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## Legacies

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The Bolshevik Revolution has left a large and varied legacy, as well as a great deal of debate, which continues to affect the world today. First, there was impact on Russia itself and on the new state that came out of the revolution, the Soviet Union (or, formally, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics—USSR), and eventually on post-Soviet Russia. The Bolshevik Revolution, to an unparalleled degree, swept away the old elite—political, social, economic, and cultural—and its values and institutions. Not only did it destroy the old political system and ruling class, but it also drove out the landowning class, which was not merely dispossessed, but in large part destroyed physically, either dead or fled abroad. The old middle class, especially the commercial element, was almost as completely eliminated, and its survivors found their condition radically altered. Property was confiscated and nationalized on an unprecedented scale, and the new system of state ownership and direction of the economy was equally novel. Politically, the Bolshevik Revolution ended the trend toward a more open, pluralistic, and democratic society that had been evolving in Russia and seemed to have reached fulfillment in 1917. Instead, the Bolsheviks, while retaining the outward forms of democratic and constitutional procedures, hollowed them out and created one of the most fully developed dictatorships of human history and the prototype of the modern authoritarian society. The earlier great revolutions of the modern Western world—the British, American, and French—incorporated more of the old elite and prerevolutionary values and institutions into the postrevolutionary order than did the Russian. In Russia, the Bolsheviks, more consciously and more success-

fully, built something very different from the old order. To be sure, much remained—Russia would have continued to be a “Great Power” in any case, for example—and the respective elements of continuity and change between tsarist and communist Russia have been the subject of debate ever since, but by any measurement, the changes were astonishingly sweeping.

A sense of the degree to which the Bolshevik victory in the revolution and civil war sent Russia along a path of development very different from what it would have traveled had victory gone to either the liberal and moderate socialist democrats who held power in the first part of the revolution, or to the conservative White generals who contested the civil war, can be seen by a brief look at alternatives, by a kind of “what if” look at Russia. Certainly, the Red Terror and the ideological justifications developed for it helped prepare the ground for the “Great Terror” of the 1930s and the continued use of repression against “class enemies” throughout Soviet history. Nothing similar existed in the thinking of their rivals, despite the actual brutality of some White Army commanders during the civil war, and it is impossible to imagine a government created by the Bolsheviks’ rivals carrying out the massive terror and forced labor camps of Soviet history. Nor would any other regime have felt it necessary to destroy the old elites so thoroughly, although they might have partially dispossessed them, especially landowners. On another theme, the other parties would not have tried to transform “man” himself (and herself), to produce the “new Soviet man” of later Soviet propaganda, as the Bolsheviks did. Not even the most restrictive tsars controlled intellectual life to the extent that the Bolsheviks did, nor can one conceive of any of the political alternatives to the Bolsheviks establishing a similar kind of control over thought, beliefs, and expression. Any Russian government of the twentieth century would have pushed industrialization and would have had to use some of the same approaches (as had the industrialization of the 1890s), but it is hard to imagine any other regime as committed to centralized economic control or resorting to Stalin’s tactics for industrialization. These and other “what if” scenarios can be debated indefinitely, and make for fascinating speculation, but what is not in doubt is that Soviet Russia was a very different place, with fundamentally different political, economic, social, and cultural features, than the Russia that any other outcome of the revolution and civil war would have produced.

Another example of the legacy, again on a comparative basis, is in the anti-Western attitude that was so much a part of the Soviet outlook and policies. Although an element of anti-Western sentiment ran through prerevolutionary Russian thought, there also was an even stronger current of seeing Western achievements as models for Russia, and a powerful Westernizing tradition had long existed. The people who first came to power in

1917, the liberals and moderate socialists, admired Western Europe and most of them hoped to reshape Russia along Western-inspired lines of democracy, parliamentary government, rule of law, and individual rights. Even socialists, who rejected Western capitalism, saw themselves as following the general path of European democratic socialism and broader Western values. Similarly, the White generals saw themselves as part of the larger Europe and within the slowly modernizing and Westernizing tradition of prerevolutionary Russia. The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, although subscribing to the Western philosophy of Marxism and admiring some features of the West, especially its technical achievements, were fundamentally hostile to the West’s basic political, social, and economic institutions and values. They saw themselves as leaders of a world revolution in the name of an alternative set of political-economic principles. This produced not only many characteristics of the Soviet Union, but a foreign policy and international relations—including the Cold War—different from what any alternative outcome of the revolution would have produced. This anti-Western sentiment reached its highest point during the Stalin era, but was a feature before and after as well. Indeed, the whole Cold War could not have happened, or would have been a very different Russia-Western confrontation, without the Bolshevik Revolution and the foreign policy and revolutionary objectives of Soviet Russia, and the reactions they inspired abroad.

