

taught that "labour in the white skin cannot free itself while labour in the black is branded." Lenin never tired of emphasising to the workers of the civilised countries of Europe and America that their freedom is inextricably bound up with the freedom of the colonial masses of China, India, Africa and elsewhere, to whom they must render every support in their fight to liberate themselves from the yoke of Imperialism. He insisted that only this unity between the working classes of the economically advanced countries with the toiling masses of the colonies and semi-colonial lands can guarantee the final and irrevocable victory over the common enemy—capitalist-imperialism, 'democratic' or fascist—the victory of all of the oppressed and exploited over the oppressors and exploiters of all races and colours and creeds.

In Russia, Lenin denounced anti-Semitism and racial chauvinism wherever it expressed itself among the Russian workers, peasants and intellectuals. He uncompromisingly proclaimed the right of Self-Determination for all the backward races of Asiatic Russia and the oppressed nationalities under Czarist Imperialism.

This is the aspect of Lenin's teachings and their application to the Russian Revolution with which we are chiefly concerned. Hence in the following pages we shall examine Lenin's method of solving the National and Colonial Question, which today, like yesterday, remains one of the most important issues in world politics. This question is of particular concern to the British people at this moment.

In order to give value to our examination of the Leninist solution of the Colonial Question, we shall first give a brief account of the rise of the Czarist Empire and the conditions which obtained among the subject peoples, particularly among those of Central Asia, before the Revolution. This will enable the reader to appreciate all the more the achievements of the Soviet Government in applying Lenin's principles in practice.

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PART I

THE OLD RUSSIA — THE CZARIST EMPIRE

CHAPTER ONE

THE RISE OF THE CZARIST EMPIRE

CZARIST Russia, 'the Gendarme of Europe' and 'the hangman of Asia,' was the most paradoxical of the great empires of modern times. Culturally the most backward of the European nations, it produced some of the world's greatest writers and social reformers, among them such literary giants as Pushkin (like Dumas, of African descent), Lermontov, Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Gorki; such important social figures as Kropotkin, Bakunin, Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, and many others. Industrially, Czarist Russia was the least developed of the Imperialist Powers, yet it produced the most revolutionary proletariat, the first to make a successful Social Revolution. Itself a semi-colony of foreign finance capital (chiefly French), Russia was one of the most aggressive imperialist nations, constantly expanding its frontiers right up to the very collapse of the Empire. Foreign participation in Russian industry and finance was very great. Eleven of the leading banks were represented by foreign capital: 5 French, 4 German, and 2 British.

"The most important of Russia's metal works were in the hands of French capitalists. In all, about three-quarters (72 per cent) of the metal industry depended on foreign capital. The same was true of the coal industry of the Donetz Basin. Oilfields owned by British and French capital accounted for about half the oil output of the country. A considerable part of the profits of Russian industry flowed into foreign banks, chiefly British and French. All these circumstances, in addition to the thousands of millions borrowed by the Czar from France and Britain in loans, chained Czardom to

British and French Imperialism and converted Russia into a tributary, a semi-colony of these countries."¹

"Besides the part played by foreign capital in Russian history, Russia's national debt had naturally to be considered as well. In 1910, at least 62.45 per cent of the total national indebtedness, amounting to nine milliard rubles, was represented by foreign loans, France's share alone being from at least 9 to 10 milliard francs, Germany's from 2 to 3 milliard, and those of England, Holland, Austria-Hungary, etc., smaller, but still quite considerable sums. The service of the Russian debt weighed more heavily on the national finances than those of the other Great Powers and would in the long run have proved too much for the country's resources."²

Yet at the same time this Eurasian colossus with feet of clay stretched itself out over more than half of Europe and a third of Asia, extending from Poland in the West to the Behring Straits in the Far East, a distance of 5,700 miles; from the Arctic in the North to the Caspian and Black Seas in the South; and the frontiers of Persia, Afghanistan and Mongolia in the South-East, a distance of 2,660 miles at the widest point.

