

VCE HISTORY: REVOLUTIONS
UNIT 3: RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

Area of Study 2: Consequences of Revolution
SAC 2: Evaluation of Historical Sources

SOURCE BOOKLET

Source 1

A historical interpretation by Stephen Smith of the objectives of Sovnarkom, published in 2002

The October seizure of power generated an exhilarating sense of a new world where justice and equality would triumph over exploitation... In the eyes of most workers and soldiers, as well as many peasants, a soviet government signalled land and freedom, the triumph of equality and justice, vengeance on the old, privileged classes, and rule by the toilers...

According to the constitution of July 1918, the aim was nothing less than the: *abolition of all exploitation of man by man, the complete elimination of the division of society into classes, the ruthless suppression of the exploiters, the establishment of a socialist organization of society, and the victory of socialism in all countries.*

Source: Stephen Smith, *The Russian Revolution: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, p. 40.

Source 2**A Soviet poster (1920)****Translation:** "Comrade Lenin cleans the earth from scum"

**ТОВ. ЛЕНИН ОЧИЩАЕТ
ЗЕМЛЮ ОТ НЕЧИСТИ.**

Source 3

Vladimir Lenin 'Advice to Workers and Peasants' printed in Pravda on 6 February 1918

You... have before you the very difficult and noble task... of organising the new economic order in the provinces and of establishing on a firm foundation the power of the soviets. In doing this you will be helped... by all workers and peasants... who are coming more and more to see that, apart from the Soviet Government, there is no escape from famine and death...

The bourgeoisie are... conspiring against us. They know that they will be completely ruined... if the people succeed in dividing the national wealth which is now in the exclusive possession of the rich...

You must organise and consolidate the soviet power in the villages. You will encounter there the rural-bourgeoisie – the kulaks – who will hinder your work in every way. But to fight them will be an easy matter. The masses will be with you... Make it clear to the peasant that the kulaks and the bloodsuckers must be expropriated¹ in order to bring about a just and equitable distribution of goods... The bourgeoisie are concealing the riches which they have plundered, and are saying, "We shall sit tight for a while." ... Your chief business will be this: do not let the brigands² get away with their riches, otherwise we shall perish³...

In reply to a question whether or not it is true that the Bolsheviks are looters⁴, [it is correct to say] "Yes, we loot the looters."

Source: James Bunyan and H.H. Fisher, ed., *Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1918; Documents and Materials*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1934), p. 542-543.

Retrieved online from

<http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1917-2/economic-apparatus/economic-apparatus-texts/lenin-loot-the-looters/>

¹ **expropriate** – seizure of private property for public benefit

² **brigands** – criminals; thieves

³ **perish** – die

⁴ **looter** – a person who seizes private property during a war or riot

Source 4

A historical interpretation by Richard Pipes of Leon Trotsky's contribution to the Red Victory in the Civil War, published in 1996

Trotsky is depicted by his biographer, Isaac Deutscher, as the man who “had founded a great army and guided it to victory.” In fact, his contribution was more modest¹. The decision to create a peasant army staffed by ex-tsarist officers was made not personally by him but by the Central Committee; and credit for the Red Army's victory belongs to ex-tsarist officers. Trotsky had no military experience, and his strategic sense left a great deal to be desired. ...Dmitri Volkogonov...concluded that in military terms he was a “dilettante².”

Trotsky's contribution lay elsewhere. He provided political linkage and political oversight, the lack of which was a major shortcoming in the White armies. Touring the front in his private train, he could assess the situation on the spot and, cutting through red tape, solve shortages of manpower and materiel³. He was also a spellbinding speaker, able to galvanise dispirited troops; in this respect, like Kerensky, he could be called “Persuader in Chief”. His directives to the troops had no operational significance, consisting mostly of exhortations topped with exclamation marks: “Southern front, pull yourself together!”; “Proletarians, to horse!”; “Don't waste time!” and the like. He was responsible for introducing a draconian discipline...which verged on regular terror.

