

Your Smartass List of Russia 1894-1945 Specialist Terms

Autocracy	A government in which one person has absolute (uncontrolled and undisputed) power. Nicholas II before 1905 was an autocrat, but in 1905 was forced to accept a Duma.
Tsarskoe Selo	Literally 'Tsar's Village', it was the summer residence of the Romanov family, the only place where Nicholas was truly happy.
Repressive	A government which oppresses its subjects – e.g. imprisonment without trial/ secret police.
Redemption payments	The payments, spread over decades, required of the peasants to pay back the money paid by the government to former serf-holders. Abolished in 1905.
Joint responsibility	The basic concept underlying the functioning of the village mir was krugovaia poruka: 'joint responsibility' – shared responsibility for the upkeep of roads, bridges and stores, for settling conflicts within the community, and for paying taxes. If one member of the mir failed in their duty, all members were held responsible. Very unpopular, it was abolished in 1903.
Mir	The village community, which controlled the rotation of crops, maintained roads and bridges, kept law and order. Very resistant to outside interference and to change. Abolished by Stalin in 1930.
Khodynka	The parade ground which was the scene of a crowd crush tragedy on the coronation of Nicholas II
Red Cockerel	1903-1904 became known as the Years of the Red Cockerel when peasants seized the nobles' land and houses, shared out the goods and livestock, and finally, the "red cockerel" was set on the buildings (that is, they were set on fire).
Banquet campaign	An opposition campaign of zemstvo (district assembly) liberals and bourgeois intelligentsia, organized in 1904; banquets were organized, at which speeches would be made demanding freedoms and a constitution.
'Zubatov' trade unions	Trade Unions set up by police agents so that the Okhrana could keep an eye on dissidents; named after Sergei Zubatov, chief of the Okhrana
Duma	The Duma was a kind of parliament which met four times in the period 1905-1917. It was unlike the British parliament, however, because it did not have the power to make laws – it only had the right to debate laws. The Tsar ignored it. Stolypin liked it, because – from the speeches of the members – he could see who opposed the government, and who he therefore needed to arrest! The First Duma (1906) was dominated by the Kadets and was outspoken against the government; in July 1906, after just 42 days, the Duma was dissolved. A second Duma was elected in 1907, by which time the Kadet leaders had fled to Finland and many Kadets were forbidden to stand for election. Instead, 135 left-wing Social Revolutionaries were elected. The second Duma was soon, also, therefore, dismissed. Stolypin then changed the voting areas so that people from the towns could not be elected, and the result was a Duma dominated by the Octobrists and the Rights; this was a Duma which did exactly what the Tsar wanted, and it lasted until 1912.
Law 87	This was one of the 'Fundamental Laws' of the Russian constitution. It gave the Tsar's government the right to pass any law it wanted in an emergency. In the period 1905-1907, Stolypin used Law 87 to pass all the laws. This was a misuse of Law 87, which was only supposed to be in emergency, and shows the repressive nature of the Tsar's regime.
Proletariat	In Marxist theory, the politically-aware town-dwelling working classes in society that possess no property, and therefore depend on the sale of their labour – they are the true 'wage slaves' of industrial society. Marxist communists believed that these were the people who would rise up and take power in the Communist revolution.
Corner-dwellers	The majority of town-dwelling working class people in St Petersburg were desperately poor. Some actually lived and slept in the factories they spent all day working in! Many others had to share a room with another family; they were called 'corner-dwellers' because sometimes up to four families shared a room – they had a corner each.