Within this enormous area there dwelt almost 175 different races and nationalities at every stage of cultural and social development, from the semi-civilised nomads of the Siberian plains and the primitive tribes of the Central Asian steppes living under patriarchal-feudal conditions, up to the most culturally advanced Finns, Poles and Baltic peoples, part of Western European civilisation. No other Empire, with the possible exception of the British Empire, was ever based upon such a medley of races. History, therefore, could not have chosen a more appropriate milieu than Czarist Russia for the experiment in inter-racial relations which the Soviet Government has undertaken since the Revolution, and the precedent it has set in the solution of national minority and colonial problems.

First of all, how was it that this colossal Empire, covering 8,250,000 square miles of territory, evolved? "As an ever-expanding empire of peasants and horsemen, Russia had pushed eastward into Siberia, southward towards Constantin-

¹ *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, p. 162.

² Hans von Eckardt, Ph.D.: *Russia*, p. 285.

ople, and westward towards the Baltic, long before the fever of modern Imperialism infected Western Europe. Russia's early expansion was the work of restless frontiersmen, seeking new homes in virgin lands, of ambitious Czars seeking 'warm water outlets', 'window to the west.' It was not the Imperialism of surplus manufactures, surplus capital and national pride. But in the late 19th century, though Russia as a whole remained agricultural, great industries developed in Russian cities, capitalists arose and imperialist doctrines identical with those of Western Europe gained currency among the ruling class. Capitalist projects for railway construction in Manchuria, capitalist interests in Persia, intensified the historic aggressiveness of Russia. French financiers (about 1890) supplied for Russian Imperialism surplus capital which Russia herself lacked; for instance, the Russian-Asiatic Bank, the agent of Russian Imperialism in the Far East, was financed with French capital."¹

The conquest and consolidation of the Russian Empire falls into two distinct historical periods. First, the Feudal period, before the abolition of serfdom in 1861, when most of the territories to the west and south-east of the Moscow Principality were acquired; and second, the Imperialist Epoch of 19th century capitalism, during which the Trans-Caucasian border regions, the Central Asian colonies and the Maritime Province of Siberia were conquered. This second period of aggressive *Lebensraum* brought Russia into direct conflict with British Imperialism in Central Asia and the Middle East, and with Japanese Imperialism in the Far East. The latter clash of imperialist interests culminated in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-5. During the period of Russia's expansion into Central Asia, war with Britain was only just averted on several occasions. It was only in 1907 that the two powers composed their differences at the expense of Persia, which was divided into spheres of influence.

The Muscovite Principality And Expansion.

Ivan IV, better known as The Terrible or The Dread, a contemporary of Queen Elizabeth, was the first of the Muscovite autocrats to assume the title of Czar (Caesar), in 1547. Ivan conquered the Tartar khanate of Kazan on the

¹ Parker T. Moon: *Imperialism and World Politics*, pp. 54-55.



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Middle Volga in 1552, to celebrate which he built the Cathedral of St. Basil on Moscow's Red Square, one of the most beautiful churches in Russia, a land of magnificent churches. Seeking an outlet to the south-east, Ivan reached, in 1556, as far as Astrakhan, outpost of the Golden Horde, which was the name given to the western part of the Mongol Empire founded by Jenghis Khan. This conquest brought Russia to the gateway to the Caspian. During Ivan IV's reign, "Great Russian trade continued to extend eastwards. . . . Cossacks and colonists crossed the Urals and began to open up Siberia. By these means the Moscow boyars created for themselves stable markets and secure roads, founded trading centres and commercial institutions, and succeeded, in close co-operation with the State, in constructing for themselves and for the Czardom a system of economic exploitation of the colonial territories which, though extensive, was coherent."¹ Ivan also looked towards the West. His wars against the Livonian military orders and Teutonic Knights, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden (1558-1582) were waged to break through to the Baltic and establish commercial links with Europe.

