

The March (February) Revolution

As the First World War dragged on the impact on the Russian people became worse. People living in the towns were starving as the railways were used to supply food to the army. Town populations were increasing as factories required more people to produce equipment for war but this made the food shortages even worse. The cost of living increased as did the death rates due to unsanitary living conditions. In January 1917 strikes broke out in some cities, in February these spread further. They were even supported by the army who had suffered terrible losses and had lost faith in the Tsar. These soldiers had recently been conscripted (been forced to sign up for the army) so they had more in common with the strikers than their own military officers, hence they joined in instead of breaking them up.

On 7th March workers at the Putilov steelworks in Petrograd went on strike. They joined with thousands of women as it was International Women's Day and other unhappy workers demanding that the government give them bread. From 7th-10th March the number of striking workers rose to 250,000 and industry came to a standstill. The Duma set up a Provisional Committee to take over the government. The Tsar ordered them to disband, but the soldiers refused. On 12th March the Tsar ordered his army to put down the revolt by force, once again the soldiers refused. Some soldiers even shot their own officers and joined the protestors. This was a crucial moment the Tsar had always relied on the army to crush any rebellions, without their support he was effectively powerless.



The demonstrators marched to the Duma and demanded that its members should take over the government. Reluctantly the Duma leaders agreed – they had always wanted reform rather than revolution but now there seemed no choice. On the same day revolutionaries set up the Petrograd Soviet and began taking control of food supplies to the city. They set up soldiers' committees, undermining the authority of the officers. It was not clear who was in charge of Russia but it was obvious that the Tsar was not. On 15 March he issued a statement that he was abdicating. There was an initial plan for his brother, Michael, to take over but Michael refused. Russia was done with the Tsars. The Tsar and his family were put under house arrest as were most of the Tsar's ministers. With this revolution 304 years of the Romanov dynasty had come to an end.

Activities

1. Complete the table of the events of the revolution. Fill in the blanks using the words at the bottom of the sheet
2. Was this a spontaneous revolution or an organised one?
3. The Tsar was forced to abdicate because of the reasons in the box. For each reason write a few sentences explaining how it led to the downfall of the Tsar
4. Can you make links between any of them, explain these. E.g. the food shortages were as a result of the war
5. Why was the Tsar able to survive the 1905 revolution but not this one? (think about the factors that were involved in 1917 but not in 1905)
6. Use the mind map and the help sheet to write an answer to the following practice exam question:
Which was the more important reason for the March 1917 revolution
 - The poor leadership of Nicholas II
 - The impact of the war at home

Reasons the Tsar was forced to abdicate:

- Failures in the war
- Mutiny in the army
- The Duma (an alternative government)
- Strikes
- Food shortages
- The Tsarina and Rasputin

Remember to use the P,Ev,Ex,Ev,Ex structure and you need to write a conclusion where you decide between the two bullet points.