alternative to tsarism. This did not occur within the sympathetic industrial or peasant workforces, let alone the unified ruling and upper classes that benefited so profitably from the current system.

Obstacle 4: Isolation – As discussed in Chapter 1, Russia's sheer size and cultural diversity made the country extremely difficult to rule, let alone sabotage. The inefficiency of communication and transportation that was to severely impact on Russia during the First World War (see Chapter 6) also made revolutionary propaganda difficult to disseminate. Added to these constraints was the illiteracy and isolation of the majority of the peasant population.

Obstacle 5: Concession – Reforms, even of a limited or temporary nature, diffuse tension and conflict within a society; opposition softens and cooperation increases. Chapter 4 discusses the Tsar's *October Manifesto* in response to the crises in 1905.

propaganda
the creation of powerful
visual or verbal material
that presents an issue
from only one dominant
point of view

THE STORY SO FAR...

- 1 Marxist ideology was adopted by the Socialist Revolutionaries and the Social Democrats.
- 2 Social Democrats split into the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions in 1903 due to opposing interpretations of how revolutionary parties should be organised and led.
- 3 The liberalism movement which favoured reforms rather than revolutionary change produced two main parties, the Kadets and Octobrists, both formed during the 1905 Revolution.
- 4 Despite the existence of revolutionary ideas, leaders and movements, there were several significant obstacles in the tsarist regime that made it more difficult for revolutionary political movements to gain mass support.

CHAPTER REVIEW

Developing clear definitions

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

Key political movements	Key concepts
Bolsheviks	Movements
Mensheviks	
Socialist Revolutionary Party	

Practising paragraph answers

- 1 Movements can be divided into three categories. Explain each.
- 2 Explain the differences between the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions.
- 3 What obstacles limited the growth of opposition to tsarism?

Essay questions

- 1 'The structure of tsarism was so fragile and the revolutionaries so strong that Marx was right; revolution was indeed inevitable.' Use information from Chapters 1 to 3 to provide evidence to support your answer.
- 2 'It was the Socialist Revolutionaries, not the Bolsheviks, who were the primary revolutionary party in the tsarist regime.' Provide evidence to support your answer.

Reading more deeply

1 EASY

Fitzpatrick, S 1982, *The Russian Revolution 1917–1932*, Oxford. Section subtitled 'The revolutionary tradition', pp. 18–26

Fitzpatrick is a noted Australian historian who became a professor of history at the University of Texas. Her style cleverly incorporates specific details and explains difficult arguments clearly. This section links together the themes of ideas, leaders and political movements as they existed in pre-revolutionary Russia.

2 MODERATE

Liebich, A, 'The Mensheviks', pp. 19–28 in Geifman, A (ed.) 1999, *Russia under the Last Tsar: Opposition and Subversion 1984–1917*, Blackwell.

This is a fascinating collection of articles on revolutionary movements in Russia under the old regime. The strength of this chapter is its examination of the attitudes and policies of the radical Menshevik socialist party, particularly in relation to Bolshevism. Liebich's key argument is that the differences between these two parties were more minor than Lenin and the Bolsheviks portrayed.

3 CHALLENGING

Carr, EH 1980, *From Napoleon to Stalin and Other Essays*, Macmillan. Chapter 7 'Liberalism in alien soil', pp. 60–7

Carr is a prominent English writer about revolution and the nature of history. This chapter discusses the question of why radical Marxism developed in Russia from the 1860s rather than the more moderate liberal school of thought. Carr explores the implication of the introduction of the self-governing *zemstvos*, impact of the nationalist 'slovophil' movement, and the emergence of the influential leaders like Struve and Miliukov. Carr argues that the social environment within Russia was not conducive to liberalism, whereas Marxism had greater appeal. The chapter concludes powerfully that 'No sane analysis can deny the fact that by the early years of the twentieth century Russia was ripe for revolution. It was the dilemma and the tragedy of Russian liberalism that it could not provide the fuel and motive power for that revolution.'

