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REVOLUTIONS AND CHANGE

October
2023

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PREFACE

As long as human societies have existed, revolutions and change have accompanied us as indelible fixtures of the human experience. This rate at which societies experience such change has only increased with greater rapidity as one approaches the temporal boundaries of contemporary society. From the agrarian revolutions of neolithic societies to the industrial and scientific revolutions of early modernity, it often falls to us as historians to make sense of such processes; How do they come about? How does one even define a revolution?

Revolutions may appear in myriad forms, be it social, political, or intellectual. Understanding change and continuity often forms the foundation of any kind of historical analysis. As things change with the passage of time, there are yet many others that remain the same.

As an academic field primarily concerned with documenting and expiating the changes which occur across tracts of time within human society, it is pertinent to engage with the concept of revolution as an agent of change. Nevertheless, it is important that historians approach such concepts with a certain degree of discretion. Peter Burke argues in the ' New Cambridge Modern History', that historians that involve themselves in subjects because of a supposed historical turning point will find themselves often assuming such breaks in continuity as axioms rather than justifying their categorization with proper critical analysis and substantiation.

The emergence of the modern academic field of history can trace its roots to the antiquarian pursuits of the dilettante scholars of early modernity, but arguably came to fruition with the establishment of the German historical school during the 19th century. The French Annales school of historical thought would later branch off from the conventions established by their predecessors, breaking away from attempts to establish universal laws concerning historical development and focusing on inquiries into social structures over extended periods of time. More recently, the cultural turn has been influential in recontextualizing the interpretation of history from the pursuit of grand narratives to the examination of meaning in the lived experiences of those whose histories we study. Revolutions are not merely confined the subject matter which historians concern themselves with; the very discipline of history itself is often subject to paradigm shifts. As historians, we would do well to understand the changes which occur within and without our discipline.

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WELCOME TO THE UCL HISTORY SOCIETY

Hey everyone,

Welcome to the first issue of the History Society Journal for the 2023/2024 academic year. We hope you're all well rested and recuperated over the summer holidays for the year ahead. At the History Society Journal, we aim to provide an open and inclusive platform for students to publish their thoughts on all things history related. Think of it as a public history forum where you can hone your skills as a writer, and share your thoughts and opinions with your fellow students. We publish on a bi-monthly basis, and each issue will be focused around a particular theme or concept. Submissions to the journal can be as short as a paragraph or as long as a full essay. Most of all, do enjoy your time here studying at the UCL History Department. UCL is an internationally esteemed institution of higher education, and to have been accepted into this programme is no small feat.

Yi Jie Teng (Editor, History Society Journal)

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  - Grace Lyon explores the role played by the Suffragettes in women's liberation, and seeks to answer the question of whether they truly were a revolutionary movement amidst a time of great change.

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  - Dora Wan chronicles the evolution of the Hong Kong film industry from the days of British colonial administration to its modern incarnation, detailing the breakthroughs achieved by Hong Kong filmmakers throughout the industry's storied history.

- **INTOLERANCE AND BIGOTRY: THE LIVES OF MIGRANTS IN MODERN EUROPEAN STATES**
  - Michael Ustynovych-Repa provides an analysis of how xenophobia and intolerance developed and intensified alongside the emergence of modern European nation-states, and how such sentiments persist into contemporary history.

- **REVOLUTIONS OF 1989: THE DISSOLUTION OF THE USSR**
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  - Jonas Lim deconstructs the notion of historical inevitability, and re-evaluates the October Revolution from the perspective of human agency in historical actors.

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SHOULD THE SUFFRAGETTES BE SEEN AS REVOLUTIONARY?

Grace Lyon (Third year)

WSPU poster, 1909, Hilda Dallas (Public Domain)

The Suffragettes were activists in the early 20th century who were part of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU)—and who are undoubtedly remembered for their courageous and somewhat dangerous fight for women's votes. In the popular narrative, they are largely attributed with achieving this and are certainly regarded as pioneers in the fight for women's rights. So, should we consider them revolutionary? Surely, this should be an easy answer, but this is actually a highly contested historical debate. The term 'revolutionary' has three definitions but only one is relevant here: 'involving or causing a complete or dramatic change.' If we attribute the gaining of female suffrage to the Suffragettes, it surely satisfies the criteria, and we can easily label the Suffragettes as revolutionary. However, how responsible were the Suffragettes for this 'complete and dramatic' political change? Ultimately, this debate comes down to a secondary question: how responsible were the Suffragettes for gaining the right to vote? In reality, not very. There were a number of factors involved in obtaining female suffrage, but despite the famous narrative, the Suffragettes were not the main reason. As such, I believe they cannot be referred to as revolutionary.

Historians like June Purvis have argued that the Suffragettes—their militancy and methods—were instrumental in gaining women the right to vote due to the press they attracted to the cause and changing the submissive perception of women both in the public eye and within their own. However, ultimately there is a stronger case to be made that the Suffragettes actually hindered the development of their own enfranchisement. Historians such as CJ Bearman and Elizabeth Crawford have both argued that the Arson and Bombing Campaign conducted by the Suffragettes—which saw 52 separate attacks in May 1913 alone—was a mistake and could have easily set back the movement by ten years. Additionally, despite the problematic government response to the Suffragette's hunger strike, Winston Churchill's Cat and Mouse Act in addition to his commitment to 'wear the suffragettes down' left the government with the upper hand on the eve of WWI. However, somewhat luckily for their widely accepted legacy as female pioneers, the war saved them from their inevitable public failure.

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WWI put an end to the hunger strike, stalled the movement and repurposed the women involved towards the war effort—rather conveniently. The Suffragettes might be remembered as revolutionary, but they are not quite deserving of the term.

Demonstration in Hyde Park led by Suffragettes, 1908, Getty Images

Women's work in the war tended to be the official government line for why suffrage was initially given to women in 1918. Their reasons in this regard were supposedly twofold: there was a change of perceptions pertaining to women in the workplace, and suffrage was bestowed as a reward for their service and dedication to their country during its hour of need. WWI as a factor in gaining women's suffrage is indisputably the most important, however, not for the above reasons.