The revolution also provided the foundation myth of the Soviet Union and its sense of special mission. Soviet leaders saw the October Revolution as the event that legitimized their regime (and therefore attempted to control historical writing about it). Communist leaders, all the way to Mikhail Gorbachev at the end, saw the Russian Revolution as opening a new era in human history. This, they believed, gave the Soviet Union a special mission in the world. The idea of a special mission arising out of the revolutionary heritage, self-proclaimed but also granted by many others, became a key ingredient in the Soviet view of the world, their place in it, and the conflict with the Western powers in the 1920s and 1930s. The Soviet victory in World War II and their new postwar position as one of the two superpowers reinforced this sense of special mission, and it helped fuel the Cold War. Moreover, the revolutionary mission, a constant feature of Soviet internal propaganda, became an important part of the identity not only of the Soviet Union as a state, but of many of its people, and gave them a sense of purpose. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and with it a retrospective discrediting of the Bolshevik Revolution that had created the Soviet system, damaged also the revolutionary mythology and sense of a special historical mission. This has left many Russians disoriented as they seek a new national identity to replace the old Bolshevik-inspired one. The promises of the Communist

Party were so extravagant and the propaganda so pervasive that they stifled alternative visions of society, visions that might have helped sustain Russians through the hard present times. They also contributed to the cynical selfishness and corruption of the post-Soviet era. This legacy, this belief in a great mission, also has left not a few Russians discontented and yearning for the old days when they confidently believed in a great historical role for Russia in the world (and had the military power to back it).

The Bolshevik Revolution's worldwide impact was enormous, although not necessarily in the way its founders intended, and transformed the globe in important ways. Many people throughout the world accepted the Bolshevik/Communist leaders' vision of their revolution as the beginning of a worldwide upheaval and a total transformation of political, economic, and social systems. Communist movements, inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution, split off from existing socialist movements or were founded from scratch around the globe. In early 1919, they formed the Communist International (Comintern, Third International), under Soviet leadership, beginning a worldwide communist movement that became one of the most powerful movements of the twentieth century. Knowing what kind of dictatorships the Soviet Union and its communist offspring became, it is easy to forget how, in the first flush of optimism, and in reaction to the slaughter of World War I, many saw communism as a path to solving the problems of war, poverty, and inequality found in the capitalist and liberal democratic world. They believed that it would usher in a new era of freedom, prosperity, and justice. For most, that dream proved short-lived, perhaps two or three decades, but some continued to believe in it to the end of the century.

Outside Europe and North America, communism linked up with the anti-Western and anticolonial movements in what later came to be called the "Third World." The Bolshevik Revolution and the Soviet Union became models for many Third World intellectuals and political leaders, especially after 1945, when a newly powerful Soviet Union presented itself to the world as an alternative model for economic and social development and as an alternative type of political system. Indeed, imagining the Third World revolutions of the second half of the twentieth century without the Bolshevik/communist inspiration is difficult. They certainly would have been different revolutions. Although countries such as China, Vietnam, and Cuba had to adapt communism to local conditions, and in the process altered it, they made their revolutions in the name of the communist revolutionary tradition begun by the Bolsheviks and saw themselves as continuing it. Other revolutionaries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America drew more selectively on the Bolshevik revolutionary tradition and communism, but were nonetheless influenced by them to varying degrees.