This process of widening out eastwards and westwards was continued by Ivan's successors, most important of whom was Peter the Great (1689-1725), founder of modern Russia. A man of great ability and energy, he introduced a number of reforms borrowed from the West—largely from Germany—and built a new capital at St. Petersburg in 1703, to serve as a 'window' through which his people might look into Europe. Peter's conquests brought into the Russian Empire the provinces of Livonia and Estonia, in 1721, as well as parts of Finland. In the south he entered the Crimea, the whole of which, as well as the Black Sea steppes, was fully annexed from the Ottoman Empire between 1774 and 1791, under Catherine II. The Crimea became known as "the brightest jewel in the Crown of the Russian Czar," because of its beauty and salubrity. During the last years of Catherine's reign the third and final division of Poland took place (1795), when Russia secured the portion which was to remain within the Empire until its fall. The Duchy of Courland (Latvia) and Lithuania were also added to Russia

¹ Hans von Eckardt : *Russia*, p. 32.

by Catherine. Sweden was made to cede Finland in 1809 by Alexander I, who annexed Bessarabia in 1812, at the end of a six years' war with Turkey. Nicholas I, the successor to Alexander, annexed the provinces of Erivan and Nakhichevan from Persia in 1826, and completed the conquest of the Caucasus.

All of the western parts of the Empire—White Russia, the Baltic provinces, Poland, the Ukraine—were incorporated as integral parts of Russia Proper. Finland enjoyed the status of an autonomous duchy.

However, in this study we are primarily concerned with the Asiatic and Far Eastern parts of Russia, which formed in reality the colonial section of the Empire. For the most part these territories were inhabited by primitive races and peoples. Many of them were even more backward in civilisation than the natives of Africa.

Russian Penetration Into Siberia.

Merchant adventurers were attracted to Northern Asiatic Russia by the prospects which were offered by the great fur belts and mineral resources, and penetration into Siberia had reached as far as the Irtish and Obi rivers before the end of the 16th century. For instance, during the reign of Ivan the Terrible, the powerful Stroganov family of merchant princes obtained the exclusive right to exploit the resources of Western Siberia. "For a term of twenty years the Stroganovs and their kinsmen were exempt from all taxes and dues in those new territories, and from every sort of statutory obligation. They were authorised to trade with foreign merchants, free of all Customs duty. . . . and, finally, to crown these privileges of the Stroganovs, they and their men were to be free from all subordination to the local authorities, and subject only to the jurisdiction of the Czar's court of justice in Moscow."¹

In pursuit of their purpose, the Stroganovs utilised the services of Cossacks, who, under their famous leader, Yermak, in 1582 captured Sibir or Isker, on the Irtish, and capital of Kuchum, "the formidable and invincible descendant of Jenghis Khan and heir of the Golden Horde." The Cossacks were not a distinct race but communities of Great

¹ Yuri Semyonov : *The Conquest of Siberia*, p. 36.

Russians who had 'seceded' from the Muscovite authority and settled in the valleys of the Don, Yaik and Terek, as well as in Siberia, as early as the 16th century. They lived in fortified villages, subsisting on fishing, and still more on plunder. The Turks and the Tartars were their lawful prey, but they did not always limit themselves to these. They recognised the Czar as their sovereign, but as he did nothing to enforce his authority, the Cossacks were practically independent military democracies."¹

It was the Stroganov family which enlisted the Cossacks to conquer desired territories in Siberia, and they penetrated the vast spaces by going from one river to the next. They made their way along these northern rivers in boats, and sent out bands in every direction, bringing the natives under subjection. With the aid of these Cossacks, trading establishments were established at intervals along the great river banks, to which the native trappers brought their skins to be exchanged for vodka and other trifles. Forty years after the death of the Cossack leader Yermak, in 1584, the Stroganov family found their monopolistic position being challenged by an influx of adventurers, in the face of whose persistent efforts to undermine them they were unable to maintain their virtual sovereignty of Siberia. They finally retired in favour of the Muscovite Empire, which looked to the furs and minerals of Siberia as a means of exchange for the gold of China which it required to fight its wars in the West. The Stroganovs, relinquishing a monopoly which had become ineffective in practice, contented themselves with millions of acres of land in the Cis-Ural region.

