

Schools of Russian History

	Soviet / Marxist	Revisionist / Post Revisionist	Liberal / Western
Outline & General Outlook	Set out to justify the Revolution and highlight the triumphs of Communism. Picks up on notions of mass participation. Soviet histories also serve a purpose of legitimising the actions of the Party. Follow Marxist argument that revolution was inevitable (dialectical materialism) – Bolsheviks guided a process which began pre-war. Puts less emphasis on WWI and shows a continual reaction of the people against the ruling class eg. 1861, 1905 etc. October 1917 was therefore the fulfilment of a process begun before the war. Class conflict. Some European historians have also shown Russian history through a Marxist if not Soviet lens – a rising of a majority of the people and popular support for some aspects of the USSR.	Critical of polarised views of other schools – seek to find a more complex analysis. Look at causation from below as well as above. Revisionists tend to look at more individual or small group experiences and have found evidence of genuine support for the Bolsheviks – they tend however not to come to grand conclusions! Play down the extent to which the Bolsheviks were manipulating Russia – show them as disorganised and chaotic – driven by local rather than national decisions. Some argue Bolsheviks adopted authoritarian measures after the failure of the international revolution – often driven by local participation as well. There has been a falling away from Revisionist arguments since the end of the Soviet Union in 1991.	Shaped by the Cold War – seek to demonise the Bolsheviks and deny the notion of mass participation. Most commonly seen view of Russian history in textbooks etc. Tends to be very set in a western/liberal mind set – judging things on “our own terms.” Generally adopts a “history from above” approach – focusing on the actions of those in power. People generally seen as irrational, ignorant, passive or anarchic. The Bolsheviks perverted a genuine attempt by the people to gain democratic representation – can be blamed on failure of Tsars and the First World War.
Sources	Based largely on Soviet sources and official (released) records of the Communist Party. Often heavily directed by the state. Some Marxist historians have also based their conclusions on studies of ordinary people – looking for signs of participation etc.	Use of sociology, economics and politics to try and build a holistic view of Russian society. Focus on the ordinary experiences of people – especially in localities. Tend to adopt a pessimist view that Russia was already in terminal decline.	Much of the work based on the writings of Russian émigrés who fled Russia after the Revolution. Led many historians to adopt an optimist view that Russia might have recovered had it not been for WWI.
Key Historians	History of the CSPU (short course) – Stalin’s course which showed the rise of the Soviet Union as inevitable, supported by the people and guided by Lenin & the Party. Downplays those who fell out of favour with Stalin!! Also - Golub, Obichkin, Trotski (early) Reed & Hill – Western Marxist historians	Fitzpatrick - ‘Cultural Revolution’ showed elements of utopian idealism and popular agency that were independent of Stalin’s control. Figes – ordinary experiences but also puts more emphasis on key individuals eg. Lenin so also quite traditional. “We are all social historians now” Acton – “Russia’s workers were not one uniform, grey mass but individuals...Rather than responding en-masse to events, their reactions depended closely upon their own particular experience” Service – Local resistance to regime happened through falsification of records – kinship ties remained. Also – Arch-Getty, Cherniaev, Kolonitskii, Melancon, Netti, Read, Rosenberg, Smith, Wheatcroft, Wood	Pipes – Traditional view of a revolution led by Lenin and a small elite as an oppressive, totalitarian coup. Believes that Revisionism is just a rehash of the old Soviet view. Also – Conquest, Keep, Lynch, Pares, Pipes, Shapiro, Ulam, Volkogonov

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The Emancipation Proclamation, 1861	<p><i>"The abolition of serfdom was a turning point in Russia's history...This was,' wrote Lenin, 'a step towards the transformation of Russia into a bourgeois monarchy.' But since the reform was carried out by the serf-owners...the peasants found themselves entangled in a new form of enslavement, that of economic thrall to the landlords."</i></p> <p>- A History of the USSR</p>		<p><i>"It is suggested by many historians that, for at least a century before its collapse in the Revolution of 1917, imperial Russia had been in institutional crisis; the tsarist system had been unable to find workable solutions to the problems that faced it... Therein lies the tragedy of Emancipation. It is an outstanding example of tsarist ineptitude."</i> - Michael Lynch</p>
The 1905 Revolution	<p><i>"1905 failed as a revolution because the protestors were disunited and inexperienced."</i> - Leon Trotsky</p>	<p><i>"The Tsar was truly out of touch with his people" and "although the regime succeeded in restoring order, it could not hope to turn the clock back. 1905 had changed society for good. Many of the comrades of 1905 were the elders of 1917..."</i> - Orlando Figes</p>	<p><i>Bloody Sunday was an overwhelming display of Tsarist incompetence."</i> - Richard Pipes</p>
The First World War	<p><i>"The tsar kept his outlook unchanged through two wars and two revolutions."</i></p> <p>- Leon Trotsky</p>	<p><i>"The autocracy's situation was precarious on the eve of First World War. The society was deeply divided, and the political and bureaucratic structure was fragile and overstrained. The regime was so vulnerable to any kind of jolt or setback that is hard to imagine that it could have survived long, even without the War."</i></p> <p>- Sheila Fitzpatrick</p>	<p><i>"By 1917 the war would prove to be the undoing of tsardom" and "The tragedy for the tsar was that he and his government showed themselves increasingly incapable of running the war."</i> - Michael Lynch</p>
Lenin and the Bolshevik Party	<p><i>"The leadership given by Lenin and the Bolshevik Party ... ensured the success of one of the greatest events in world history – the overthrow of the power of the landowners and capitalists."</i>- GD Obichkin</p>	<p><i>"While Lenin was cunning & untrustworthy, he was also dedicated to the ultimate goal of communism ... He was determined that the Bolsheviks should initiate the achievement of a world without exploitation"</i></p> <p>- Robert Service.</p>	<p><i>"To impose such immense sacrifices in the name of so naïve and flawed a vision makes Lenin one of the greatest criminals of all time."</i> - Lievin</p>
The February Revolution, 1917	<p><i>"The dynasty fell by shaking, like rotten fruit."</i></p> <p>– Leon Trotsky</p> <p><i>"Who led the February Revolution? We can... answer definitively enough: conscious and tempered workers educated for the most part by the party of Lenin."</i> - Leon Trotsky</p>	<p><i>"When the February Revolution came, it was ... the result of the collapse of public support in the government."</i> - Steve Smith</p> <p><i>"The Tsarist regime's downfall was not inevitable, but its own stupidity made it so."</i> - Orlando Figes</p>	<p><i>"The collapse of the Romanov dynasty ... was one of the most leaderless, spontaneous, anonymous revolutions of all time."</i> - WH Chamberlin</p> <p><i>"No-one made the Russian Revolution, unless it was autocracy itself ... it was the direct result of the utter bankruptcy of the autocracy."</i> - Bernard Pipes</p>
The October Revolution, 1917	<p><i>"In his guidance of the uprising, Lenin's genius as a leader of the masses, a wise and fearless strategist, who clearly saw what direction the revolution would take, was strikingly revealed."</i> - GD Obichkin</p>	<p><i>"The October Revolution emerges as very much more than a conspiratorial coup d'état. By then the central political issue was that of soviet power."</i></p> <p>- Edward Acton</p>	<p><i>"There was something essentially totalitarian about Lenin himself."</i> - Lynch</p> <p><i>"October was a classic coup d'état, the capture of governmental authority by a small band ... with a show of mass participation, but with hardly any mass involvement. "</i> - Richard Pipes</p>