There were certainly more women in work during and after the war than ever before, and perhaps in traditionally more ' masculine' roles, but this perspective ignores that nearly 33% of women were already employed before the war began and many in factory jobs. Moreover, the ' reward' for the serving women was certainly exaggerated as all women under 30 (the majority of the war-time female workforce) did not benefit from the 1918 extension of suffrage. The ' real' cause for the obtainment of the 1918 female suffrage was instead to balance out a radically changed political demographic—this shows that the Suffragettes were far from revolutionary.

In 1918 the Representation of the People Act gave women over 30 who owned property the right to vote. Also, in the same act, all men over 21 gained the right to vote. This saw working-class men finally being able to participate in the political system which they had previously been denied. The inclusion of working-class men in suffrage posed a serious problem to the government of the time. While they felt unable to continue to deny the vote to the millions of men who had fought for their country during the war, an undisputable truth remained that most of the working class-men (about 40% of the new electorate) would vote Labour rather than Liberal or Conservative. In order to keep their majority and power, the liberal government would need to balance out the influx of Labour votes. One way of doing this: to enfranchise upper and middle-class women. The Suffragettes' campaigning was not the reason for the gaining of the vote for women, but rather the post-war upheaval of the British political system.

The ' equal vote' as I will refer to it, when women were able to vote on an equal basis to men did not happen until 1928 with the Equal Franchise Act which enfranchised all men and women over the age of 21. This was over a decade after the initial granting of partial female suffrage in 1918, and over fourteen years after the suffragette campaign had been suspended in 1914. Although it would be minimising and unfair to say that all campaigning for equal female suffrage did not continue in these years, the Suffragettes as we knew them in both 1906 as demonstrators, and from 1908 onwards as militants had all but disappeared from the popular press. The vote in 1928 simply cannot be attributed to Suffragette campaigning. Undoubtedly, the Suffragettes are an integral part of the history of women and have certainly done more than enough to be remembered as female pioneers. However, by definition, they were not revolutionary. In spite of their deceptive legacy, the Suffragettes were not the reason women became enfranchised in 1918 or in 1928.

In conclusion, it seems clear that we cannot consider the Suffragettes as revolutionary. The ' complete or dramatic change' required it simply not met in regard to gaining women the right to vote. While perhaps a factor and an important part in raising female consciousness and changing perceptions of women, they were not principal enough in actually obtaining female suffrage to be considered revolutionary. The war and the changing political demographic with working men being able to vote is too fundamental a factor in the 1918 partial suffrage, and the longevity of the movement was not sustainable enough to directly cause the 1928 ' equal vote'. The reality is that the Suffragettes were not responsible for what the popular narrative gives them credit for. Their legacy as such was formed by the abundance of press they received for their militant methods —bombing, setting fire to David Llyod George's home, arsenic parcels in the post, throwing themselves in front of the King's Horse—and WWI saving them from inevitable public failure. This article does not seek to dimmish the contribution of the Suffragettes to women's rights or to women's history more widely. It only seeks to ascertain the reality of their contribution and female suffrage. The Suffragettes should not be seen as revolutionary—but who is it hurting if we do?

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REVOLUTIONARY CINEMA: EVOLUTION OF HONG KONG FILMS

Dora Wan (Second Year)

The recent news of Tony Leung being the first Chinese actor to receive a Golden Lion Lifetime Achievement at the 80th Venice Film Festival has once again brought the public's attention to Hong Kong's film industry. During its peak from the mid-80s to mid-90s, Hong Kong films dominated the box office in Asia and even exported more films than every other country except for the US. From Bruce Lee's Kung Fu flicks to Wong Kar-Wai's tales of romance, Hong Kong cinema helped popularise various film genres as well as revolutionising the industry. Through the years, these changes have redefined what Hong Kong film means to the local community, and in turn how the city influenced the industry's developments. Revisiting the development of the Hong Kong film industry from its start in 1913 to the heyday of the 1990s, this article analyses what " revolution" means in the context of Hong Kong cinema from three perspectives.

Shot from the film ' Chuang Tsu Tests His Wife', 1913, Lai Man-Wai (Public Domain)

The Beginning: New Influences

Hong Kong films were, at their earliest stage of development, closely associated with China. The first feature film made in the city was Chuang Tsu Tests His Wife in 1913. Produced by Huamei, a Chinese-American studio, the film detailing the life of the Chinese philosopher Chuang Tsu was never screened in Hong Kong. Instead, the studio distributed it among Chinese communities in the US. Nevertheless, this film was a breakthrough for the industry as it demonstrated Hong Kong's potential as a filmmaking centre. With the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1939 and later the Chinese Communist Revolution in 1949, filmmaking talents brought large amounts of capital with them, fleeing from the North to Hong Kong.

With the filmmakers' active participation, the film industry recovered quickly and even took new directions in development. While in previous years Hong Kong remained second to Shanghai in terms of cinematic importance, after the communist victory in China, it took advantage of its position as a British colony with access Western equipment and overseas markets to export local films to. Mandarin films produced in Hong Kong gained massive popularity. In the 1950s and 60s, film companies such as the Shaw Brothers produced a series of Kung Fu flicks which gave rise to the iconic Bruce Lee.

The positive reception was such that local filmmakers began producing kung fu movies specifically for international audiences that would otherwise not even play in Hong Kong. From silent films to full-length feature films, external factors drove the industry to innovate but traditional Chinese elements were still prominent in all genres.

The Peak: Searching for a Local Culture

Diverging from traditional themes, Hong Kong films in later years became increasingly international in light of rapid globalisation. Yet, the search for a local culture remained persistent throughout this period. Despite the immense popularity of big-budget kung fu films, they were almost exclusively in Mandarin. In fact, the Cantonese market was so small that in 1972 no Cantonese films were produced at all. Since the majority of local Hong Kong residents speak Cantonese, the apparent disregard for Cantonese-speaking audiences prompted a movement neatly dubbed the " Hong Kong New Wave" to reintroduce local elements such as the use of native Cantonese to films. Directors such as Ann Hui, Tsui Hark, and Wong Kar-Wai, most of whom had studied abroad, combined Hong Kong characteristics with an appreciation of Western filmmaking techniques to cultivate a hybrid local style. Their efforts proved successful as Hong Kong entered a golden age and dominated the local and regional markets. Spanning from the late 1970s to the early 2000s, films during this period were more serious in tone and incorporated aspects from the daily lives of locals in order to resonate with audiences. Examples from various genres of film include Homecoming (Yim Ho, 1984), Dangerous Encounters of the First Kind (Tsui Hark, 1980), and Chungking Express (Wong Kar-Wai, 1994). These films were filled with local jokes, slang, as well as occasional phrases in English and Mandarin, just like what local Hongkongers encountered in their everyday life. Similar to how Hong Kong was at the crossroads of Chinese and Western cultures, the city's cinematic heritage reflected an eclectic mix of local and Western influences. In short, the film industry again revolutionised Hong Kong cinema by breaking away from the framework set by its predecessors.

