



Revolution in Real Time: The Russian Provisional Government, 1917

ODU Model United Nations Society

Introduction

The Russian Revolution began on 8 March 1917 with a series of public protests in Petrograd, then the Winter Capital of Russia. These protests lasted for eight days and eventually resulted in the collapse of the Russian monarchy, the rule of Tsar Nicholas II. The number of killed and injured in clashes with the police and government troops in the initial uprising in Petrograd is estimated around 1,300 people.

The collapse of the Romanov dynasty ushered a tumultuous and violent series of events, culminating in the Bolshevik Party's seizure of control in November 1917 and creation of the Soviet Union. The revolution saw some of the most dramatic and dangerous political events the world has ever known. It would affect much more than Russia and the ethnic republics Russia ruled. It started a process that dominated world events through much of the Twentieth Century, until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991,

seventy-four years later. The legacy of the Russian Revolution continues to be keenly felt to this day.

But could it have gone differently? Historians emphasize the *contingency* of events. Although history often seems inventible afterwards, it always was anything but certain. Changes in policy choices, in the outcome of events, different players and different accidents, lead to surprising outcomes. Something like the Russian Revolution was extremely likely in 1917—the Romanov Dynasty was unable to cope with the enormous stresses facing the country—but the revolution itself could have ended very differently.

Major questions surround the Provisional Government that struggled to manage the chaos after the Tsar's abdication. Could it have survived? Could the Bolshevik (Soviet) take-over been avoided? ODUMUNC 43 will know by Sunday, 16 February 2020.

Note on dates: Until 1918, Russia used the Julian (Roman) Calendar, which had been abandoned in the West in the Sixteenth Century. As a result, all official dates were thirteen days ahead of the Gregorian calendar used in the West. The Russian revolution started on 8 March 1917 (Gregorian) or 23 February (Julian). Thus, the revolution was known as the February revolution in Russia, but it usually is called the March Revolution in the West. In 1918, the Soviet government switched the country to the Gregorian system. In this simulation, Julian dates are used throughout, for consistency with Russian practice at that time.

Start Date: This simulation begins on 15 May 1917 (Julian), following the formation of a coalition between the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet.



The Russian Provisional Government¹

Russian Provisional Government (Vremennoye pravitel'stvo Rossii) was the internationally recognized government of Russia from February to October (March to November, New Style) 1917. It was formed by the Duma (the Russian Parliament) after the collapse of the rule of the Romanov dynasty and Tsar Nicholas II. It initially was composed entirely of liberal

ministers, except for Aleksandr Kerensky of the Socialist Revolutionary Party.

The Provisional Government was reorganized twice in its eight-month existence, each time as a coalition of several parties. At no point could it adequately address the problems afflicting the country. In reality, it was swept from power in a bloodless coup by the Bolsheviks in the second phase of the Russian Revolution, in October (November) 1917.



Postcard of leaders of the first Russian Provisional Government in 1917. Included are Alexander Kerensky, Georgy Lvov, Pavel Milyukov, Mikhail Tereshchenko, Alexander Guchkov, Nikolai Nekrasov, Alexander Konovalov, Andrei Shingarev, Andrei Manuilov, and Vladimir Lvov. Prince Georgy Lvov was minister-president. *Source:* Hoover Institution.

¹ 'Russian Provisional Government', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, n.d.,

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Russian-Revolution>



By late February 1917, tradition was virtually the only claim to legitimacy remaining to the imperial regime. Even that foundation had been shaken by the unsuccessful Revolution of 1905, and Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War, that same year, and a long series of military failures in World War I.

The Russian imperial family was divided, and the government was divided in its views of the imperial family. The Duma had a mixed opinion of the government, and it was far from giving it anything like the wholehearted support that it needed in the gloomy moments of an unsuccessful war. The authority of the Russian Orthodox Church was shaken by a series of scandals which touched not only the church hierarchy but also the Romanovs. The war with the Central Powers had affected the entire country. While the leaders of the Duma were dissatisfied because the war had not been better conducted, the mass of the people wondered why the war continued at all. The army had lost faith in its commanders, and its commanders had lost faith in the government, which failed to supply them with adequate weapons.

The collapse of Tsarist rule, planned by no one, came suddenly on 23 February (8 March), 1917. A number of factories in Petrograd were undergoing strikes, and many of their workers were in the streets, as were people in shopping queues and women celebrating the international socialist anniversary of Women's Day. These gatherings turned into demonstrations which proceeded to take over large areas of the capital. Workers took to the streets with political slogans: "Down with Autocracy!" and "Down with War!" Two days later Emperor Nicholas II ordered the military governor to fire on the demonstrators, but the soldiers refused to use their rifles, and unit after unit went over to the

workers' side. The police and gendarmes did shoot, however, and street fighting took place.

Challenges of the Provisional Government

The Duma, which had been prorogued, refused to disperse, and on March 1 (March 14) it formed a government, headed by Georgy Yevgenyevich, Prince Lvov, and mainly composed of leaders of the Social Democratic (Kadet) and Octobrist (liberal-reformist constitutional monarchist) parties. On the next day a deputation visited Tsar Nicholas II at his military headquarters in Pskov and accepted his abdication on behalf of himself and his son, Alexis. When his brother Grand Duke Michael refused the throne, the Romanov dynasty came to an end. The demise of the empire saw the emergence of two separate authorities, both claiming to speak for the people but neither representing more than a section of it: the *Provisional Government* and the *Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies*.²

The Provisional Government never really ruled Russia. Right from the start, it had to share power with the Petrograd Soviet, which had a rule (Order No.1) that its members should only obey the Provisional Government if the Soviet agreed with it. For this reason, March to November 1917 is sometimes called the period of Dual Government in Russia.³

Disastrously, the Provisional Government - because it was only a temporary government - did not really carry out any major reforms. All it did was abolish the Okhrana and press censorship, and allow political freedom. This gave the government's opponents - such as Lenin's Bolsheviks - the freedom to attack the government for the problems it was not solving.