Recruited into the Czar's service, the Cossacks continued to be used in the opening up of Siberia. When territories were conquered, large stretches of land were usually reserved for them on the frontiers, on which they built *ostrogs*, or forts, from which they ruled the scattered native peoples. Liable to military service, the Cossacks received a monetary grant and arms from the Government. They were allowed a certain amount of autonomy and endowed with certain privileges. Their attempts to conquer the Turkic regions of South Siberia were at first unsuccessful, thanks to the determined resistance offered by the Kirghizians and Khkasses,

¹ Prince D. S. Mirsky: *Russia, a Cultural History*, p. 133.

and they were restricted to the north and east, where furs were most easily obtainable. The animal wealth of the country, which stretched from the Urals to the Pacific coast, was utilised by Russian companies, traders and merchants, who operated on lines similar to those of the British Hudson Bay Company in Canada.¹

Parties of Cossacks were sent to settle on the frontiers of Eastern Siberia as far as the shores of the Sea of Okhotsk, while Imperial Guards garrisoned the *ostrogs* (forts). Everywhere the native Tartars offered fierce resistance, the most effective coming from the Tunguses, now known as Evenks. Russian settlements were established at Tobolsk in 1585; at Tomsk in 1604; at Eneseisk in 1619; at Krasnoyarsk in 1628; at Yakutsk in 1632; at Okhotsk in 1638. The march across Siberia to the Pacific was so rapid that Cossacks reached the Sea of Okhotsk before they were in Irkutsk, the halfway point, but further south, in 1652, Nerchiask came under control in 1658. Vladivostock came into Russian possession only in 1860, when it was ceded by China. Alaska remained part of the Russian Empire until it was sold to America in 1869.

As the different parts of Siberia came under control, the Cossacks ruled them under the direction of State officials. Their methods were similar to those employed by imperialists everywhere, possibly because it is difficult to change the pattern of subjection and extortion. All with an interest in exploiting the resources of conquered Siberia, and they included the Moscow officials, the merchants, and hordes of Cossacks, "were concerned with the subjection of the native population and the collection of tribute. The methods were simple. An armed detachment came to a village and assembled the village elders, and the commander informed them through an interpreter of the amount of tribute they would be required to pay in future. A first collection was

¹ The Hudson Bay Company was founded in 1670 by the Anglo-German Prince Rupert of the Palatinate. "His cousin, Charles II," writes Yuri Semyonov (*The Conquest of Siberia*, p. 72) "gave the company its charter for the collection of furs in Canada, of which not a square foot belonged to Charles. Close relations of those beavers and sables and black foxes and ermines that had lured the Russians to Siberia, and established them there, conferred the Dominion of Canada on the British Commonwealth."

made on the spot. If the natives refused to deliver the furs, or produced too few, various sorts of pressure were applied. Their 'yurts' (tents) were burnt, their reindeer confiscated. Any who offered resistance were killed. Women and children were taken into captivity."¹

The Czars, observing how useful the Cossacks were in conquering and subduing the primitive peoples of the Siberian wastes, later recruited them as mercenaries to suppress revolutionary movements among the Russian workers, to terrorise the Jews, and to further their imperialist conquests in Central Asia.

The Cossacks did not come to Siberia as colonising settlers. The very nature of their role precluded that. Russian settlers did find their way there, however, particularly after the great Schism in the Orthodox Church (1652-1667), when there was a continuous migration of religious refugees into Siberia. Thousands of 'Old Believers,' who would not accept the new religious concepts, political prisoners and out-and-out criminals constituted the bulk of the Russian and Ukrainian elements inhabiting the great stretch of land reaching from the Urals to Lake Baikal. Under the crazy Czar Paul, an ambitious attempt was made in 1799 to settle the region of Transbaikalia. Soldiers and criminals who had incurred punishment, and peasants banished by the lords of the manors for 'bad behaviour' were exiled there. In order to perpetuate these colonies, every man was required to take a wife with him. If he had none, one was provided him by the State, along with a horse and cart and a sheepskin. In the rigorous conditions which existed, and because these 'settlers' were largely convicted wrongdoers, the life of exiles in Siberia was no easy one. The Russian Government might have wanted to colonise the conquered territories, but it was by no means sentimental. In that respect it was very much like other Governments. The English transportation system, for example, was put into operation almost at the same time as the Russian *ssylka* (banishment). The first columns of Russian exiles marched to Siberia at the end of the 16th century; the first English ships carrying cargoes of criminals sailed for Virginia and Maryland at the beginning of the following century. "Both Governments pursued the

¹ Yuri Semyonov: *The Conquest of Siberia*, p. 95.

same end—they wanted to rid the mother country of elements of unrest and to provide settlers for the colonies. One difference between the two was that the English sold their criminals to the colonists as slaves through special agencies, whereas the Czarist Government set out to utilise the labour of the criminals itself."¹

A new expansionist drive towards the North Pacific was inaugurated by Peter the Great, who conquered Kamchatka in 1707. The fur trade and exploration of these vast regions, including the Aleutian and Commander islands and Alaska, were the monopoly of a Muscovite chartered company. The expansion continued throughout the reign of Alexander II, and by 1860 Russian influence had stretched to the Amur River and east of the Ussuri River, a vast area which became part of the Maritime Province of Siberia. This region, together with North Sakhalin, covered a stretch of territory measuring 350,000 square miles.