Scenes from Chungking Express. Taiwan-born Japanese pop star Takeshi Kaneshiro (right) starred as the main character which reflects the appeal of Hong Kong films. Filmmakers recruited leading actors from across the region to star in local films.

Challenging Boundaries: Away from Mainstream

A deeper dive into Hong Kong cinema sheds light on how directors endeavour to use their work as a device to establish new perceptions. One example would be the depiction of the LGBT community in film. In Hong Kong cinema, gay, lesbian, and queer characters are often portrayed in a stereotypical way as jokes or cliches with shallow personalities. Though the depiction of LGBT characters was still far from perfect in more recent Hong Kong films, the negative connotations associated with the community changed when the New Wave movement began exploring themes of identity and a sense of belonging. Contrary to their prior antiquated, sardonic portrayal, filmmakers pushed boundaries to depict LGBT relations in a serious way. One notable example is Happy Together (Wong Kar-Wai, 1997) which features Leslie Cheung and Tony Leung as a couple arriving in Argentina from the pre-handover Hong Kong to seek a better life, only to find themselves drifting apart. The romance between the two male leads was filmed with a gravitas which was uncommon at that time. Other examples include He's a Woman, She's a Man and its sequel Who's the Woman? Who's the Man? (Peter Chan, 1994 and 1996) which explored the themes of gender identity and cross-dressing through the lens of romantic comedy. These films, while focused on the experience of marginalised groups and their struggles of seeking an identity, also addressed the concerns surrounding Hong Kong's impending handover to the mainland in 1997 and the subsequent search for a sense of belonging. This overlap reflected filmmakers' practice of drawing inspiration from daily life as films between the 1980s and 90s were set against the backdrop of Hong Kong sandwiched between China and the UK. Hence, another revolution in Hong Kong cinema was challenging the portrayal of characters.

Although the Hong Kong film industry never recovered after its decline in the mid-1990s, it is nevertheless a crucial part of Hong Kong's history. Amidst the rise and fall of Hong Kong cinema, the revolutionary spirit of filmmakers drove the industry to innovate and aim for breakthroughs to elevate Hong Kong films. From pop culture to collective memory, its legacy lives on in Hong Kong and in countless communities across the globe.

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INTOLERANCE AND BIGOTRY: THE LIVES OF MIGRANTS IN MODERN EUROPEAN STATES

Michael Ustynovych-Repa (Third Year)

The modern European state held by some to have begun with the creation of the French Republic in 1792, had embedded itself in popular discourse by the end of the 19th century, when mass politics was establishing itself across the continent; and when the effects of the industrial revolution had left Europe with a growing sense of cultural and economic permeability. Consequently, conservative narratives around national identity – involving, to an extent, xenophobic sentiment – were being encouraged by a new phenomenon, mass migration. However, to suggest that there is an objective definition of a " migrant" seems erroneous, since the ideologies, practice and degrees of tolerance vary – affecting the way such people are, and have been, perceived. Thus I shall attempt to argue that the degrees of tolerance reflect the dynamic nature of European states: their social climate, culture, and even literature. Current attitudes must also be considered in the context of historical processes of migration, diaspora, and evolving state ideologies.

This article will initially consider how one of the largest diasporic communities – the Jews – were affected throughout the 20th century, including the build-up to World War Two. Subsequently, the topic will proceed to an exploration of migration laws in Britain, before finally examining how the migrant " crisis" has affected contemporary European sentiment, and shaped the lives of migrants and minorities living through it – with particular emphasis on Germany and France. Throughout, I shall suggest that more should be done to emancipate a largely silenced minority group: migrants, refugees and minorities fleeing to Europe.

From the fin de siècle onwards, the image of the " foreign threat" has been widely disseminated. From Bram Stoker's 1897 Dracula, to the stereotypical, negative depiction of the Jew Fagin as a long-nosed, scheming thief in the film Oliver! (1968), the portrayal of the " other" has played on contemporary anxieties. Apt, then, is Mary Gluck's reminder that the Jew has often been disparaged in public perception and literature (Gluck, 2016). Ashkenazi Jews (1880-1914) fleeing persecution in the Russian Empire, found themselves treated with suspicion, and indeed hostility, not only by mainstream British opinion, but also by already-assimilated Sephardic Jews, who emphasised their " alien" culture. This intolerance of the new migrant Jewish population was exemplified by the founding of organisations like the proto-fascist " Big Brothers' League" in 1901, eventually culminating in the 1905 Aliens Act, which declared that no " undesirable immigrants" would be let into Britain. This in turn encouraged the maintenance of a strong, intra-communal solidarity amongst Ashkenazi Jews. Hannah Ewence provides an account of how migrating Jews were perceived in Britain, suggesting that a ' disparate assortment of commentators reimagined, and politicised what they saw as they transplanted themselves...into the spaces of the migrating Jews'(Ewence, 2019, p.6). The vulnerability of an apparently well-integrated minority was starkly revealed in the steady intensification of anti-Jewish measures in Nazi Germany during the 1930s. This was highlighted by Hannah Arendt - herself made stateless following the 1935 Nuremberg Laws, which deprived Jews of German citizenship.

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Poster from a 1931 American theatrical adaptation of Bram Stoker's horror novel (Creative Commons)

In a classic essay written in 1943, Arendt pointed out that the term "refugee" had changed from someone who had previously been exiled to someone who now had no choice but to move; she identified such blatant intolerance as being a 'powerful weapon of totalitarian politics' (Arendt, 1951, p.296). Jews were excluded from professions, forbidden to interact with non-Jews, and subjected to loss of property and physical violence. The world undeniably faced an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. But how did the degree of tolerance towards Jews in Britain change as a result?

