

# **From Imperial Russia to the 1917 Revolution**

## **Handout #1, 8 January 2019**

### **Leonard Friesen**

#### **Introduction:**

- “The Soviet Union was a non-stop dictatorship and people were basically prisoners”: What (we think that) we know about Russia and the Soviet Union.
- Who is Friesen anyway and what does he know about this stuff?
- Soviet history as three revolutions (Leninist, Stalinist, Gorbachev) and one hinge.

#### **What do We Need to Know about Russia before the Commies Took Over**

- Massive and northern, though concentrated: 1/6 of the world land mass
- The Tale of Three Cities: Kiev, Moscow, and St. Petersburg, and one hinge
- In 1900, It is overwhelmingly peasant and noble with recent and mass industry
- Something about Nicholas II, and maybe even Rasputin
- Was the Russian empire stable by 1913, or ripe for revolution?

#### **1917: The Year that Changed the World**

- Making Sense of it: Was it a Commie Take Over or a Popular Revolution?
- 1917 in a Nutshell: February Revolution, summertime blues, October Revolution
- Lenin, the Finland Station and the April Theses (who was Lenin anyway?)
- What Lenin found: the Tsar overthrown, and a February (bourgeois) Revolution
- Petrograd Soviet forms alliance with Duma. Becomes Provisional Government
  - Policies? War, Land, Factories
  - Lenin? Peace, Land, Bread, Revolution now!
- Lenin goes from being oddball in 1917 to “popular” genius. Why?
  - From the June Offensive to August’s Kornilov Revolt
  - Lenin and the Bolsheviks as the only popular alternative
- The Great October Socialist Revolution (25 October, or 7 November)
- How Lenin read elections: the failed Constituent Assembly
- Brutal Civil War is around the corner: 1917-1921

#### **Possible Further Reading:**

Daniels, Robert. **Red October: The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.**

McMeekin, Sean. **The Russian Revolution. A New History.**

Merridale, Catherine. **Lenin on the Train.**

Service, Robert. **The Last of the Tsars: Nicholas II and the Russian Revolution.**

Suny, Ronald. **Red Flag Unfurled. History, Historians and the Russian Revolution.**