Putilov Works	<p>The huge engine and car manufacturing establishment in St Petersburg. Forty thousand workers were employed there before 1914. A strike by the 'Putilovtsi' (Putilov workers) started the Revolution in January 1905. In 1907, the 'Putilovtsi' again went on strike, helping to force the Tsar to allow elections for the third Duma.</p> <p>Again on 4th March 1917, a strike at the Putilov factory – for a 50% increase in wages to buy food – started the March Revolution. The Putilovs were militant Bolsheviks – they rebelled during the July Days, helped during the November coup, and defended Petrograd against Yudenitch during the Civil War. They were, in a way, the proof of Lenin's belief that the proletariat would bring in the Communist Revolution.</p>
Little Father	The peasants' name for the Tsar, whom they believed was God's living representative on earth and a saint. This belief was somewhat dented by the events of Bloody Sunday.
Tercentenary	In 1913, the Romanov dynasty (family of rulers, descended from Tsar Michael Romanov, 1613-45) celebrated its 300th anniversary in 1913. This caused a wave of celebrations and pro-Tsar feeling; in 1913 the Tsar was in the strongest position since before 1905.
Orthodox	The Russians were Christians of the Greek Orthodox Church. The Church supported the Tsar, teaching that he was appointed by God and should be obeyed, and in fact the Headquarters of the Okhrana were in the Ecclesiastical Academy in St Petersburg.
Zemstva	In 1864, soon after he had freed the serfs, Tsar Alexander II set up elected zemstva in each district of Russia – local councils to provide roads, hospitals and education for the peasants. As time went on, the government took more and more control over the Zemstva. Nobles were gradually given a greater proportion of the seats from the peasants. In 1902-5 the government appointed zemskii nachalnik (Land Captains) took control over the zemstva, and liberal zemstva members were dismissed.
Black Hundreds	Lenin's name for the 'Rights' in the Duma who wanted to abolish the Duma and bring back autocracy.
Okhrana	The Tsar's secret police, led by Sergei Zubatov. It seems to have had 26,000 paid informants in 1912, and to have killed 26,000 people without trial. Okhrana agents were everywhere – Evno Azef, the leading Social revolutionary, and Roman Malinovsky, a member of the Bolshevik Central Committee, were both Okhrana double-agents, and the Russian Prime Minister Piotr Stolypin was assassinated by an Okhrana double agent..
Kadets	The constitutional party in the Duma (and who dominated the first Duma) – comprised mainly of zemstvo nobles and middle class liberals – who wanted a British-style parliament.
Social Revolutionaries	The extreme left-wing party in the Duma (and who dominated the second Duma) – comprised mainly of intellectuals and rich peasants – who wanted a peasant revolution, and to take all the land from the nobles.
SRCO	Socialist Revolutionary Combat Organisation – the terrorist branch of the Socialist Revolutionary Party. Conducted numerous assassinations of government ministers.
<i>Das Kapital</i>	The book, written by Karl Marx, which explained that all history was the story of the struggle of the proletariat for power. It claimed that the worker had always been oppressed, and demanded a classless Communist society where the people owned the means of production process and shared its rewards equally.
Mensheviks	From the Russian word: menshinstvo meaning 'minority'. Until 1903, they were members of the Russian Social Democratic Party, but left after a split with the Bolsheviks. They were Communists, but wanted the Communist Revolution to come about peacefully, and did not object to capitalism and industrialisation.
Bolsheviks	From the Russian word: bolshinstvo meaning 'a majority'. Until 1903, they were members of the Russian Social Democratic Party, but left split with the mensheviks. They were Communists, but wanted the Communist Revolution to come about by a violent proletarian revolution, and demanded that all the means of production be placed immediately in the hands of the people.
Bourgeois	The Marxist word for the middle classes capitalists who owned the means of production – landowners, factory owners.
<i>Iskra</i>	Literally: 'the Spark'. Exiled from Russia after 1900, Lenin produced a newspaper – Iskra – which was smuggled into Russia.