To examine this question, one must compare British foreign policy and domestic attitudes at the time. We see an official reluctance to let Britain become a "migrant" destination. Between 1933-1945, the USA admitted three times as many Jewish migrants as the UK. In part, this was due to Britain's focus on maintaining a balance between national identity, and the humanitarian crisis at hand. Around 80,000 Jews emigrated to Britain between 1938-45, most of whom were seen as temporary settlers.

Thus Jewish immigration should be contextualised with British self-interest and relative lack of empathy. However, the views of government and people at large show marked differences: a 1943 poll suggesting 78% of public voters favouring the admission of Jews. Unlike the old stereotype of the poor, East European Jew, many of these new migrants (Sigmund Freud, Frank Auerbach, etc.) were highly educated professionals, many of whom came to play prominent roles in British commercial, intellectual and artistic life. This demonstrates that discussion of minority tolerance must focus on all demographic evidence available: public sentiment not necessarily being take on board by governments prioritising perceived national self-interest over emerging humanitarian concerns.

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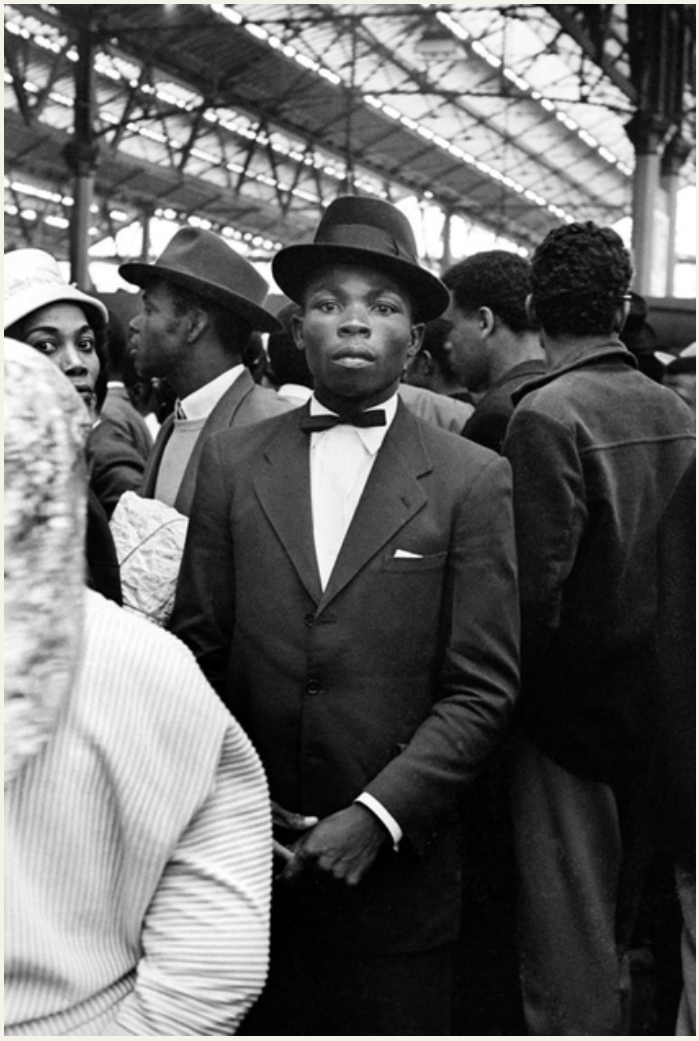
A broader look into British migration laws suggests that multiculturalism has been an issue since the creation of the multinational British state in 1707 – this is certainly true when considering the opinions of Richard T. Ashcroft and Mark Bevir (2018). However, its nature needs to be evaluated when discussing modern Britain. Modern "multiculturalism" arose with the influx of non-white migrants after World War Two. The Windrush migration of Caribbean people (1948-71) - perceived at the time as culturally and ethnically less-compatible with mainstream British culture - has profound implications for academic debate: namely, to what extent were they tolerated and integrated into broader society? Lisa Outar's allusions to the empire 'coming home to roost' and the "excitement" of the anti-colonial movement give an optimistic interpretation of a more complex issue (Outar, 2015, p.27). Her assumption that national discourse was overtly supportive is far from reality: the Windrush arrivals did not receive a warm welcome.



A new arrival to Britain, photographed at Waterloo Station just weeks before the enactment of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962 (Creative Commons)

This claim is evidenced most infamously by the 1958 and 1981 race riots in Notting Hill and Brixton where many Caribbean migrants had settled. The cry to "Keep Britain White" represented the anxieties of a growing demographic of Britons, fearful of the expanding number of migrants. The Black and West-Indian population was estimated to be 75,000 in 1952 and grew to 500,000 by 1961. The legislative reaction was the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act – aimed at managing Commonwealth immigration into the UK. Paul Gilroy supports this notion of intolerance with what he defines as "ethnic absolutism" – the reductive idea that ingrained culture can make ethnic differences mutually impermeable (Gilroy, 1990). Consequently, a series of Race-Relations Acts, beginning in 1965, have made all forms of discrimination on grounds of race illegal. However, the fact that such legislation has had to be repeated – as recent as in 2000 - suggests that underlying prejudice and intolerance persists. This has proved particularly problematic in areas such as employment, and relations between minority-communities and the police. The debate around integration continues, with the controversial UK-Rwanda deal promising asylum seekers a one-way ticket to Rwanda – a country which was never part of the British Empire.

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The debate around " external borders" and a contemporary migration " crisis" is a profound yet contentious topic. From 2014, the term " refugee crisis" has circulated among the public, the media and policy circles, addressing the growing awareness of migrants internationally. Under the rubric of " Muslim refugeedom" , the narrative of the 1990s (the removal of borders, i.e. the iron curtain being lifted, the Berlin Wall destroyed) has more recently been undermined by growing European nationalism. Media reports of the 2016 Cologne Assaults portrayed " North African and Middle Eastern" migrants as an unruly " sex mob" and fed directly into the rhetoric of anti-immigration, right-wing groups in Germany (Lüthi, 2018). Notwithstanding such allegations, many scholars have sought to understand the underlying motives behind the resurgence of anti-immigration sentiment in Europe. Dirk Hoerder and Christiane Harzig posit that by the 1960s, significant refugee populations were being generated in Africa due to decolonisation; and that the Western world had become the destination of ' unarmed poor migrants' who were nonetheless still being stigmatized (Hoerder &Harzig, 2009, p.45). Barbara Lüthi reinforces these claims, arguing that the notion of a migrant " crisis" is not due to any supposed proclivity towards violence, but rather to the enduring destabilising effects of European imperialism.

