



Russian Revolution 1917

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Content Disclaimer

At its core, Model United Nations (MUN) is a simulatory exercise of diplomatically embodying, presenting, hearing, dissecting, and negotiating various perspectives in debate. Such an exercise offers opportunities for delegates to meaningfully explore possibilities for conflict resolution on various issues and their complex, even controversial dimensions – which, we recognize, may be emotionally and intellectually challenging to engage with.

As UTMUN seeks to provide an enriching educational experience that facilitates understanding of the real-world implications of issues, our committees' contents may necessarily involve sensitive or controversial subject matter strictly for academic purposes. We ask for delegates to be respectful, professional, tactful, and diplomatic when engaging with all committee content, representing their assigned country's or character's position, communicating with staff and other delegates, and responding to opposing viewpoints.

The below content warning is meant to warn you of potentially sensitive or triggering topics that are present in the formal content of this background guide, as well as content that may appear in other aspects of committee (e.g., debate, crisis updates, directives), so that you can either prepare yourself before reading this background guide or opt-out of reading it entirely:

Some content that will be discussed in this committee will revolve around violence, both in the First World War and the Russian Revolution, and extreme poverty. These events are by no means isolated to the time in which they occurred, and the trauma of these events are still felt by many today. This committee will use professional conduct, which aims to respect history, while being compassionate to the very real pain still felt today as a result. Please do not hesitate to contact the dais or UTMUN Secretariat should you have any concerns.

If, because of this committee's content warning, you wish to request switching committees and you registered with UTMUN as:

- a) part of a group delegation, please contact your faculty advisor and/or head delegate with your concerns and request.
- b) an individual delegate, please email our Equity Officer at equity@utmun.org with a brief explanation of your concerns based on this committee's content warning and your request to switch. You will be contacted shortly regarding your request

UTMUN Policies

We ask for your cooperation in maintaining order, both inside and outside of committee session, so that we may provide a professional, safe, inclusive, and educational conference.

Throughout the conference, please note that delegates shall only:

1. Wear Western Business Attire (i.e., no costumes, no casual wear)
2. Embody their assigned country's/character's position, not their mannerisms (e.g., no accents, no props)
3. Use laptops or electronic devices during unmoderated caucuses to draft paperless resolutions/directives (subject to their committee director's permission)
4. Opt for diplomatic, respectful, and tactful speech and phrasing of ideas, including notes (e.g., no foul language, suggestive remarks, or obscene body language)
5. Make decisions that contribute to a professional, safe, inclusive, and educational space for debate

The rest of our conference policies can be found on our website at <https://www.utmun.org/conference-policies>. By attending all or part of a UTMUN conference, attendees agree to abide by all of our conference policies.

Furthermore, delegates' efforts to contribute to a culture of collaboration, inclusivity, and equity at our conference, both inside and outside of committee session, will be considered by the dais and Secretariat when determining conference scholarships and committee awards.

In cases of failing to adhere to any of UTMUN's policies, the Secretariat reserves the right to take any action it deems necessary, including rendering delegates ineligible for awards, taking disciplinary action, and prohibiting delegates from participating further in the conference.

Equity Concerns and Accessibility Needs

UTMUN 2020's Secretariat and Staff are committed to ensuring every attendee has an enjoyable, comfortable, and safe experience and is able to participate fully and positively at our conference.

If you have any equity concerns (e.g., concerns about barriers to participation) or accessibility needs now or during the conference, please do not hesitate to contact your committees' dais and/or our Equity Officer at equity@utmun.org.

A Letter from Your Director

Dear Delegates,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to UTMUN 2020 and the Russian Revolution, 1917! My name is Katie Bray Kingissepp and I am in my second year at the University of Toronto, double majoring in Political Science and English, with a minor in Cinema Studies. I have been involved with Model UN since 2015 and began to Chair in 2018, something I have loved even more than being a delegate. As the director for this committee, I am extremely excited to see how delegates deal with the pressing matters at hand and hopefully, put an interesting twist on history!