Stolypin's necktie	<p>Piotr Stolypin: large landowner who became the governor of Saratov province, where he was very successful at getting rid of all revolutionary troublemakers. As a result, Nicholas made him Prime Minister in 1906. Stolypin tried to create stability in the countryside by creating a class of prosperous farmers (the kulaks); he used the zemstvo councils to improve conditions in the countryside.</p> <p>At the same time, he sought out and hanged 3,000 political revolutionaries – the noose became known as 'Stolypin's necktie'. In 1907 he introduced a new electoral law, which assured a right-wing majority in the Duma, and was assassinated on 1st September, 1911 by Dmitri Bogrov, a Socialist Revolutionary who was a double agent for the Okhrana.</p>
Octobrists	<p>During the troubles of 1905, the Tsar and his chief minister Witte had published the October Manifesto, which promised freedom of speech, no imprisonment without trial, and a Duma to approve all laws. The Octobrists were supporters of the Tsar who did not want to go so far as to restore autocracy, but wanted him to keep to the October manifesto.</p>
Cossacks	<p>A people of the Ukraine, who held their lands in return for military service in the Russian cavalry. The Tsars used them to put down peasant revolts (the Cossacks were usually happy to slaughter the Russian peasants). It was the decision of the Cossack troops in St Petersburg in March 1917 not to put down the riots which led to the fall of the Tsar's government.</p>
Provisional government	<p>The government, set up by the Duma after Nicholas had abdicated. Its head was prince George Lvov (a zemstvo landowner who was chairman of the All-Russian Union of Zemstva) but its most powerful member was Alexander Kerensky (a lawyer who had been in the Social Revolutionary party).</p> <p>The dictionary defines 'provisional' as 'temporary provided for present need, requiring future confirmation'. The provisional government was expected only to 'hold the fort' until it could arrange the election (by universal suffrage) of the new 'Constituent Assembly'. In the event, the provisional government fell to the Bolshevik coup in November 1917, a month before the Constituent Assembly met.</p>
Soviet	<p>A Russian word meaning 'Council'. Originally set up as strikers' councils during the 1905 revolution, they turned into elected committees representing workers, soldiers and groups of peasants. These councils in turn sent representatives to the All-Russian Council of Soviets.</p> <p>Thus, in March 1917, the system of Soviets formed an alternative government to the provisional government which had developed from the Duma – for this reason, the period March-November 1917 is sometimes called the 'Dual government'. The St Petersburg Soviet (now called Petrograd) was so powerful that its Order No.1 instructed its members only to obey the provisional government IF the Petrograd Soviet agreed.</p>
Order Number 1	<p>Order #1 of the St Petersburg Soviet was that members would obey the Provisional Government only if the Soviet agreed.</p>
Pre-Parliament	<p>When the Second Coalition of the Provisional Government collapsed, Kerensky patched together a 'Pre-Parliament' (14 October) including Kadets and landowners, postponed elections and land reform, and dismissed the Duma. The Bolsheviks (with good cause) declared 'the Revolution in Danger'.</p>
Death squads	<p>Faced by mass desertions, the provisional government tried to stop desertion by setting up 'death squads' to execute deserters. Not only did these fail to stop the thousands of soldiers going home, they turned the army against the provisional government, so that it did nothing to stop the Bolsheviks taking it over in November 1917.</p>
Finland Station	<p>The station in St Petersburg where Lenin (smuggled through Europe by the Germans) arrived on 3rd April 1917. Later Communist films show him arriving in triumph to huge cheering crowds, but it seems that in fact they were much smaller than the later films made out.</p>
April Theses	<p>Having returned to Russia on 3 April 1917, Lenin went to the All-Russia Conference of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, and on April 4 1917 read his manifesto to them – the so-called April Theses (a thesis is a proposition).</p> <p>These advocated that the war was 'an imperialist predatory war' into which the workers were being deceived by the bourgeoisie; that the proletariat in Russia had awakened and was ready for revolution; that the imperialist capitalist provisional government should be replaced by 'a republic of Soviets'; the abolition of the police, army and government bureaucracy; and the confiscation and nationalisation of all the nobles' land. They are often summed up in the phrase: 'Peace, Bread, Land'.</p>
July Days	<p>A Bolshevik attempt to seize power by mobilising a popular uprising. It failed, convincing Lenin that he had to take power by a military coup.</p>

<i>Pravda</i>	<p>A Russian word meaning 'truth'. The Bolshevik newspaper, run by Lenin from exile abroad to publicise Bolshevik views. In March 1917 Stalin became editor – he was quite supportive of the Provisional Government. On his return, in the April Theses, Lenin attacked this policy and took over as editor. It carried on a propaganda war against the provisional government, and attacked all Mensheviks as traitors.</p> <p>After the July Days, it was closed down by the provisional Government. It continued publishing, constantly changing its name (coming out as Lislok Pravdy, Proletary, Flaboehy and Raboehy Put) to beat the censorship laws. After the November coup, it became the organ of the new government, and simply pushed the party line and supported the government.</p>
<i>Rabonitsa</i>	A socialist women's journal, first published on International Women's Day 1914; Nafda Krupskaya and Inessa Armand were instrumental in its publication.