Irish navy ship rescues migrants to the EU from the Mediterranean Sea, 2015, Irish Defence Forces (Creative Commons)

The effects of such historical processes are still ongoing – as seen in the creation of external borders, and bi-lateral agreements between European and North-African countries aimed at stopping the influx of migrants into Europe. Thus migrants have often been made the subjects of mass-deportations back to their countries of origin or, in the case of Libyan refugees seeking asylum in Italy, placed in inhumane detention centres. The argument for off-shore facilities has been fuelled by the " threat" of an uncontrolled wave of migrants at the EU's borders.

Such fears led the British government in 2008 to propose new " off-shore lines of defence" ; whether through buffer-zones, or a reliance on a much wider array of institutional and private actors. Whether under the rubric of security or national interest, these sites have been ' crucial in the sorting of the right to European rights' (Bialasiewicz). The victims of such bureaucratic and rigorous forms of controlled immigration, (those bodies previously washed up on Euro-Mediterranean shores), are now largely concealed from European eyes. Whilst the debate regarding migrants already in Europe persists, the consequences for asylum-seekers migrating to Europe have been advertently hidden. This analysis has been echoed by Barry Stein's assertion that refugees have responded ' passively to the circumstances they have faced', and that more guidance should be offered to them (Stein, 1981, p.320-330). Migration and refugee historiography seems to have entered a watershed moment: many European states still being reluctant to allow asylum seekers through their borders. While there seems still to be an emphasis on " Euro-centricity" , scholars are now questioning the morality of such a sentiment by empathising with a largely sequestered and silenced minority; those whose lives have been poorly documented.

Such intolerance has indeed shaped the lives of many migrants; but to assert, as Lüthi does, that modern-day Europe is characterised by heterogeneity, and that countries are migrant societies, is controversial. This is most vividly seen in the case of France. Frederick Cooper quotes French MP's in 1946 comparing the ideal of the mono-cultural, secular French state to Caracalla's edict of 212AD -extending Roman citizenship to all across the Empire (Cooper, 2018). Since 1794, French had been imposed as the only language allowed to be taught or used in public - based on the principle that one nation required one language. Since then, regional languages have been actively suppressed: as late as 2021 the Constitutional Council vetoing legislation intended to allow for the teaching of regional minority languages. Officially, membership of the French nation is not based on race, ethnicity or ancestry - but on culture and citizenship. "Multi-culturalism" as currently espoused in Britain has been explicitly rejected. This has profound implications for minority and immigrant communities - and on the process of integration. The French Revolution, for instance, emancipated France's Jews, but defined them as individuals "of the Mosaic faith". The legal separation of religion and the state (enacted in law in 1905) also has implications for the public display of religious affiliation. This has affected France's large Muslim minority population - largely drawn from France's former North African colonies – where the ban on full-face covering (including the Burqa and the Niqab) in 2011 has been interpreted as a lack of religious tolerance. Muslim intellectuals have debated the possibility of developing a specifically "French" form of Islam - but President Macron's initiative to counter " Islamist separatism" has been met with opposition, with two-thirds of French Muslims suggesting that their religion has been negatively portrayed. For many, the experience has been one of exclusion, alienation and ghettoization in the "banlieues" of major French cities - expressed notably in protracted riots in 2005. The French emphasis on cultural conformity has found expression in the past in waves of antisemitism -where Jews were seen, notably on the Right, as a subversive threat to the identity of traditional "Catholic" France; and more recently in the gravitation of white, working-class French people towards populist movements like the National Rally (formally the National Front) with their exclusivist, anti-immigrant rhetoric. The process of integrating and tolerating migrant populations has also proved challenging due to the insistence on the state's secular character. It is evident therefore, that racial tensions permeate contemporary Europe, as they have done in the past - not just transnationally, but on an intra-societal level too.

To conclude, European " intolerance" has affected the lives of migrants – both on a trans-European scale and in individual states adversely to a significant degree. It is evident though, that the recent media portrayal of a refugee " crisis" has been taken on by the populist right across Europe in the suggestion that an external and unknown threat exists at Europe's borders. This idea has been seen in recent times and also in the delineation of a historically diasporic community: the Jews. While this remains a pervasive issue, the works of scholars like Barbara Lüthi and Barry Stein remain important in echoing a more contemporary claim – that minorities and migrants have often been silenced, and that western media should seek to engage with migrant groups, and not assume things of them. However, these assertions have been met with criticism. Nevertheless, the apparently growing trend amongst scholars to empathise with minority populations in Europe suggests there are grounds for guarded optimism about the direction of refugee historiography, public tolerance and integration into European society.

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REVOLUTIONS OF 1989: THE DISSOLUTION OF THE USSR

Yi Jie Teng (Third Year)

In 1922, when Lenin and the Bolshevik movement ascended to national leadership over the former territories of the Russian Empire, they would embark upon the colossal task of reorganizing Russian society and its economy along the lines of hitherto untested methods of central planning, with the aim of eventually establishing the classless, stateless, and moneyless society envisioned by German economist and sociologist Karl Marx. Little more than six decades later, this experiment would come crumbling down as a variety of issues encompassing economic stagnation and an ossified political class led to intensifying waves of nationalist and revolutionary movements, bringing about the collapse of the Eastern Bloc of socialist states.

A Soviet Army tank in Moscow during the August Coup, Ivan Simochkin, 1991 (Creative Commons)

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 came as a moment of triumph for liberal market advocates and a cause for introspection and retreat for the global socialist movement. The causes for its fall have been hotly debated, with much of the academic literature focusing on the factors which led to the economic decline of the USSR. Nevertheless, other factors, such as rising ethnic tensions and nationalist movements in the peripheral republics of the USSR, as well as the questionable sustainability of a system held together by coercion and repression, account for the eventual demise of the Soviet Union.

