**The February Revolution, 1917**

"Why was Tsar Nicholas II forced to abdicate in 1917?"

**ACTIVITY 1 -** Adapted from Russel Tarr [www.activehistory.co.uk](http://www.activehistory.co.uk)

1. CUT and PASTE events from the first column into the social, political and military columns of the table as appropriate. You can delete the (now empty!) first column when you have finished.
2. Read Pages 18-19 and add any further facts to the events below.

**Short term factors causing the Russian Revolution 1917.**

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| **Date** | **Event** | **Social (the workers)** | **Military (the soldiers)** | **Political (The Tsar and his ministers)** |
| January 1 | ▪ Morale in the army is extremely low: most soldiers do not believe in the goals of annexing more territory for Russia. 1.5 million soldiers deserted the army in 1916. Many soldiers' families are starving (50% of the nation's farmers are fighting in the war). |  |  |  |
| January 9 | ▪ 30,000 Moscow workers strike in demonstration, while 145,000 workers strike in Petrograd (the former St. Petersburg, renamed because it sounded too German!) |  |  |  |
| February 10 | ▪ Rodzianko, leader of the Duma, asks for more power to keep Petrograd under control. Nicholas refuses. |  |  |  |
| February 14 | ▪ 100,000 workers strike in Petrograd from 58 different factories.  ▪ The Duma meets and attacks the government over food shortages. |  |  |  |
| February 19 | ▪ Street demonstrations after Petrograd authorities announce that bread will be rationed from March 1st |  |  |  |
| February 22 | ▪ A further 20,000 workers from the Putilov arms factory go on strike after a wage dispute. |  |  |  |
| February 23 | ▪ An estimated 128,000 people join a march celebrating International Women's Day (led by women and striking Putilov workers).  ▪ Revolutionary banners and slogans start to appear;the focus now is on ending the war and overthrowing the autocracy rather than simply obtaining food. |  |  |  |
| February 25 | ▪ 200,000 people are now on strike – over half the entire workforce of Petrograd.  ▪ Empress Alexandra writes to Nicholas II: "This is a hooligan campaign, with boys and girls running about shouting that they have no bread... all this will surely pass." |  |  |  |
| February 26 | ▪ Nicholas II ordered the Duma to close down. Members refused.  ▪ Michael Rodzianko, President of the Duma, sent a telegram to the Tsar suggesting that he appoint a new government which shared power with the Duma. The Tsar did not reply, noting in his diary: "That fat bellied Rodzianko has written some nonsense to which I will not even bother to reply". |  |  |  |
| February 27 | ▪ The Tsar orders the army to fire at protesters, but the Petrograd garrison of 66,000 men mutinies, joins the protesters and arms them with 40,000 rifles.  ▪ The Petrograd Soviet (worker's council) is created. |  |  |  |
| February 28 | ▪ The Tsar tries to return to Petrograd but his train is stopped.  ▪ The Petrograd Soviet issues "Order Number One", which assumes control of the armed forces.  ▪ Sailors mutiny in Kronstadt.  ▪ The High Command of the Russian Army asks Nicholas II to abdicate in favour of his brother. |  |  |  |
| March 1 | ▪ The Soviets – whilst refusing to surrender control of the army - agree to recognise a "Provisional Government" formed by members of the Duma under Prince Lvov. |  |  |  |
| March 2 | ▪ The Tsar abdicates on behalf of himself and his son in favour of his brother Michael, who in turn refuses the offer of the throne. The Romanov dynasty which has ruled Russia for 300 years is at an end.  ▪ Workers, soldiers, and young people take to the streets, tearing down statues of the Tsar, and set alight the Imperial emblems. |  |  |  |
| March 3 | ▪ The country now exists in political limbo, with the middle-class, liberal Provisional Government uneasily sharing power and authority with the working-class,socialist Soviets.  ▪ The Tsar and his family are placed under house arrest. |  |  |  |

3. Now complete ONLY columns [1] and [2] using the timeline and evidence that you have gathered above.

4. Now use your notes from previous lessons to complete columns [3] and [4] of the table.

5. Write a conclusion that gives a judgment as to the main causes of the revolution.

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|  |  | **Evidence: Facts which backs up this interpretation** | | |
| **Group** | **[1] Analysis: Why did the Tsar lose their support in 1917?** | **[2] Short Term: Events in 1917** | **[3] Mid-Term: Events 1914-1917** | **[4] Long-Term: Events before World War One** |
| **Social (the workers)** | Socially, the Tsar lost the support of ordinary people because... | This can clearly be seen by the fact that in 1917... |  |  |
| **Military (the soldiers)** | Militarily, the Tsar lost the support of the soldiers because... | Evidence from 1917 to back up this view is as follows: ... |  |  |
| **Political (The Tsar and his ministers)** | Politically, the Tsar lost the support of the Duma because... | To illustrate this point, in 1917... |  |  |
| **Conclusions: Weigh up the importance of the different causes** | | | | |
| Explain whether you feel the main cause for the revolution was WW1 or the failures of the Tsar before and during the war? | | | | |

**ACTIVITY 2**

Use the following sources (courtesy of [www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk)) to answer the following questions:

**Study sources A & C** - How far did members of the aristocracy agree about the seriousness of the situation in Petrograd?