Source: Richard Pipes, *A Concise History of the Russian Revolution*, Vintage, New York, 1996, p. 246-247

¹ **modest** – small

² **dilettante** – amateur; without real skill

³ **materiel** – weapons and equipment needed by an army

Source 5:

Yuri Steklov 'Report to the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party' (June 1919)

In the purely peasant and semi-proletarian provinces, Soviet power in general and the Communist Party in particular has no social base. You will not find there broad layers of the population who are committed to us, who share our programme, and are ready to act for us. I am not speaking about kulaks or the remnants of the bourgeoisie, of which hardly any remain. I am talking about the broad mass of workers, and, especially, peasants. We have frightened off the mass of middle and poor peasants. Voluntary mobilization¹ has failed. We met with the refusal of entire trade unions to give up even one man. And matters with the peasantry were entirely antipathetic².

I do not say that these are consciously counter-revolutionary forces; they are not. But the mass of the population is indifferent or hostile to our party. In many districts they are waiting for Kolchak³. It's true that when he arrives, the mood changes to our benefit, but not for long. The reasons for this are many. But the central fact - and this is true on a national level - is that we have actually given nothing to the peasants except hardship. Terror reigns. We hold on only through terror.

Source: Stephen Smith, *The Russian Revolution: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, p. 91

¹ **voluntary mobilization** – encouraging support for the Bolsheviks and Red Army

² **antipathetic** – feeling strong dislike

³ **Kolchak** – Admiral Alexander Kolchak, leader of one of the White armies

Source 6:

A historical interpretation by Martin Sixsmith of the nature and motives for the Red Terror

In response to the attack on Lenin, so-called class enemies were rounded up and executed for no other crime than their social origin. Hostages were selected from former tsarist officials, landowners, priests, lawyers, bankers and merchants to be used as reprisals. Lenin himself signed the execution lists. The aim seemed to be the physical annihilation of a whole social class. Being modestly well off made you guilty; soft hands unused to manual labour could get you shot. The Bolsheviks relied more and more on the murderous henchmen of the Cheka. The organisation's methods were extrajudicial¹: confessions extracted by torture, followed by immediate execution. Cheka's leader, Felix Dzerzhinsky, claimed, 'this should be frankly admitted. Terror is an absolute necessity during times of revolution. Our aim is to fight against the enemies of the Soviet government and of the new order of life.'

Source: Martin Sixsmith, *Russia: A 1000 Year Chronicle of the Wild East*, Overlook Press, New York, 2012, p. 232

¹ **extrajudicial** – outside the law

Source 7:

Soviet government poster '(1920)



Translation: Only the close, indissoluble union of workers and peasants will rescue Russia from ruin and hunger.

Workers! Give agricultural goods to villages to increase production of bread to the republic; give steam locomotives to transport bread to the starving areas; give the Red Army the weapons to protect the labourers from capitalists.

Peasants! Give bread to workers so that they can work; give foodstuffs and fodder to the Red Army so that it can protect your land from the capitalists.

Source 8:

...doubts were strengthened by the sudden rise in unemployment in the first two years of the NEP. While these unemployed were living on the bread line the peasants were growing fat and rich. 'Is this what we made the revolution for?' one Bolshevik asked Emma Goldman. There was a widespread feeling amongst the workers, voiced most clearly by the Workers' Opposition, that the NEP was sacrificing their class interests to the peasantry, that the 'kulak' was being rehabilitated and allowed to grow rich at the workers' expense. In 1921-2 literally tens of thousands of Bolshevik workers tore up their party cards in disgust with the NEP: they dubbed it the New Exploitation of the Proletariat.

Excerpt From: Orlando Figes. "A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891 – 1924" Chapter 15: Defeat in Victory. pg 771

Source 9:

Soviet Government Poster (1920)

Translation: Before and After October 1917