Union of <i>Soldatki</i>	A Union of soldier's wives, very hostile to the government, who made common cause with the Bolsheviks in 1917.
Oktybar	The title of Eisenstein's film which told the story of the Bolshevik coup of November 1917. Although the seizure of Petrograd and the Winter Palace was a virtually bloodless, unresisted coup, Eisenstein presented it as a popular revolution – which has affected our view of the events ever since. The film was called Oktybar because (according to the Russian calendar which was 13 days behind the rest of the world) the coup took place on 26th October.
Death Battalion	<p>One of the units defending the Provisional Government was the Women's Death Battalion. Kerensky's Provisional Government formed several 'revolutionary battalions of death' intended to inject aggressive spirit into the army. One of these battalions was formed by women under the command of 25-year-old Maria Bochkareva, who hoped to shame men into acting bravely. 2,000 women joined the battalion, but Bochkareva's strict discipline soon reduced its size to just 300. It fought in the Galicia offensive of 1 July, but was forced to retreat, losing third of its strength.</p> <p>During the October revolution, Bochkareva and around 140 of her women defended the Winter Palace. Rather than the she-devils depicted in Eisenstein's film, however, the Red Guards found the women hiding in the cellar; they were so distressed that the Bolsheviks disarmed them and allowed them to go home. On 21 November Lenin ordered the battalion disbanded and Bochkareva fled to America</p>
Constituent Assembly	Elections were held in November 1917 for a new government – the Constituent Assembly. The Bolsheviks won 175 seats and the Social Revolutionaries won 370 seats. When it met in 1918, Lenin used the Red Guards to close it, and killed anybody who objected. Instead, Lenin ruled by decree
Dictatorship of the Proletariat	Although the April Theses had called for rule by the Constituent Assembly, Lenin soon abandoned this idea when it became clear that the Assembly did not have a Bolshevik majority. He dismissed the Assembly and ruled by decree, arguing that the people had been beguiled by years of oppression, and therefore were not yet ready to bring in Communism – for a while, he argued, until the people understood properly, there would have to be a 'dictatorship of the proletariat', which would bring in the Communist way of life by force. The Bolshevik Party would exercise this dictatorship, on behalf of the proletariat. In this way, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', however Lenin chose to justify it, really meant dictatorship by Lenin.
Politburo	The executive committee – 18 members – of the Supreme Soviet in the USSR, which laid down party policy. This was the group which wielded REAL power in the USSR.
<i>Zhenotdel</i>	The women's department of the Central Committee of the All-Russian Communist Party, founded in 1919 in order to ensure women's full participation in Soviet society; adopted by Bolshevik feminists to campaign for women's rights, education, creches etc.
<i>Prodrazverstka</i>	Under the so-called 'War Communism', the confiscation of grain surpluses and other agricultural products from peasants according to specified quota at nominal fixed prices, allegedly as a 'loan' against future provision of machinery. VERY unpopular.
<i>Subbotniki</i>	Under the so-called 'War Communism', 'voluntary' weekend work days.