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| --- | --- |
| **Points of Agreement** | **Points of Disagreement** |
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**Study sources B & D** -In what ways do Rodzianko (leader of the Liberals) and Kerensky (leader of the Social Revolutionaries) disagree about what was needed to solve the crisis, and why do you think they do so?

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| --- | --- |
| **Points of Agreement** | **Points of Disagreement** |
|  |  |

**Study source F** - Using your background knowledge and the other sources to help you, give THREE reasons to explain why the Tsar regarded the telegram of "Fat Rodzianko" as "a load of nonsense"?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **Explanation** |
| **1** |  |
| **2** |  |
| **3** |  |

**Source A. Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich, letter to Nicholas II (January, 1917)**

The unrest grows; even the monarchist principle is beginning to totter; and those who defend the idea that Russia cannot exist without a Tsar lose the ground under their feet, since the facts of disorganization and lawlessness are manifest. A situation like this cannot last long. I repeat once more - it is impossible to rule the country without paying attention to the voice of the people, without meeting their needs, without a willingness to admit that the people themselves understand their own needs.

**Source B. Alexander Kerensky, speech in the Duma (13th February, 1917)**

There are people who assert that the Ministers are at fault. Not so. The country now realizes that the Ministers are but fleeting shadows. The country can clearly see who sends them here. To prevent a catastrophe the Tsar himself must be removed, by force if there is no other way.

**Source C. Princess Alexandra Fyodorovna, letter to Nicholas II (26th February, 1917)**

The strikers and rioters in the city are now in a more defiant mood than ever. The disturbances are created by hoodlums. Youngsters and girls are running around shouting they have no bread; they do this just to create some excitement. If the weather were cold they would all probably be staying at home. But the thing will pass and quiet down, providing the Duma behaves. I think that for speaking against the dynasty there should be immediate and severe punishment.

**Source D. Michael Rodzianko, President of the Duma, telegram to Nicholas II (26th February, 1917)**

The situation is serious. The capital is in a state of anarchy. The government is paralyzed; the transport service has broken down; the food and fuel supplies are completely disorganized. Discontent is general and on the increase. There is wild shooting in the streets; troops are firing at each other. It is urgent that someone enjoying the confidence of the country be entrusted with the formation of a new government. There must be no delay. Hesitation is fatal. [The Tsar gave no reply to this]

**Source E. Stinton Jones was in Petrograd during the February Revolution.**

In a short time the whole of the city was aglow with the glare from the burning buildings which, in addition to the heavy firing, made the situation appear far worse than it actually was, and had the effect of clearing the streets of the more serious-minded and nervous citizens. The mobs presented a strange, almost grotesque appearance. Soldiers, workmen, students, hooligans and freed criminals wandered aimlessly about in detached companies, all armed, but with a strange variety of weapons.

**Source F. Michael Rodzianko, President of the Duma, telegram to Nicholas II (27th February, 1917)**

The situation is growing worse. Measures should be taken immediately as tomorrow will be too late. The last hour has struck, when the fate of the country and dynasty is being decided. The government is powerless to stop the disorders. The troops of the garrison cannot be relied upon. The reserve battalions of the Guard regiments are in the grips of rebellion, their officers are being killed. Having joined the mobs and the revolt of the people, they are marching on the offices of the Ministry of the Interior and the Imperial Duma. Your Majesty, do not delay! Should the agitation reach the Army, Germany will triumph and the destruction of Russia along with the dynasty is inevitable.

**Source G. Nicholas II, telegram to The Tsarina (27th February, 1917)**

Again, that fat-bellied Rodzianko has written me a load of nonsense, which I won’t even bother to answer.

**Source H. Harold Williams witnessed the mutiny in the Russian Army that led to the overthrow of Nicholas II.**

When all the speakers were hoarse and weary, it was certain that the whole Petrograd garrison of 140,000 men had gone over to the revolution. But the officers were not with them. Uncertain of their duty, unwilling to break their oath of allegiance, they held back - all but a very few - and passed the day in deep depression while Petrograd was rejoicing.

**Source I. Nicholas II, telegram to Michael Rodzianko (1st March, 1917)**

There is no sacrifice that I would not be willing to make for the welfare and salvation of Mother Russia. Therefore I am ready to abdicate in favour of my son, under the regency of my brother Mikhail Alexandrovich, with the understanding that my son is to remain with me until he becomes of age.

**Source J. Nicholas II, abdication statement (7th March, 1917)**

Today, I am addressing you for the last time, my dearly loved armies. I have abdicated for myself and for my son, and I am leaving the throne of the Emperors of Russia. Much blood has been shed, many efforts have been made, and the hour of victory is approaching when Russia and her Allies will crush, in the common effort, the last attempts of the enemy. The unprecedented war must be conducted to the final victory. Those who think of peace and wish it now are twice traitors to their country. Every honest soldier must think that way. I urge you to fulfill your duty and to valiantly defend your Russia. Obey the Provisional Government!