This committee aims to tackle the overarching issue of setting up a new government in Russia, now that the Monarchy has been overthrown. However, this will be complicated with crises revolving around our three sub-topics: deciding the fate of the royal family, navigating Russia's ongoing role in the First World War and managing rampant poverty throughout the nation. Due to the complexity of the issues at hand, this committee will require that delegates be creative, quick thinking and cooperative with other members of the delegation.

Please recognize that while this paper is a comprehensive background on the crisis, it should be used as a starting place for research. This guide will contain all pertinent information in regards to the background information and possible directions the committee may take, but it is nonetheless important to go beyond this research. It is recommended that delegates continue to research the crisis itself, in order to become better acquainted with its intricacies, in addition to researching their characters and policies. As well, the unorthodox structure of this committee will require you to have an understanding of both directives and resolutions, meaning that delegates should incorporate this into their preparation for debate.

While this may seem daunting at first, I have complete faith that you will be able to tackle this committee and make it a truly memorable experience. With that being said, please contact me with any questions about this committee or UTMUN itself!

Best of luck with your research! The entire dias, including myself, look forward to meeting you all in February!

Sincerely,

Katie Bray Kingissepp
Director, Russian Revolution, 1917
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A Note on Committee Structure

As mentioned above, this committee will have an unorthodox structure. While this is a specialized committee, we will be incorporating several crisis elements in order to create an immersive and exciting environment. This results in a hybrid committee, which combines elements from both the crisis and specialized branches.

The committee will take place immediately following the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II on March 15, 1917. The primary interest of this committee is to create a new government in order to replace the fallen monarchy and restore stability to the nation. As a result, there will be no opening vote to set the topic, as the committee will strive towards one communal goal, with subtopics running in parallel. In other words, delegates must attempt to set up a new government while dealing with urgent crises that prevent them from this ultimate objective. Creative solutions that solve multiple issues at once are both effective and encouraged!

Solving the crisis will take place in two different forms: coalition directives and resolutions. The overarching issue of creating a new government should be tackled through the drafting of a resolution. This resolution will function as a pseudo-constitution for the new government. However, the sub-topics will be resolved through coalition directives. Coalition directives are similar to personal directives, however they will require at least 3 sponsors and 5 signatories. This group of delegates will draft a directive, outlining how they plan to resolve the crisis and then gather the number of required signatories. This will then be submitted to the dias, where it will be reviewed and potentially adopted, affecting the direction the debate will take. These directives may involve, but are not limited to, the creation of press releases, military action and establishing treaties. However, these directives must be written within the realistic power of the parties involved in sponsoring it.

Delegates will not represent a country in this committee, rather a real historical figure involved in the crisis. Your character will be involved with a movement, meaning that it is crucial to be well informed on both your individual character's politics and desires, in addition to the larger goals of the group to which they contribute. While passing directives will require cooperation, it is important for you to know the fundamental values of your position and envision how they might interact with other members of the delegation.

While this hybrid blend may seem confusing at first, we will have a brief tutorial on how the committee will run before the debate starts. However, if you have any questions that you would like answered before the conference, please do not hesitate to reach out to me!

Historic Overview

At the turn of the century, Russia was decades behind every other European country in terms of economics, government, and society. Tsar Nicholas II assumed the throne in 1868 and though formal serfdom was abolished under his rule, peasantry was rampant. Former serfs remained tied to their land without any formal ownership claims, let alone civil rights, wealth, power, or resources. In the early 1900s, major cities like St. Petersburg and Moscow nearly doubled in size due to industrialization, creating destitute living and working conditions for industrial workers. Russia was considered to be the poorest country in Europe and the gap between the working class and the aristocracy grew exponentially.

Class tensions came to a peak during January 1905's Bloody Sunday, where a peaceful demonstration marched to the Winter Palace demanding livable conditions for the working class.¹ The crown responded by ordering troops to open fire on the protestors, killing hundreds and injuring more. Bloody Sunday acted as a turning point in the working class's relationship with the monarchy; mass protests, strikes, and mutinies ensued across the country as the people called for reform.² The St. Petersburg Soviet of Workers' Deputies (later called the Petrograd Soviet) formed to represent the rights of the working class.