<i>Vesenkha</i>	The Supreme Soviet of the People's Economy – the state institution which managed the economy of the USSR.
<i>Prodnalog</i>	A tax on agricultural production, paid in kind in the Soviet Union (sometimes called 'the Tax in Kind', which replaced the prodrazvyorstka in the NEP
Bazaars	Illegal markets which continued to function during the so-called 'War Communism' in defiance of government rules.

Red Terror	On 30 August 1918, Fanya Kaplan, a Social revolutionary angry at the dismissal of the Constituent Assembly and Lenin's seizure of power, attempted to assassinate Lenin. On 3 September 1918, the Bolshevik newspaper Izvestiya published an 'Appeal to the Working Class' encouraging the workers to 'crush the hydra of counterrevolution with massive terror'. This was followed by the decree 'On Red Terror' (5 September 1918). The Cheka immediately killed 10,000 'counter-revolutionaries' and set up the Gulag of concentration camp (70,000 imprisoned by September 1921). During the Civil War, the Red Terror increased. Captured 'White' soldiers were systematically murdered, more than 7000 people were executed, and Red Army generals were kept loyal by taking their families hostage.
Cheka	Cheka: the Bolshevik secret police 1917-23 – the name is formed from the Russian letters Ч and К (che and ka) of the two Russian words Чрезвычайная Комиссия meaning 'extraordinary commission'. The Cheka was the 'All Russian Extraordinary Commission for combatting counterrevolution, sabotage and speculation', and was formed from the tsarist Okhrana for 'the repression of counter-revolutionary activities', and also conducted espionage and smuggling. More than half its senior officers were Jews, although many Jewish officers were killed during Stalin's Great Purges of the 1930s. Its name changed successively to the OGPU 1923-34, the NKVD 1934-46 and the KGB from 1954.
Comintern	In March 1919 Lenin founded Comintern, in Moscow with Zinoviev as its President. The Comintern was the Third Communist International, and its task was to co-ordinate with all the Communists in the world to bring in the Communist revolution and destroy capitalism everywhere. It was this that frightened Britain and America and brought them into the Civil War on the side of the Whites.
Capitalism	Private enterprise in business and private ownership of wealth and possessions. It was the aim of Communism to destroy capitalism which, Communists said, oppressed the working classes.
Ekaterinburg	The town in the Urals where the Romanov family were imprisoned, and eventually shot as the White armies advanced in 1918.
RSFSR	The Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic, which was inaugurated in July 1918 by the 1918 Soviet Constitution. This Constitution declared that the Bolshevik Party, an alliance of workers and peasants, was the ruler of Russia. Supreme power rested in theory with the All-Russian Congress of Soviets, made up of deputies from local soviets across Russia. The Congress was led by a steering committee known as the Central Executive Committee, which acted as the 'supreme organ of power' between sessions of the congress, and a Council of People's Commissars was set up for the 'general administration of the affairs of the state'. In effect, the country was run by the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian SFSR. In 1922, it became the largest (and most powerful) of the 15 Soviets in the Soviet Union.
Petropavlovsk	The battleship harboured in Kronstadt, which became the headquarters of the anti-Bolshevik rebellion in 1918.
Nepmen	The nickname for the small private traders who were allowed to set up under the NEP.
Kulaks	The name for the rich peasants who were allowed to sell their produce under the NEP. Stalin declared war on the kulaks and 'eliminated' them as a class. Some 7 million kulaks were killed or sent to the gulag.
Russification	Under the NEP national identity was allowed (eg In the Ukraine, the Ukrainian language was used in government and business, and children were taught it in schools). Under Stalin, all this stopped and Russian became the sole language.
Show trials	The public trials of Bolshevik leaders who were accused during the Great Purges. They were even allowed to be seen in the west. The trials were regarded as amazing because the accused always pleaded guilty, admitting incredible crimes of which they could not possibly be guilty. The public humiliation and punishment were part of the psychological element of Stalin's Terror – the establishment of an underlying fear of the government.

