

The Great Break: War and Revolution



I. The First World War

A. The Bismarckian System of Alliances

1. After the German victory over France in 1871 Bismarck strove successfully to maintain peace between Austria-Hungary and Russia, and to keep France diplomatically isolated.
2. The Three Emperors' League linked Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Russia.
3. Bismarck maintained good relations with Britain and Italy.

B. The Rival Blocs

1. In 1890 the new emperor, William II of Germany, dismissed Bismarck, partly because of his friendly policy towards Russia.
2. William then refused to renew the neutrality treaty between Germany and Russia (the Russian-German Reinsurance Treaty).
3. As a result, France and Russia concluded a military alliance in 1894.
4. Commercial rivalry and expansion of the German fleet led to tensions between Britain and Germany.
5. Between 1900 and 1904 Britain improved relations with France and the U.S. and signed a formal alliance with Japan.

C. The Outbreak of War

1. The weakening of the Ottoman Empire, the rise of independent and fiercely nationalist states in the Balkans, and Austrian attempts to expand in the area raised tension between Austria and Russian-backed Serbia.
2. In June 1914 a Serbian nationalist assassinated Francis Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian throne.
3. Austria decided to destroy Serbia and issued an ultimatum.
4. Germany offered Austria unconditional support and Russia backed the Serbs.

5. Fearful of falling behind in mobilization, all the major powers rushed toward war.
 6. As part of its war plan against France, Germany attacked neutral Belgium. In response, Britain joined the Franco-Russian war against Germany.
- D. Reflections on the Origins of the War
1. German encouragement of the Austrian attack on Serbia, plus Germany's precipitous attack on Belgium and France, created a Europe-wide war.
 2. German leaders after 1890 felt that Germany's "Great Power" status was threatened.
 3. Some historians argue that German leaders deliberately sought war to reduce social tension and the political power of socialism in Germany.
 4. Nationalism certainly played a major role in motivating the war's outbreak.
- E. Stalemate and Slaughter
1. The French stopped the initial German advance into France at the Battle of the Marne.
 2. The western front then settled into bloody, brutal, and indecisive trench warfare.
 3. In the East warfare was more mobile, and the Russians and Austrians took heavy casualties.
- F. The Widening War
1. In May 1915 Italy joined the Triple Entente of Great Britain, France, and Russia.
 2. In October 1914 the Ottoman Empire joined Austria and Germany in the Central Powers.
 3. The entry of the Ottomans brought the war into the Middle East.
 4. In 1915 the Ottoman government ordered a genocidal mass deportation of the Armenians.
 5. The British had some success inciting Arab revolts against the Turks.
 6. War also spread to East Asia and Africa.
 7. Unrestricted submarine warfare against merchant vessels by Germany brought the U.S. into the war in April 1917 on the Allied side.
- II. The Home Front
- A. Mobilizing for Total War
1. At first there was mass enthusiasm for the war, even among socialists.
 2. Demands for munitions and other matériel far exceeded supplies, leading to central government coordination of economies.
 3. In Germany Walter Rathenau, head of the nation's largest electric company, directed the War Raw Materials Board that inventoried and rationed every useful material from oil to barnyard manure.
 4. After the Battles of the Somme and Verdun in 1916, the military leaders Hindenburg and Ludendorff were de facto rulers of Germany.
 5. In late 1916 Germany introduced forced labor for adult males.
 6. Food rations dropped to just over 1,000 calories per day by the end of the war.
 7. In Germany total war led to the creation of the first "totalitarian" society.

B. The Social Impact

1. War created full employment. Labor unions cooperated with government and private industry.
2. Large numbers of women left home to work in industry, transport, and offices. Women also served as nurses and doctors at the front.
3. In some countries, notably Britain, full employment greatly improved the material lot of the poor.

C. Growing Political Tensions

1. Pressures of total war eventually led to strikes, mutinies and demonstrations in the combatant powers by 1916.
2. In Austria nationalist dissatisfaction with the Empire grew.

III. The Russian Revolution

A. The Fall of Imperial Russia

1. Russian armies suffered from a lack of supplies and equipment.
2. Russia's political system, with its weak Duma and powerful Tsar, was not conducive to total war mobilization.
3. The tsar, Nicholas II, distrusted the Duma and resisted calls to share power with his subjects.
4. In September 1915 the tsar took direct command of armies at the front, leaving his wife, Alexandra, and her adviser Rasputin in real control of the government.
5. In March 1917 troops in St. Petersburg mutinied as women rioted, demanding bread. The Duma formed a provisional government and the Tsar abdicated.