In October of 1905, Nicholas II signed the October Manifesto, which established a form of elected parliament called a Duma. The Manifesto promised civil liberties including freedom of speech, the right to form political parties, and a preliminary system of suffrage. The Duma proved to be little more than symbolic, as Nicholas II ignored the Duma whenever it opposed his will and dissolved it on multiple occasions when it became uncooperative.³

1914 marked Russia's entry into World War I and saw massive food shortages, tremendous casualties, and a failing economy. Nearly all able-bodied men were conscripted and resources were funnelled into the war effort. Living conditions worsened and unrest grew. Though corruption in the ruling class was not a new phenomenon with Nicholas II consistently ignoring the will of the Duma, political tensions rose when the Tsar left the capital to join the war effort and left his wife, Czarina Alexandra, in charge. She fired numerous elected officials and was influenced by the widely-unpopular Rasputin, who was killed by aristocrats in 1916 when they grew tired of his influence. The combination of rampant poverty, death, and corruption brought the anger of the working class to a high and protests spread

1 CN Trueman, "The 1905 Russian Revolution," The History Learning Site, 22 May 2015, <https://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/modern-world-history-1918-to-1980/russia-1900-to-1939/the-1905-russian-revolution/>.

2 CN Trueman, "The 1905 Russian Revolution," The History Learning Site, 22 May 2015, <https://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/modern-world-history-1918-to-1980/russia-1900-to-1939/the-1905-russian-revolution/>.

3 Siobhan Peeling, "Revolution of 1905 (Russian Empire)," International Encyclopedia of the First World War, revised October 8, 2014, https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/revolution_of_1905_russian_empire.

across the country once again.

In March of 1917, strikes and riots brought record amounts of people into the streets. Industrial workers, women, students, teachers, and white collar workers unified against the monarchy. Many of the Tsar's own troops turned against him and unable to control the people, Nicholas II finally abdicated. With his brother's refusal to take the throne, a provisional government was formed.

A View of the Modern Situation:

The Provisional Government was established for the purpose of an interim authority, until a more concrete organization might take its place.⁴ The government was led by Prime Minister Prince Georgy Lvov and Minister of Justice Aleksander Kerensky. This government had to share their power with the popular Petrograd Soviet, which opposed many of the provisional government's objectives. While the provisional government promised civil rights, including freedom of speech, equality under the law and the right to organize unions, they refused to withdraw from the war and opposed the idea of a radical social revolution.

Meanwhile, the Petrograd Soviet "always rejected the Provisional Government,"⁵ and "rejected participation in the Provisional Government, instead choosing to act as an independent organ of control over the bourgeois cabinet."⁶ Made up of Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionary Parties, the Soviet Petrograd acted as a more radical body operating alongside the provisional government. The division of power functioned thusly, with "the Provisional Government [having] the responsibility of running the country, [and] the Petrograd Soviet [controlling] the actual levers of power, such as the troops, railways and telegraph service."⁷ As distrust in the more moderate provisional government grows, the Petrograd Soviet gains more and more power. As previously mentioned, the Petrograd Soviet is made up of the Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionary Parties, or Bolsheviks, and is therefore important to recognize the difference between these two groups.

4 N.A., "Provisional Government and its problems," British Broadcasting Company, accessed November 1, 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z2tp2p3/revision/1>.

5 N.A., "Provisional Government and its problems," British Broadcasting Company, accessed November 1, 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z2tp2p3/revision/1>.

6 Siobhan Peeling, "Dual Power," International Encyclopedia of the First World War, Revised October 8, 2014, https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/dual_power.

7 Siobhan Peeling, "Dual Power," International Encyclopedia of the First World War, Revised October 8, 2014, https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/dual_power.