Gulag	<p>or 'Main Directorate for Corrective Labor Camps'. Stalin's system of concentration camps. Most of the camps were in Siberia and the Far North. The Gulag was vital for the Soviet economy.</p> <p>Gulag prisoners constructed the White Sea-Baltic Canal, the Moscow-Volga Canal, the Baikal-Amur main railroad line, numerous hydroelectric stations, and strategic roads and industrial enterprises in remote regions. GULAG manpower was also used for much of the country's lumbering and for the mining of coal, copper, and gold. Conditions in the camps were harsh. Prisoners received inadequate food and insufficient clothing, and frequently died because of the severe weather and the long working hours.</p>
<i>Apparatchiki</i>	Party members loyal to Stalin who got all the new flats, jobs, holidays etc.
NKVD	The name for the Communist secret police (formerly the Cheka) 1934-1946.
<i>Kolkhozi</i>	The Russian word for the collective farms that Stalin enforced on the Russian peasants.
GOSPLAN	The word 'Gosplan' is an abbreviation of Gosudarstvennyy Komitet po Planirovaniyu, which means 'State Committee for Planning', which was set up in 1921. Under the five year plans, GOSPLAN set the production targets for every industry, each region, each mine and factory, each foreman and even every worker. There were two Five Year Plans – 1928–33 (during which time the leading Communist minister Kuibyshev was in charge of GOSPLAN) and 1932–1937 (Mezhlauk).
Pioneers	Idealistic young Communists, who would move into a new area and work sacrificially to set up the new industrial towns in the east of the USSR. The Young Pioneers were a Communist scout movement which encouraged healthy hobbies, took children away on camps, and taught them Communist ideals and theory.
Stakhanovites	Alexei Stakhanov (who cut an amazing 102 tons of coal in one shift) was held up as an example. Good workers who achieved exceptional production were nominated as 'Stakhanovites' and won a medal.
Belomor	The Belomor Canal, built with slave labour and incredible cruelty in the 1930s, was held up at the time as a model of Stalinist achievement, but is now seen as an example of Stalinist oppression.
Dniepropetrovsk	A hydro-electric dam on the river Dnieper, built with slave labour and incredible cruelty in the 1930s, was held up at the time as a model of Stalinist achievement, but is now seen as an example of Stalinist oppression.
Magnitogorsk	<p>One website calls Magnitogorsk 'one of the modern wonders of the 20th century as well as a constant reminder of the blunders of modern industry'. The town was built from scratch in the southern Ural Mountains as part of the first of Stalin's Five Year Plans. After the site was selected in 1929, its construction began with extreme rapidity. The centre of the town was the huge steel plant that dominates the eastern bank of the Ural river.</p> <p>By 1932 the population had grown to 250,000, most of whom were still living in the original barracks put up in 1929, or in tents. Most of the workers were local peasants or gulag prisoners. Magnitogorsk represents the achievement and the blunders of the Five Year Plans. Although the local mountains were rich in iron ore, there was no coal or wood locally, all of which had to be brought in by train; but the railway was so shoddily built that trains could not travel faster than 10 kph!</p>
Operation Barbarossa	The name for the Nazi invasion of Russia, 1941
<i>Sovinformburo</i>	The Soviet propaganda bureau set up during the Great Patriotic War to maintain people's fighting spirit.
Scorched earth	The strategy by which, when forced to retreat, the Soviet Army destroyed all crops, provisions and stores, leaving nothing that the advancing Nazi Army could use or live on, forcing it to rely on ever-extending supply lines
Lucy Spy Ring	An anti-Nazi World War II espionage operation, run from Switzerland by a German refugee named Rudolf Roessler, who got his information from two German Army officers. It supplied the Soviets with vital operational intelligence about the Nazi armies, notably before the Battle of Kursk (1943).