Nor should we overlook the impact of the Bolshevik Revolution on non-communist political movements, as the Bolsheviks inspired revulsion as well as admiration. Bolshevism/communism powerfully affected, and in significant ways reshaped, conservatism as a political movement. Anti-communism became a central tenet of conservative thought and programs. At times it perhaps became the dominant element, such as in the "Red Scare" of 1920, and in the activities of Joseph McCarthy in the early 1950s. One of the often-made political analyses of the 1990s was to ask what the collapse of the Soviet Union meant for conservatism, what might replace anticommunism and anti-Soviet postures as centerpieces of conservative political parties in the United States and Europe. Other political movements, liberalism and democratic socialism in particular, also had to redefine themselves vis-à-vis the Bolshevik Revolution, communism, and the Soviet Union. Conflict over communism tore European and American trade union movements apart, and the Western intellectual communities as well. The rise of fascism and Nazism is not understandable without comprehension of the role of anticommunism in their programs and among their supporters. Hitler, Mussolini, and other fascists shaped much of their appeal around the fear of the spread of Bolshevism; some observers have even suggested that without communism, those movements would never have gained the following that they did. After World War II, anticommunism was also an important part of many of the military dictatorships of Latin America and the Third World, and a key reason for American alliance with many of them during the Cold War era.

The Bolshevik Revolution's impact on socialism as a political movement also deserves special attention. There have been two stages to the debate on this issue. The first began immediately after 1917. Socialism was an important political movement before the revolution, especially in Europe, and remained one afterwards. The Bolshevik Revolution, however, split socialism into sharply defined (and antagonistic), democratic and reformist versus revolutionary, communist, and authoritarian wings. Revolutionary socialism was revitalized and quickly became closely identified with communism and the Soviet Union. The collapse of the Soviet Union opened a new debate, which promises to be long-lived, about what that collapse means for the future of socialism generally. Some have argued that it means the (final?) discrediting of socialism as an ideology or political movement, while others (often with anxiety) have contended that it freed socialism from the albatross of Soviet communism, allowing democratic and nonrevolutionary forms of socialism a new opportunity to flourish. This controversy has been more important in Europe and the Third World than in the United States, where socialism has been less influential. Ultimately, the entire debate

leads back to the Russian Revolution and civil war, to decisions made then and the consequences that followed.

The Bolshevik Revolution has had a far-reaching, if somewhat paradoxical, impact on the intellectual, and cultural currents of the twentieth century. Most directly, of course, it shaped the social, intellectual, and cultural features of the Soviet Union. Its influence was hardly limited to that country, however. The revolution, through the Bolsheviks' extravagant claims about building the future, stimulated both utopian and anti-utopian thought. Initially, it stimulated the arts in Russia, but quickly led to creative sterility inside the Soviet Union as the official doctrine of Socialist Realism was imposed. Art in the West also was significantly, if temporarily, influenced, as witnessed, for example, by paintings, photography, and films of the 1920s and 1930s. Yet, in the long run, Bolshevism's impact was limited. The main direction of art in the twentieth century was abstraction, which was anathema to the Communists, and even "realistic" art swiftly moved away from both the style and messages of Bolshevik-inspired Socialist Realism. Similarly, despite some minor influence on literary trends of the mid-century, the Bolshevik Revolution failed to stimulate a great literary tradition. It had a greater influence in the intellectual world, especially on political thought, but fell far short of the impact of the French Revolution (and to a lesser extent the American and British revolutions). To take one ironic example, while one cannot imagine Marx without the French Revolution, nothing similar can be said of the Bolshevik Revolution's impact on the world of thought. It was, perhaps, more successful in spawning a revolutionary romanticism, especially in Europe and Latin America, that in turn affected politics, thought, and culture. The Bolshevik Revolution also had a significant, if diverse, influence on popular culture in the West. Popular literature and Hollywood films of the 1920s and 1930s reflected a fascination with this mysterious new society, and then, with the coming of the Cold War in the late 1940s, communism and the Soviet Union provided the inspiration for a vast outpouring of novels and movies (of which John Le Carre's spy novels and Tom Clancy's *Red October*, novel and movie, can stand as examples). Its influence on diverse currents of thought and behavior continues, in often unpredictable ways. As late as 1999, Hollywood, seemingly far removed from such issues, found itself embroiled in bitter controversy over the earlier pro- and anticommunist activities of prominent film directors, writers, and actors, while in early 2000, a stage play about growing up a "Red Diaper Baby" in an American Communist family was playing in Washington.