By the late 1980s, it was clear that the Soviet economy was languishing, plagued by shortages of consumer goods, low levels of labour productivity, and middling growth rates. Common explanations for the failure of the Soviet economy point to the inability of a centrally planned system to efficiently and adequately allocate resources for production, owing to the absence of a natural price mechanism for the valuation of consumer and producer goods, the system of centrally mandated prices and production quotas would, by the rules of classical economics, result in significant distortions in supply and demand, consequently leading to shortages in the supply of highly demanded products and precipitating the emergence of an underground secondary economy to supplement the shortcomings of the planned economy. Economic historian Vladimir Popov estimates that by the Brezhnev era, the size and scale of the Soviet shadow economy had reached an estimated 10-15% of the Soviet GDP (Popov, Oxford, 2014, 60-61). Peter Kenez observes that in a system which fixed prices based on centrally mandated policies rather than in response to market mechanisms, shortages manifested not ' not by bidding up prices, buy by standing in line for products in short supply.', resulting in citizens hoarding currency they had no use for (Kenez, Cambridge, 2017, 267).

Nevertheless, economic failure would not necessarily equate with regime failure were it not for the political preconditions which translated that failure into broader systemic ramifications. Such is argued by economists Marshall Goldman, Michael Ellman, and Vladimir Kontorovich, all of whom argue that the opaque and calcified nature of the Soviet bureaucracy, coupled with its complacency and arrogance, magnified economic failure into systemic collapse. (Rowley, Slavica Publishers, 2001, 406).

Furthermore, the rise in nationalist sentiments throughout the USSR's constituent republics undoubtedly played a role in bringing about the demise of the Soviet Union. In spite of decades of harsh repression and Russification under Stalinist rule, nationalist feelings and the desire for self-determination was merely repressed rather than having been outright eliminated in favour of a supranational conception of Soviet citizenship. Stephon E. Hanson notes that burgeoning nationalistic tendencies had begun to come to the fore as early as under Brezhnev's rule, with the limited Soviet federalism afforded by Brezhnev leading to the emergence of powerful and individual non-Russian ethnic networks in Republics such as Kazakhstan under Dinmukhamed Kunaev, Ukraine under Volodymyr Shcherbytsky, Uzbekistan under Sharaf Rashidov, and Azerbaijan under Heidar Aliev (Hanson, Cambridge, 2008, 305). Whilst these proclivities would later be magnified under Gorbachev's policy of Glasnost, it is arguable that their re-emergence as a force in Soviet society was merely delayed by decades of repressive policies, with the implication that the multi-ethnic empire of the USSR was held together at the seams by masking the issue of national self-determination through a veneer of unity rather than genuine compliance.

Anti-coup demonstrators outside of the Russian parliament in 1991, David Broad, 2008 (Creative Commons)

Such is demonstrated by the eruption of the War in Nagornyi Karabakh betwen the Armenian and Azerbaijani SSRs, which began in 1988 prior to the exit of either Soviet Republic from the Soviet Union, providing a barometer for the scope and depth of ethnic unrest and sectarianism which had hitherto been deliberately concealed through the Soviet state. Furthermore, the violent suppression of Georgian nationalist demonstrators in Tblisi in 1989 was further cause for embarrassment to the central government in Moscow, illustrating that the Soviet Union was not a federal entity forged through consent but rather held together by violence and coercion, irreparably damaging the legitimacy of the now floundering Union.

Finally, despite the ostensible goal of creating an emancipatory revolutionary state controlled by the workers, the USSR under Lenin quickly descended into a bureaucratic dictatorship, further intensified by his predecessor Stalin. Subsequent efforts at destalinization merely curtailed the greatest excesses of Stalinist totalitarianism; the Soviet state was very much reliant on repression as its primary tool of legitimation and stabilization for much of the remainder of its existence. Thus the collapse of the Soviet system is can arguably be attributed to the inherently unstable nature of totalitarian and authoritarian rule, David Rowley, Alexei Yurchak, and Peter Kenez as being unable to contain the desire for change within a system that was inimically opposed to it. Rowley argues that viewing the Soviet Union from an imperial paradigm which explicates Soviet failure through the deteriorating capacity for the imperial core to maintain and sustain its hold over its periphery serves to explain its eventual and sudden dissolution. (Rowley, Slavica Publishers, 2001, 425-426). Yurchak adopts a slightly different view, positing that there existed a genuine and authentic relationship between Soviet society and the politics of its governance, but that this relationship invited a constant reinterpretation of Soviet symbols and ideology which contradicted the perception of the Soviet system as ' monolithic and eternal', laying the seeds for its self-immolation when Gorbachev introduced the element of genuine public debate and discourse under Perestroika (Yurchak, Cambridge, 2003, 504). Kenez puts forth the most pessimistic appraisal of the Soviet Union, proposing that the USSR was, like its predecessor of Tsarist Russia, a ' hopelessly anachronistic' and conservative regime that was brought down by its own internal contradictions and its inability to contend with the need for change (Kenez, Cambridge, 2017, 278).

The Soviet Union's demise was the result of a confluence of factors. The unsustainable nature of its economic system being chief among them; during the USSRs age of rapid economic development under Khrushchev, its much vaunted system of central planning was hailed as being the deliverer of a post-capitalist utopia that would eventually surpass the developed economies of the West, by the 1980s, shortages and stagnation laid bare the failure of central planners to deliver upon the lofty promises of their predecessors. Moreover, the emergence of long-dormant but nevertheless extant ethnic tensions and proclivity for self-determination, and the inability of the Soviet state to adapt itself to new and pressing challenges further accelerated its demise, demonstrating various shortcomings present in the nature of its composition as a unitary entity founded upon coercion rather than a voluntary association of nations. Lastly, the Soviet state's capacity to maintain its vast empire was founded upon the unsustainable use of coercive force; as economic stagnation and rising nationalism threatened its integrity, the government in Moscow became increasingly conservative and reactionary, further deteriorating its ability to contend with the challenges arrayed against it.