B. The Provisional Government

1. The Provisional Government made Russia the freest country in the world on paper, with equality before the law, freedom of religion, the right to strike, and so on.
2. The Provisional Government shared power with the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.
3. Following the failure of Russia's summer 1917 offensive, the army began to dissolve.

C. Lenin and the Bolshevik Revolution

1. Early Life of Lenin
2. Lenin's political ideas:
 1. Only violent revolution could destroy capitalism.
 2. Socialist revolution was possible even in a backward country such as Russia.
 3. Human leadership rather than historical laws made real revolutions.
 4. Unlike many other socialists Lenin did not rally round the flag in 1914.
3. In April 1917 Germans smuggled Lenin out of exile in Switzerland and into Russia.
4. In the summer of 1917 Bolsheviks won support in Petrograd and by October gained a small majority in the Soviet.

- D. Trotsky and the Seizure of Power
 - 1. In early November militant Bolsheviks under the leadership of Leon Trotsky seized power from the Provisional Government in the name of the Petrograd Soviet.
 - 2. Reasons for Bolshevik success:
 - a. By late 1917 Russia was in anarchy. Power was available to anyone who would seize it.
 - b. Bolshevik leadership was superior to that of the Imperial or Provisional Governments.
 - c. In 1917 the Bolsheviks succeeded in appealing to many soldiers and urban workers.
- E. Dictatorship and Civil War
 - 1. The Bolsheviks immediately legalized peasant seizures of land.
 - 2. The Bolsheviks made peace with Germany in March 1918.
 - 3. In January 1918 the Bolsheviks dispersed by force the democratically elected Constituent Assembly, which was to write a constitution for Russia.
 - 4. The Bolshevik destruction of democracy led to civil war in Russia from 1918-1921.
 - 5. The Bolsheviks won the civil war for several reasons.
 - . They controlled the strategic center of the country.
 - a. The Bolsheviks' "White" opponents were divided and lacked a single clear political program.
 - b. Trotsky created a superior army to the Whites.
 - c. The Bolsheviks mobilized the home front, introducing forced labor, grain requisitioning, and rationing.
 - d. The Bolsheviks used terror to maintain discipline and subdue opposition.
 - e. Allied military intervention against the Bolsheviks allowed the latter to appeal to Russian patriotic sentiment against foreign invasion.

IV. The Peace Settlement

- A. End of the War
 - 1. After a renewed German offensive in summer 1918 failed, newly arrived American troops helped the French and British turn the tide and begin a war-winning attack.
 - 2. In November 1918 German military discipline collapsed, the Kaiser abdicated, and socialist leaders declared a German republic.
 - 3. On November 11 new leaders of the republic agreed to Allied terms for an armistice.
- B. Revolution in Germany
 - 1. In Austria-Hungary as in Russia, defeat led to revolution, but nationalist revolution. Independent Austrian, Hungarian, and Czech states were established.

2. In Germany as well, revolution broke out and took two directions, moderate socialist and radical communist, as in Russia. Unlike in Russia the moderate socialists won.

C. The Treaty of Versailles

1. At the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson sought the creation of a League of Nations to avoid future international conflict. Wilson also wanted lenient terms for Germany.
2. Lloyd George of Britain and Georges Clemenceau of France were indifferent to the League and sought harsher terms for Germany. France in particular feared future German attack.
3. Terms of the Treaty of Versailles
 - . German colonies went to France, Britain, and Japan.
 - a. Alsace-Lorraine returned to France.
 - b. German army limited to 100,000.
 - c. Germany to pay war reparations.
4. Separate peace treaties were concluded with the other defeated powers.
5. The Ottoman Empire was broken up and Britain and France expanded their power in the Middle East.
6. The Balfour Declaration of November 1917 declared that Britain favored a “National Home for the Jewish People” in Palestine.

D. American Rejection of the Versailles Treaty

1. The U.S. Senate rejected the Treaty of Versailles.
2. Republicans led by Senator Henry Cabot Lodge disliked the League of Nations’ power to require member states to take collective action against aggression.
3. The United States refused to back up the peace settlement, leaving France to face Germany alone.