The Far East Conquests.

About the time when the scramble for Africa was taking place in the eighties of the last century, the Western Imperialist Powers were carving an enormous slice out of the "sleeping giant of the East," as Napoleon once described China. After three wars Britain finally annexed Burma on January 1, 1886; France annexed Annam on June 6, 1884, and Tongking on April 4, 1885; whilst Japan established sovereignty over Korea in 1895. Three years later America grabbed the Philippines from Spain. In this great battle for concessions in East Asia and Pacific, the Russian capitalists had no intention of being hedged aside. They therefore commenced the building of the Trans-Siberian railway in 1891 with money advanced by French capitalists, and looked covetously towards China's north Manchurian province.

In 1896, the Russo-Asiatic Bank, again a Muscovite corporation operating with French capital, obtained a concession from the Peking Government to build a railway right across Manchuria, linking up with the Trans-Siberian line with the terminus at Vladivostock. "The railway was first

¹ Yuri Semyonov: *The Conquest of Siberia*, pp. 221-223. These and the following pages give an interesting account of the colonisation process.



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and foremost a strategic railway, to advance Russian imperialist interests in the Far East. It would facilitate the movement of Russian troops in the case of war; and even in time of peace Russian military guards could be stationed along the line to preserve order. Russia would dominate Manchuria from the military point of view. From the economic standpoint, also, Manchuria would be Russified. Of course the railway would give Russia the commerce of central and northern Manchuria; in addition the company was to have mining rights along the route. Moreover, goods imported or exported over this railway would enjoy a reduction of a third of the established tariff rate. Russia's next step would be to get a concession for a southern extension of the line and a warm-water port, for Vladivostock was ice-bound for several months in the year."¹

Conniving with Germany, Russia next moved to obtain Port Arthur, which would provide the warm-water outlet she was seeking on the entrance to the Gulf of Chih-li. This was the very port which Czar Nicholas II had prevented Japan from annexing after the Sino-Japanese war of 1895. Japan naturally resented the Russian acquisition of Port Arthur and made preparations to settle accounts with the Czar at all speed. Japan allied herself with Britain in 1902, thus linking herself with Russia's bitterest opponent in the Middle East and Central Asia. Diplomatically assisted by Britain, Japan mobilised her navy, and employing the same tactics as those more recently used at Pearl Harbour, without warning, she opened attack on the Russian navy in Port Arthur on February 5, 1904. The declaration of war followed subsequently. Russia's defeat in the war with Japan marked the first major setback for Czarist Imperialism in the Far East, and delivered the first blow to white prestige in the Orient.

Caucasian and Central Asian Annexations.

Russia's orientation towards the Near East took shape in the 18th century, and her encroachments on the Ottoman Empire brought her into conflict with the Western Powers, finally culminating in the Crimean War of 1854-56. During this period of imperial expansion, Trans-Caucasia became the scene of her conquering activities. In 1783, Georgia was

¹ Parker T. Moon: *Imperialism and World Politics*, p. 333.

declared a Protectorate of Moscow and was finally annexed in 1801. The annexation of Azerbaijan and part of Armenia from Persia followed. Daghestan in the north-east Caucasus along the shores of the Caspian was conquered in 1859. Resistance to further expansion in this region was put up by the warlike Moslem tribes inhabiting the Caucasian mountains under their famous leader, Shamil. They were pacified only about 1864, with the conquest of Circassia. Rather than submit to Russian rule, over 200,000 native Circassians migrated to Turkey. Following the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, Russia acquired Batum, Kars and Ardahan as part of the settlement of the Berlin Conference. It was on this occasion that the wily Disraeli, who dominated the 1878 conference, returned triumphant to England with 'peace and honour,' and Cyprus added to the British Empire.