A final legacy, one only recently recognized, was the effect of the revolution and civil war on the nationalities that made up the former Russian Empire and how that would affect the state structure of the region in the

twenty-first century. The revolution of 1917 unleashed a powerful nationalist wave that had two immediate results. First, some peoples along the western edge of the old state took advantage of its collapse to call for self-determination and then to create independent states, while others attempted to do so, but failed. Second, the power of nationalism in the revolution and civil war forced the Soviet leaders to structure the new state, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, as formally a federal state made up of constituent republics (along with smaller "autonomous" republics and regions). National identity was now recognized by internal borders and in the names of constituent "republics." This was a major change from the unitary structure of tsarist Russia. Although in the following decades the Communist Party declared nationalism to be a declining force, and Western scholars dismissed its importance in the Soviet Union, in fact the nationalist surge of the revolution and civil war survived in altered form. The division of the Soviet Union into ethnic-based republics with distinct boundaries and administrations, and serving as repositories of national identity, set the stage for nationalism once again to assert itself if the central state power weakened. This it did again in 1989–91, just as it first did in 1917–21. Identities and boundaries that were developed because of the Russian Revolution proved to have laid the groundwork for the new independent states that emerged out of the wreckage of the Soviet Union—Ukraine, Belarus, and the new states in the Baltic, the Caucasus, and Central Asian regions. They also prepared the ground for the assertiveness of "autonomous republics," such as Chechnia and Tatarstan, within the post-1991 Russian state, with the attending ethnic conflicts (of which two or three dozen were ongoing at the opening of the new millennium in 2000). The long-term working out of the nationalist legacy remains uncertain, but is one of the major issues of the early twenty-first century.

Whatever its varied legacies, what the Bolshevik Revolution did not do was fulfill the revolutionary dreams of 1917 for freedom, democracy, economic well-being, civil rights, and justice. It did, it should be recognized, address some of the popular concerns. In particular it speeded the spread of literacy, created a well-educated population, and built a system of medical care, old-age pensions, guaranteed employment, and other social welfare programs that were very popular with the population (and exceeded what any alternative regime probably would have done). Despite these achievements, however, for the most part it failed to fulfill the aspirations of the revolution of 1917. Moreover, it failed to take its expected place in the revolutionary tradition. Many (including the early Bolsheviks) saw it as extending the line of progress of the British, American, and French Revolutions toward greater freedom, democracy, equality, justice, dignity, and

well-being. In this it failed, proving to be an aberration from, rather than an extension of, those revolutions. Nonetheless, the legacies of the Bolshevik Revolution, for good or ill, are many and varied, are with us still, and will remain with us for a long time yet to come. Fascination with the Russian Revolution, its dreams, failures, and threats, remains an important part of its legacy to our world.

## Biographies: The Personalities of the Revolution and Civil War

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### **Denikin, Anton Ivanovich (1872–1947)**

Denikin was a prominent Russian general and one of the two most important leaders of the White armies in the civil war. Born December 4, 1872, in Russian Poland to a Russian father and Polish mother, he entered the army and attended the prestigious General Staff Academy. Contrary to the image of the White generals as aristocrats (as some were), Denikin was among those of humble origins—his father had been born a serf. He distinguished himself as capable and courageous in the Russo-Japanese War and World War I, reaching the rank of lieutenant general. After the failed offensive of June 1917, Denikin was one of the most outspoken critics of the changes made in the army since the February Revolution. He spoke out for restrictions on the soldiers' committees, restoration of officer authority, and restoration of the death penalty as necessary steps to preserve the army.

After the October Revolution, Denikin made his way to south Russia where he helped organize the Volunteer Army. On the death of General Lavr Kornilov, he became its commander in April 1918, and in October also took responsibility for the government and civil administration of the areas under its control. By early 1919, he brought most anti-Bolshevik armies in south Russia under his control as commander-in-chief of the "Armed Forces of South Russia" (AFSR). In May 1919, Denikin launched his major offensive, driving north toward Moscow and Kiev with an army of 300,000. He conquered most of Ukraine and south Russia, reaching Orel, about 235 miles from Moscow, and was the greatest military threat the Reds faced. By