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WHAT MAKES REVOLUTIONS INEVITABLE? HUMAN AGENCY IN THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION

Jonas Lim (Class of 2023)

Change was inevitable in revolutionary Russia. Both the workers and the peasantry, as much as the Bolsheviks, knew that reform was not an option for late Imperial Russia. Marxists from the likes of Valdimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky argued that Russia was on the verge of revolution, which they believed to be an inevitable outcome of dialectical progress. A hundred years later, as historians, it is worth recasting this question in hindsight: was the October revolution really ' inevitable'?

Unlike Marx's or even Lenin's time, historians now rarely believe that any historical event was truly inevitable. Since the Cultural Turn of the 1960s, history as a discipline has moved away from hard facts and casual claims, to meanings and imagined concepts that seldom concern themselves with proving causation scientifically. Clayton Roberts, in his Logic of Historical Explanation, replaces ' causation' with the term ' colligation' as a multi-faceted and explanatory process, to account for the fact that academic history rarely attributes a unilateral cause to a historical event. With this movement away from the casual, the philosophical standing of historical inevitability itself as a concept seems difficult to sustain.

A historical event can be defined as inevitable only if there were no alternative consequences available through the action of historical agents at the time. For the October revolution, alternative consequences are those such as a continuation of the Dual power between the Provisional government and the Petrograd Soviet or an establishment of a regime under a political party other than the Bolsheviks. The possibility of these ' alternative consequences' depends on two specific factors: agency and structure.

Female soldiers from the 2nd Moscow Women's Battalion defend the Winter Palace against the Bolsheviks, Unknown Author, 1917 (Creative Commons)

However, the question between agency and structure cannot be objectively answered by choosing either one. To do so inadvertently oversimplifies the intricate colligation of historical events in which agency is exerted in the context of structural preconditions. Instead, the question requires considering the varying subjective meanings the October revolution had to different social groups: politically-minded elites, urban grassroots organisations, and people in the ' periphery' of revolutionary Russia. In this article, I argue that the October revolution, at its grassroots level, was not an inevitable consequence of the chain of events since February 1917 but a continuation of these changes that were only resolved after the Russian Civil war.

Until the 1980s, historical approaches to the Russian revolution placed a heavy emphasis on the agency of politically-minded individuals, namely the Bolsheviks. A problem with such an approach is that it exaggerates the extent to which Bolshevik agency influenced the outcome of the revolution. Assuming without due examination whether the ideas of the politically-minded elite were mirrored in other spheres of Russian society creates a top-down bias in writing the political and the intellectual history of the revolution. Moreover, this approach disregards how the Bolsheviks themselves were acutely aware of the structural preconditions that enabled the revolution. In his Peculiarities of Russia's Development, Leon Trotsky highlights the structural differences between Russia and Western Europe, noting how such conditions enabled Russia to step over capitalist democracy directly to a socialist revolution. Prominent in Trotsky's writing, as well as the writings of Vladimir Lenin, is the idea of dialectical materialism - the Marxist theory that that society inevitably progresses from capitalism to socialism and communism, through a revolution led by a ' vanguard party.' Thus, viewing October 1917 as solely a product of Bolshevik agency is anachronistic, as the Bolshevik themselves were wary of the limits of their role as historical actors in shaping the revolution's outcome.

Unlike the linguistic school of new social historians in the west, social historians of the Russian revolution have focused mainly on the political dynamics between various grassroots social groups in the revolution. Historical surveys of the revolution after Perestroika and the collapse of the Soviet Union have focused on the grassroots, structural aspects of late Imperial Russia that conditioned the outcome of the October revolution. Ronald G. Suny attributed the Bolsheviks' victory in October, not to their superior political tactics but to the fact that the policies formulated by the Bolsheviks since February situated them ' at the head of a genuinely popular movement.' Viewing the history of the Soviet Union in hindsight, historians such as Peter Kenez have argued that reform was just not an option for Russia and that it is incomprehensible any liberal policies the Provisional government could have implemented to prevent the outcome of the October revolution

Approaching the events after the February revolution in terms of structural causes, change in revolutionary Russia was, to a certain extent, inevitable. Persisting structural problems in various spheres of Russian society since the nineteenth-century resulted in widespread discontent with Russia's political system. Hardships for the rural peasantry continued after the abolishment of serfdom in 1861, as emancipated serfs suffered to pay off their debt to previous landlords. Meanwhile, in the cities, the pressure for industrialisation on the tsarist government resulted in haphazard attempts of urbanisation that worsened living conditions for the working class under a harsh working environment and high living prices. Moreover, the tsarist regime's haste for modernisation without reforming its antiquated political system resulted in an inefficient governing system, which led to its poor performance in the Russo-Japanese war and the First World War. Russia's involvement in the latter particularly exacerbated the economic hardships, which led the Russian people to turn to radical protest than reform. By 1917, change in Russia was inevitable; however, the inevitability of that change being embodied in the form of the October revolution and Bolshevik victory in 1917 is debatable.

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Although the structural preconditions did render change inevitable in revolutionary Russia, historical agents did have an influence in the course of events from February to October 1917. Alfred Riever argued that Russia's historical heritage played out not as ' permanent conditions' that predestined the outcome of the revolution before it took place but in the form of ' persistent factors' that took effect within a specific time and place. Agency is only applicable when we consider it within the context of structural conditions, and structure is only significant when we can discern to what extent it shaped (or did not shape) the actions and the subjective experiences of historical agents. Thus, to fully appreciate how the Russian revolution looked from a grassroots perspective, we must look at the people's subjective lived experiences during the revolution.

Bolshevik propaganda poster celebrating the dictatorship of the proletariat, Aleksandrs Apsītis, 1918 (Creative Commons)

In the sphere of high politics, it is, to a certain extent, true that there was no alternative consequence other than the advent of the Bolshevik regime after the February revolution occurred. Not only did the Provisional government fail to provide for the demands people had been rooting for since the February revolution, but it also alienated itself from both the left and the right, creating a power vacuum for itself which naturally led to more grassroots support towards the Petrograd Soviet and the Bolshevik party. However, this does not mean that Bolshevik victory in the political sphere encapsulates the entire picture of the October revolution. Classifying the revolution pertaining only to what happened in the sphere of high politics disregards the revolution's different meanings for social groups in various dimensions of Russian society - the workers, peasants, sailors, and soldiers. Sources that reveal the subjective aspects of the revolution through an account of the lived experiences during the revolution suggest that, for the urban and rural grassroots people, life after the October revolution was not that different from how it had been before. Thus, for many grassroots social groups, the October revolution did not mean an inevitable consequence of the changes they had been advocating for as it meant for the Bolsheviks.