Most important of the colonial regions of the Russian Empire were those located in Central Asia, comprising the vast area known as Turkestan, bounded by Siberia on the North and Persia and Afghanistan on the South. Its frontier to the West was the Caspian Sea, and in the East the Gobi desert. It is now broken up into several Soviet Republics.

War was carried against the tribesmen of the Kirghiz steppes from 1734, and it was in pushing southward from Siberia across these steppes that the Russians moved up the Syr-Darya River. From there they moved through the desert of Khiva, subduing the Khanates (or Moslem principalities) as they went, until they linked up again with the shores of the Caspian. The Khanate of Bokara was conquered in 1868, following the subjugation of Aralsk in 1848; Kozata in 1849, Turkestan in 1865. Khiva fell in 1873; Ferghana in 1876; Geok Tepe in 1881, and Merv in 1884. This predatory campaign covered the period up to the assassination of Alexander II, and this vast Central Asian region became for Russia what tropical Africa is today for the British Empire: a source of raw materials for the industries of Western Russia. Turkestan provided the cotton for the mills of the great textile industrialists which were set up in Latvia, and at Ivanov and Lodz in Poland.

At that point in her history, Russia, then ruled by Alexander III, moved right up against Afghanistan, over which she began to extend her sphere of influence. During

that period, too, Russia brought pressure to bear upon China to concede Outer Mongolia, which became a protectorate of Czarism in all but name. Enmity with Britain was increased on this score, while the political penetration into Afghanistan threatened India—the 'brightest jewel in the British Crown'—and intensified Anglo-Russian imperialist rivalry in Central Asia. War almost opened between the two nations when the Czar annexed the Pamir Plateau in north-east Afghanistan. It is estimated that Alexander added over 400,000 square miles of Central Asia to the Russian Empire.

While Russia played an active role in Asia, she was the only great Imperialist Power which was left out of the scramble for Africa, although one of the signatories to the Congo Basin Act signed in Berlin on February 26, 1885. This was in the main a consequence of Britain's policy, which from the time of the Crimean War had been to keep Russia bound up in the Black Sea. That is why Disraeli opposed the Treaty of San Stefano in 1878 and moved Indian troops to Malta and threatened to despatch the British Fleet to the Dardanelles. Frustrated in their efforts to secure control of the Straits, the Russians attempted to get a foothold on the East African Red Sea coast, to break across the British sea lane to India. After the defeat of the Italians at Adowa in 1896, Czar Nicholas II., the last of the Romanovs, established diplomatic relations with Abyssinia, and sent a mission to the court of Menelik. The Russians soon became great favourites of the black Emperor, and he appointed some of them as officers in his army. The Czar entertained great hopes of drawing Abyssinia under Russian influence, but his ambitions were thwarted after the Russian defeat of 1905.

Alignment of Forces Laid for 1914.

The British alliance with Japan in 1902, to which reference has already been made, was undertaken as a means of countering the Russian imperialist drive towards the China Sea via Port Arthur, after Russia had failed to secure an ice-free outlet into the Mediterranean, and later the Persian Gulf. Just as France and Britain almost came to blows over Fashoda in 1898, and France and Germany

over Morocco in 1905 and 1911, so similarly Britain and Russia nearly went to war over Central Asia in 1885, and again in 1897, over Russia's annexation of the Pamir Plateau. War was only averted through the instrumentality of France, the ally of both Russia and Britain. Following the Entente Cordiale of 1904 and the Russian defeat at the hands of Japan in 1905, French diplomacy succeeded in bringing Britain into rapprochement with Russia. Under the influence of this new-found friendship, Britain and Russia, in 1907, cemented their amity at the expense of Persia, which was divided into two spheres of influence under an Anglo-Russian agreement. This step paved the way for the conversion of the Dual Entente into a Triple Entente, which was consummated between Britain, France and Russia, and laid the alignment of forces for 1914. It will be seen that the Colonial Question in Asia and Africa then, as now, played a leading role in international politics; and it was only after the outstanding colonial differences between the contending parties were allayed that there came into being the political alignment of forces leading up to the First World War, which culminated in the destruction of the Czarist Empire in 1917.