The Bolshevik vs. Menshevik Position:

The Mensheviks, like their more revolutionary counterparts, were eager to see capitalism eliminated and the Tsar overthrown, but their political ambitions differed in a few key ways. Mensheviks believed in a democratic form of communism, in which Party members would openly differ on several policy points.⁸ They were, for the most part, willing to work with liberal political figures, and actively opposed autocracy and the use of violence.⁹ That being said, the Mensheviks held a “deep-rooted mistrust of the peasantry,” who they felt embodied socio economic backwardness.¹⁰ The peasantry’s belief that they had been the heroes of the revolution restricted the limits of Marxist revolution, which would have to impose a new social order in the countryside.¹¹ Peasants could not possibly be socially or politically involved. This attitude may have been due to the urban background of most Mensheviks.¹²

Consistent with the core tenets of Marxist philosophy, Mensheviks believed in an inevitable cycle of social development, which moved from autocracy to a popular revolution, to a democratic capitalist society and eventually to socialism.¹³ Political freedoms were believed to be essential for a strong centralized Party (such as Lenin envisioned) to form. More than anything, Mensheviks were afraid that a “premature” revolution would disrupt the natural cycle.¹⁴

It would be a mistake to categorize all Bolsheviks as highly revolutionary socialists who encouraged the use of violence to further grandiose aims. In fact, prior to Lenin’s return to Russia in March of 1917, the party was fairly divided regarding the Provisional Government. Far-left actors (for example, members of the Vyborg Committee) believed that a revolutionary government should be established through the immediate election and subsequent unification of various worker Soviets (or councils).¹⁵ Others believed that such a revolutionary government should be constructed from the top, in collaboration with the party leaders.¹⁶ There even existed more conservative Bolsheviks who believed in leaving the capitalists in power

8 Richard Cavendish, “The Bolshevik-Menshevik Split,” *History Today* 53, no. 11, (2003).

9 Richard Cavendish, “The Bolshevik-Menshevik Split,” *History Today* 53, no. 11, (2003).

10 Ziva Galili, *The Menshevik Leaders in the Russian Revolution: Social Realities and Political Strategies* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), 29.

11 Esther Kingston-Mann, “Problems of Order and Revolution: Lenin and the Peasant Question in March and April, 1917,” *Russian History* 6, no. 1, (1979), 42.

12 Ziva Galili, *The Menshevik Leaders in the Russian Revolution: Social Realities and Political Strategies* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), 29.

13 Ziva Galili, *The Menshevik Leaders in the Russian Revolution: Social Realities and Political Strategies* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), 29.

14 Esther Kingston-Mann, “Problems of Order and Revolution: Lenin and the Peasant Question in March and April, 1917,” *Russian History* 6, no. 1, (1979), 42.

15 D. A. Longley, “The Divisions in the Bolshevik Party in March 1917,” *Soviet Studies* 24, no. 1, (1972).

16 D. A. Longley, “The Divisions in the Bolshevik Party in March 1917,” *Soviet Studies* 24, no. 1, (1972).

for the interim, given that they had been key players in the February Revolution.¹⁷ It is often argued that the Bolsheviks were not in fact Leninist; they refused to publish much of Lenin's writing from abroad, and even Stalin at the time could not envision a transformation more radical than a bourgeoisie-led democracy.¹⁸

Lenin himself was vocally critical of the Provisional Government, claiming it lacked both teeth and the ability to handle the problems of the peasantry. He also believed that socialism would be established without the cycle of revolution proposed by the Mensheviks, as soon as the peasants had overthrown their landlords.¹⁹ Lenin envisioned a ruling party that was small, organized, and highly disciplined. Its members would be full-time, professional revolutionaries, who would follow the party line to the letter. Such a government, Lenin believed, would be highly centralized and impossible to infiltrate.²⁰

It should be mentioned also that unlike the Mensheviks, the Bolsheviks had a clear peasant program, which encouraged the peasantry to engage in politics through policy committees which would seize property from landlords, among other functions.²¹

17 Longley, *The Divisions in the Bolshevik Party*

18 Esther Kingston-Mann, "Problems of Order and Revolution: Lenin and the Peasant Question in March and April, 1917," *Russian History* 6, no. 1, (1979), 42.

