

Year of Change: 1917

Key words: *February revolution, October revolution, Brest-Litovsk Treaty, W. Wilson,*

Two big changes in 1917 that influenced the WWI:

1. USA:
2. Russia:

Russia: 1: February revolution and 2: October revolution

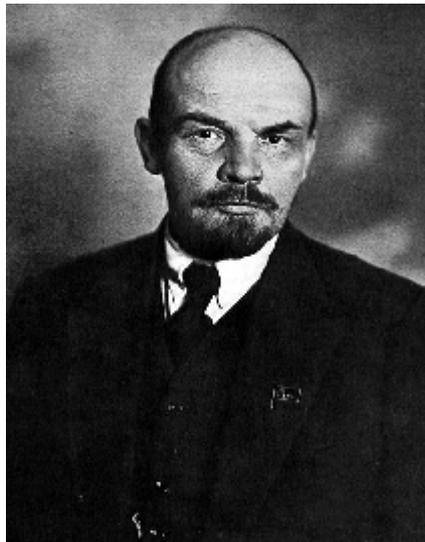
1. Conditions in Russia were bad. Food was in desperately short supply, fuel was scarce, and after the bitterly cold winter of 1916-1917 many Russian civilians were sick and tired of the war as the men at the front. As a result revolution broke out in February 1917.

February Revolution 1917: (according to Gregorian calendar in March 1917), demonstrations in Petrograd culminated in the abdication of **Tsar Nicholas II**¹ and the appointment of a weak **Provisional Government** which shared power with the **Petrograd Soviet socialists**. This arrangement led to confusion and chaos both at the front and at home. The army became increasingly ineffective.

The Provisional Government under **Alexander Kerensky** tried to carry on the war, but the government faced many problems.

English nurse serving with the Russians wrote in January 1917: *“Sabotage – railroads destroyed, workshops looted. Mobs shouting “Peace and Bread.” They are aware the war is at the root of their hardships. The Tsar wishes to please everyone and pleases no-one. [...] Things can not continue as they are.”*

By the end of the autumn 1917 discontent in Russia was so widespread that Lenin and his Bolshevik or Communist followers were spreading revolutionary ideas among the workers and troops. They decided to seize the opportunity to organize a second revolution, which broke out in October 1917.



Lenin's (on the picture, see left) slogan was: **“Land, Peace and Bread”** – this seemed to offer to the Russian people all the things they wanted, namely an end to the war, land for the peasants and freedom from starvation.

An army intelligence report stated: *“Everywhere one bears voices calling for peace because no one will stay in the trenches in the winter. The Germans use leaflets and newspapers to encourage fraternization.”*

¹ **Nicholas II** abdicated following the February Revolution of 1917. Nicholas II, his wife, his son, his four daughters, **were all executed by the Bolsheviks** in July 1918.

2. The **October Revolution** a.k.a. the **Great October Socialist Revolution** (according to Gregorian calendar in November 1917), **Red October** or the **Bolshevik Revolution**, was a political revolution and a part of the Russian Revolution of 1917. The October Revolution in Petrograd overthrew the Russian Provisional Government and gave **the power to the local soviets dominated by Bolsheviks**.

Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (in Slovak „Sovietske Rusko“): was established on 18 November 1917 after the Kerensky's government was overthrown in the October Revolution.

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk:



Soon after seizure of the power the Bolsheviks began negotiations, and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed in March 1918.

The **Treaty of Brest-Litovsk** was a peace treaty signed on March 3, 1918, at Brest-Litovsk (now Brest, Belarus) between the RSFSR and the Central Powers, marking Russia's exit from World War I.

Results of the treaty: 1, 2

1. The Bolsheviks decided to lose some land in order to

keep the results of the Revolution alive. The treaty provide some relief to Bolsheviks who were tied up in fighting the civil war and affirmed the independence of Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Lithuania and part of Poland. Germany's defeat in World War I, made it possible for Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, and Poland to become independent sovereign states.

The map shows the extent of Russian's loss of land under the treaty – 1/3 of its wheat-growing areas, 1/3 of its railways, 1/4 of its population and 3/4 of its heavy industry. German troops were allowed to occupy the area, and to harvest the wheat in 1918.

2. Britain and France sent troops to help the non-communist or “White” Russians fight the Bolsheviks, **and Germany concentrated its forces once again on the Western front.**

USA:

1. **Before 1917:** American factories and farms produced the food and war goods which Britain and France desperately needed. Therefore American ships carrying American citizens were frequently crossing the Atlantic to Britain, and this is where the trouble between the USA and Germany began. **In May 1915 German U-boat sank liner Lusitania.**

The USA exercised the **policy of isolation** until 1917: Why?

1. The USA had never been involved before as an ally in European wars
2. Many Americans were of German descent

2. **In 1917:** When the Germans began total U-boat warfare in February 1917, American ships were among targets. The Americans could not simply sit back and see their merchant vessel destroyed and their sailors killed without doing nothing. **In April 1917 the USA entered the war on the side of the Allies.**

US President Woodrow Wilson: re-elected in 1916. Part of his campaign was based on the idea of keeping out of the war. The people of America seemed to support the idea of peace and Wilson was returned as President. People regarded the war as a European quarrel. But in 1917 Wilson changed his mind. This is what he said in Congress:

“Vessels of every kind, whatever their flag, their cargo, their destination, their errand, have been ruthlessly sent to the bottom without warning or thought of help – the vessels of friendly neutrals, even hospital ships. Since the start of the war the Germans have had spies here in America. Now she means to stir up enemies at our very doors. The world must be made safe for democracy.”

President Wilson delivering his war message before Congress.
April 2, 1917:



An American cartoon commenting on Wilson's about-turn

Wilson took America into World War I as a war to make "the world safe for democracy". Although he tried to make involvement in the war a matter of conscience, there were business reasons. If Germany sank the ships, trade would stop. This would mean unemployment in the USA. Depression could set in. If the Allies lost the war, they would not pay back the money America had lent them.

There was another reason. This is a part of telegram sent by the German Foreign secretary to his Ambassador in Mexico: *“We intend to begin unrestricted submarine warfare. If there is a war with the USA, we will offer Mexico an alliance – Make war on our side, and Mexico can re-conquer the lost territory of Texas, New Mexico and Arizona.”*

Reasons we should remember Wilson:

The **Fourteen Points** was a speech delivered by United States President Woodrow Wilson to a joint session of Congress on January 8, 1918. The address was intended to assure the country that the Great War was being fought for a moral cause and for postwar peace in Europe. People in Europe generally welcomed Wilson's intervention, but his Allied colleagues (Georges Clemenceau, David Lloyd George and Vittorio Emanuele Orlando) were skeptical of the applicability of Wilsonian idealism.

The Fourteen Points, Point 10: The peoples of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity to autonomous development.

What help did the Americans give?

1. soldiers
2. the factories and farms produced the food and war goods which Britain and France desperately needed
3. tanks, airplanes, munition,
4. loans,
5. boost in morale and a hope of victory in 1918.