To them, October 1917 was a phase that saw a continuation of conditions experienced before the revolution and part of a broader change that continued until the Civil war.

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From a grassroots perspective, the October revolution was not a consequence of societal change that resolved the people's demands. Rather, it was a continuation of the problems of Russian society they had been protesting against since the February revolution. Political historians have interpreted political documents of the revolutions of 1917, assuming that the Bolsheviks had firm control of the grassroots organisations in Petrograd and the soldiers on the war front. ' Order Number One,' which sent the Soviet orders to soldiers on whether or not they should defy their superiors' orders, is a prominent example of a document that has been interpreted as such. However, political documents such as Order Number one are top-down orders that do not capture how the soldiers may have perceived this particular document. Such a top-down approach assumes Bolshevik control of the grassroots movements as given and attributes its cause entirely to the strategic Bolshevik agency. The most we can tell from top-down political documents like Order Number One is that the military commanders of the tsarist regime had lost control over their soldiers, and that many of them attributed this loss of control to Order Number One and the Petrograd Soviet.

We see that the mechanism that led to Bolshevik support was more complicated than the top-down approach that exaggerates the Bolsheviks' role as superior manipulators. For Order Number One, it is essential to note that the soldiers in 1917 did not share an unconditional support for the Bolsheviks and their ideology.

Letters sent by soldiers on the front to their families express their discontent, not simply at their commanders of the tsarist regime, but specifically at the experience of deprivation caused by economic hardships. Soldiers wrote about their anger that they had to purchase their own rations despite their patriotic contributions to the war effort. Experiencing deprivation and hunger despite sacrificing themselves for the Russian government soon led to other emotions as well. Soldiers felt anxiety as one of them wrote to his wife that ' my heart is heavy and sick when I think how you are living,' and some felt despair about the pessimistic future that ' I could die. We lie in filth... and go around barefoot and naked.' Such sentiments, or, in Rosenberg's words, 'the language of extreme need,' were predominant among these letters where soldiers confessed their subjective emotions regarding the war, how they perceived Russia's current situation, and what they thought these implied for themselves.

What is notable in this ' language of extreme need' is that these sentiments were not necessarily that of politically driven support towards Marxist-Leninist ideology, but languages of deprivation along with anxiety and discontent. Political documents such as Order Number One and Bolsheviks slogans of ' Land, Peace, and Bread' gained their significance, not necessarily because the people agreed to the Bolsheviks' Marxist-Leninist ideologies, but because such rhetoric fitted into these contexts of deprivation as it claimed to offer what the people wanted most. Thus, discontent and deprivation under the tsarist regime and later the Provisional Government did not necessarily mean unconditional support for the Bolsheviks. This is also the case for the sailors in 1917, whose contribution was essential in the February revolution. In 1921, sailors in the port city of Kronstadt felt their demands during the revolution had not been met and initiated a rebellion against the Bolshevik regime. Thus, for the soldiers, urban workers, and sailors, October 1917 was not the ultimate consequence of the changes they had been advocating for, nor was it, from their perspective, ' inevitable.' Although the Marxist-Leninist propaganda focused on the inevitability of the October revolution as the ' people's revolution,' life after October 1917 was a continuation of the economic hardships and deprivation for many in the urban cities.

Moreover, as in the urban ' centre' of the revolution, the lived experience of October in the rural ' periphery' also saw a continuation of the hardships that had predated the revolution since February. Bolshevik politicians during the revolution and later Soviet historians have classified the image of the Russian peasantry as that of the ' backward' apolitical peasant disinterested in ideology and revolution. However, recent scholarship has revealed the constructed nature of the image of the backward peasant. Far from the characterisation that the peasants were uncooperative and anarchistic towards party politics in the city, peasants were acutely aware of how the political events in the cities affected their lives. Peasant communities were interconnected with urban cities as many workers from the countryside moved to the cities searching for work. This was also the case during 1917, as the peasants put forth, in Mark Baker's words, ' tiny local revolutions by individual peasant communities.' The peasantry's foremost concern was land redistribution, a problem that had persisted since the abolishment of serfdom in the nineteenth-century.

Propaganda poster from the Polish-Soviet War depicting Leon Trotsky on guard at the Polish-Soviet border, Dmitry Moor, 1921 (Creative Commons)

This deconstruction of the idea of the apolitical, ' backward' peasant enables us to reinterpret the agrarian tendency to support anarchistic armies during the Russian Civil war in the following years. During the Civil war, most peasant communities supported neither the Red nor the White army, and many of them participated in autonomously grouped anarchist armies, such as that of Nestor Makhno. This anarchist tendency demonstrates how agrarian life had experienced a continuation of the same problems they had with the tsarist government, even after October 1917.

Though the peasantry had fought for ' Land and Liberty' since the February revolution, their demands were poorly met as economic strains continued in the aftermaths of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, and rural life showed little signs of improvement as grain was requisitioned from the peasantry to maintain the Civil war effort. Hence, to the rural peasantry, October 1917 was also a continuation of the economic hardships that had persisted since late Imperial Russia and was only resolved by the New Economic Policy.

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The October revolution was not inevitable once the February revolution took place, in the sense that it was not an inevitable consequence of the course of events since February 1917. Rather, both the February and the October revolution were part of a broader inevitable change which had amounted since late imperial Russia and was fully resolved only after the Russian Civil war. For social groups other than the politically-minded elite in high politics, evidence of the revolution's lived experience suggests that the years after the October 1917 saw a continuation of the problems people had been protesting against since February. Thus, for the soldiers, workers, sailors, and the peasants in revolutionary Russia, the October revolution was not an inevitable result of the course of events since February 1917; it was part of a wider inevitable change that had been occurring since the years of later Imperial Russia and was only resolved after the Civil war.

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