19 Esther Kingston-Mann, "Problems of Order and Revolution: Lenin and the Peasant Question in March and April, 1917," *Russian History* 6, no. 1, (1979), 42.

20 Richard Cavendish, "The Bolshevik-Menshevik Split," *History Today* 53, no. 11, (2003).

21 Esther Kingston-Mann, "Problems of Order and Revolution: Lenin and the Peasant Question in March and April, 1917," *Russian History* 6, no. 1, (1979), 42.

Topic A: Deciding the Fate of the Royal Family

Following the abdication of Tsar Nicholas on March 15, 1917, the provisional government is tasked with the difficult issue of deciding what to do with the Royal Family. Tsar Nicholas II proved a terrible leader for Russia, as he led the nation to defeat in the Russo-Japanese War, failed to deliver on the rights he promised the people, did not attempt to industrialize a nation that was falling behind the rest of the Western world, watched his people starve from the comfort of his palace and sent them into a war that resulted in the deaths of countless Russians.²² His crimes were inexcusable, however, what is the correct action to take?

He is currently “detained at Tsarskoye Selo by Prince Lvov’s provisional government,” alongside the rest of his family.²³ The longer the Tsar and his family remain there, the weaker the provisional government appears, as they seem to lack power and appear indecisive. Therefore, the fate of the royal family must be decided promptly, with a few options presenting themselves. Should they be excused for their crimes and allowed to stay in the country? This option is unlikely, as the people are very angry and demand action. Two of the more likely options are either prison or exile. Both of these options entail trying the royals for the crimes they committed and ultimately punishing them with either jail time or exile from Russia. The last option is quite severe, which is executing the royals for the crimes they committed in government. This option would both enrage many people within and outside of Russia and cause mass outrage. Though it may seem like a viable option for those who dream of complete reform, it is a polarizing move and should not be considered without great justification.

²² John L.H. Keep, “Nicholas II: TSAR OF RUSSIA,” Encyclopædia Britannica, Jul 20, 1998. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nicholas-II-tsar-of-Russia>.

²³ John L.H. Keep, “Nicholas II: TSAR OF RUSSIA,” Encyclopædia Britannica, Jul 20, 1998. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nicholas-II-tsar-of-Russia>.

Topic B: Determining Russia's Role in the Great War

When Russia entered the war, they were not prepared, as "just nine years earlier she had been defeated in a war with tiny Japan. The Revolution of 1905, when revolts and uprisings had forced the Tsar to concede civil rights and a parliament to the Russian people, had also shaken the empire."²⁴ Russia did win some victories in the Great War, but the nation does not have enough success to justify the staggering amount of casualties. At the time of the Tsar's abdication, there are over a million dead and millions more wounded. Additionally, "the country's political and economic problems were greatly exacerbated by the war. Many factors - including the militarisation of industry and crises in food supply - [threaten] disaster on the home front."²⁵

With this in mind, Russia's future in the conflict must be brought into question. While the existing provisional government supports staying in the conflict, what are the consequences of this decision? Lacking economic resources, food, equipment and soldiers, can Russia truly afford to stay in the war? Contrarily, what is the cost of leaving the war? In brokering a peace deal, Russia would have to both betray the Triple Entente and sacrifice their own terms in order to create a peace deal with the Allied forces. No route is easy, but inaction is simply not an option, meaning that delegates must consider their choice seriously.

24 Jonathan Smele, "War and Revolution in Russia 1914 - 1921," British Broadcasting Company, Updated March 12, 2011, http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/eastern_front_01.shtml.

25 Jonathan Smele, "War and Revolution in Russia 1914 - 1921," British Broadcasting Company, Updated March 12, 2011, http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/eastern_front_01.shtml.

Topic C: Poverty in Russia

After suffering from years of neglect by the former Tsar and the costly strain of the Great War, Russia's economy was behind the rest of the Western world. While Western Europe was going through an industrial revolution, Russia was an agrarian state made up of "independent peasants, who seldom owned modern machinery."²⁶ Russia was beginning to industrialize in cities, however "rapid industrialization of Russia also resulted in urban overcrowding and poor conditions for urban industrial workers."²⁷ Conditions continued to worsen as skilled men were sent to war alongside the resources needed on the homefront. With a fundamentally broken economy and people starving across the country, urgent actions need to be taken.

How can Russia industrialize in a way that allows for them to catch up with the rest of the world, while at the same time prioritizing good living conditions for people? Additionally, if this can be conceptualized, where are the resources to finance this plan coming from? While the situation may appear hopeless, giving up is not an option and a plan must be devised to help save the Russian people.

26 N.A., "Russian Revolution of 1917," McGill University, accessed November 1, 2019, https://cs.mcgill.ca/~rwest/wikispeedia/wpcd/wp/r/Russian_Revolution_of_1917.htm.

27 N.A., "Russian Revolution of 1917," McGill University, accessed November 1, 2019, https://cs.mcgill.ca/~rwest/wikispeedia/wpcd/wp/r/Russian_Revolution_of_1917.htm.

Topic D: Solidifying a Government System in Russia

While the previous issues are pressing, establishing a functioning government is vital in ensuring a prosperous future for the nation. The current provisional government is losing the faith of the people and support of the masses is leaning towards the Soviet Petrograd.

While this issue is the largest, there are many variables at play. There are three major players at hand, the Provisional Government, Bolsheviks and Mensheviks; all struggle to create a functional and enduring government. Each group must consider whether they would consider sacrificing some of their own values in order to create a cooperative government, or whether they think that they can gain enough support to create a government on their own.

After it is decided who will create the new government, it must be considered what form the government will take on. Will it resemble a democracy, like that of the Provisional Government, or will it follow in the words of Marx and follow a communist approach?

Lastly, once a government has been set in place, the new government must reconcile the fact that much of the country does not support their new form of government. How does the new government intend on gaining the support of the rest of the nation?

Questions to Consider

1. With their continued presence is undermining the existence of your new government, what should be done with the Royal Family?
 - a) Ensure to consider that much of the country, in addition to the majority of the international community, wants the Royal family to remain happy and well, if not in power.
2. What continued role should Russia play in the Great War?
 - a) Should they stay true to their promise and stay in the conflict, losing resources, men and the faith of the country? Or should they retreat on their word, in order to stop the violence as quickly as possible? Consider the costs of either option.
 - b) In the case of exit, what terms is Russia willing to accept and what terms are out of the question?
3. How do you plan to tackle the rampant poverty in Russia?
 - a) How does this plan look in the short term vs. the long term?
 - b) How will you cooperate with the international community in order to obtain resources?
3. What type of government shall be put in place?
 - a) What form of government is most effective?
 - b) Who will be represented in this new government?
 - c) How will this new government convince dissenters that this form of government will ensure the most prosperous future for Russia?
 - d) How do you intend to establish this government in a time of turbulence?

Advice for Research and Preparation

In this background guide, I have attempted to cover as much of the vital material for debate as possible. However, it is by no means an expansive history of all aspects of the revolution. If you feel it pertinent to either your character, or debate, please feel free to go above and beyond the information included in this paper.

If looking for a jumping off point for research, please look below at the bibliography and consider using any of these resources in your own research! Sources need not be academic, however they should always be trustworthy and accurate.

In preparing for the debate, delegates should not research further in time than March 1917, as that is where our debate will be starting. This means that delegates should be highly familiar with both the conflict and their character profiles, in order to be able to make well-informed decisions as to what their character might do in a new situation. This committee values accuracy to policy above accuracy to history, meaning that delegates should not feel limited by the events of history in debate and instead focus on how their character might react to a new situation.

Once you are familiar with both your character and the conflict, ensure you understand the flow of committee. Please come to the conference understanding the procedure of a specialized committee and the few elements of a crisis committee mentioned above, namely crisis updates and coalition directives. We will be doing a run-through of the procedure at the conference, in which we will show you how the component parts all fit together to create a lively flow of debate.

If you have any questions about research, your positions or the conference itself, please do not hesitate to email me! I would love to answer any questions, or just to say hello.

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