² Ibid.

³ 'Provisional Government and its problems', *BBC*, n.d.,

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z2tp2p3/revison/1>



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The main problem of the Provisional Government was that it tried to continue the war. In June 1917, it organized an attack on Austria. When the attack failed, people began to turn against the government. Instead, they started to follow Lenin whose welcome message was: 'Peace, bread, land'.

Provisional Government Failures⁴

- The Provisional Government had to share power with the Petrograd Soviet. Members of the Soviet always rejected the Provisional Government.
- The Provisional Government did nothing to stop the war. In fact, as desertions increased, it set up death squads to hunt down and execute deserters. The soldiers came to hate the Provisional Government.
- The Provisional Government was unable to end the shortages of food and fuel in Petrograd. This was because it continued the war, which was causing the shortages. The workers came to hate the Provisional Government.
- The Provisional Government did nothing to solve the land problem. In the countryside, peasants started taking over the land of the nobles, many of whom had run away. The Provisional Government sent soldiers to take the land back by force. The peasants came to hate the Provisional Government.
- The Provisional Government could not deal with its opponents. Even after the Bolsheviks rebelled in July 1917, it allowed Lenin to preach his popular message of 'all power to the Soviets'. People came to despise the Provisional Government.

Participants

1. Prince Georgy Yevgenyevich Lvov,
Minister-President and Minister of the Interior



Russian social reformer and statesman who was the first head of the Russian provisional government established during the February Revolution (1917).

An aristocrat who held a degree in law from the University of Moscow, Lvov worked in the civil service until 1893, when he resigned. He became a member of the Tula zemstvo (local government council), and during the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05) he organized voluntary relief work in the Orient. In 1905 he joined the newly founded liberal Constitutional Democratic (Kadet) Party, was elected to the first Duma (Russian parliament; convened May 1906), and in 1906 was informally nominated for a ministerial post.

⁴ Ibid.



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During World War I, Lvov became chairman of the All-Russian Union of Zemstvos (1914) and a leader of Zemgor (the Union of Zemstvos and Towns; 1915), which provided relief for the sick and wounded and procured supplies for the army. Although his activities were often obstructed by bureaucratic officials who objected to voluntary organizations that encroached upon their areas of responsibility, Lvov's groups made significant contributions to the war effort, and he won the respect of many political liberals and army commanders. When the imperial government fell, he became the prime minister (with Tsar Nicholas II's subsequent approval) of the provisional government (March 2 [March 15], 1917).

2. Mikhail Ivanovich Tereshchenko, Minister of Foreign Affairs



Son of a wealthy sugar factory owner, he was born in 1886. He studied at Kiev University and

Leipzig University and in 1910 he joined the Freemasons. During the war Tereshchenko he helped organize the Red Cross hospitals. In 1915 he became the chairman of the Military Industry Committee of the Kiev district and deputy chairman of the All-Russian Military Industry Committee. Although he gave loyal support to the government during this period, other members of the Duma were highly critical of the government.

On 26th February Nicholas II ordered the Duma closed. Members refused and they continued to meet and discuss what they should do. Michael Rodzianko, President of the Duma, sent a telegram to the Tsar suggesting that he appoint a new government led by someone who had the confidence of the people. When the Tsar did not reply, the Duma nominated a Provisional Government headed by Prince George Lvov. Tereshchenko became Finance Minister. On 5 May, Pavel Milyukov and Alexander Guchkov, the two most conservative members of the Provisional Government, were forced to resign. Milyukov was replaced in the role of Foreign Minister by Tereshchenko.

3. Alexander Fyodorovich Kerensky, Minister of War and Navy



Born in 1881, in Simbirsk, Russia, he died in 1970 in New York. A moderate socialist revolutionary, he served as head of the Russian provisional government from July to October



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1917 (Julian). While studying law at the University of St. Petersburg, Kerensky was attracted to the Narodniki (populist) revolutionary movement. After graduating in 1904, he joined the Socialist Revolutionary Party and became a prominent lawyer, frequently defending revolutionaries accused of political offenses. In 1912 he was elected to the Duma, and in the next several years he gained a reputation as an eloquent, dynamic politician of the moderate left.

Unlike more radical socialists, he supported Russia's participation in World War I. He became increasingly disappointed with the tsarist regime's conduct of the war effort, however, and, when the February Revolution broke out in 1917, he urged the dissolution of the monarchy. He instituted basic civil liberties—e.g., the freedoms of speech, press, assembly, and religion; universal suffrage; and equal rights for women—throughout Russia and became one of the most widely known and popular figures among the revolutionary leadership.

In May, when a public uproar over the announcement of Russia's war aims (which Kerensky had approved) forced several ministers to resign, Kerensky was transferred to the posts of minister of war and of the navy and became the dominant personality in the new government.

4. **Aleksei Alekseyevich Brusilov**, Supreme Commander of the Russian Army



The most successful Russian commander of World War One, he is best known for the “Brusilov breakthrough” on the Eastern Front against Austria-Hungary (June–August 1916), which aided Russia's Western allies at a crucial time during World War I. Though they suffered heavy losses, Brusilov's forces took 375,000 Austrian prisoners and had overrun all of Bukovina and part of eastern Galicia. Brusilov's offensive produced no decisive results on the Eastern Front itself, however. Brusilov served briefly as commander-in-chief of the Russian armies from May 22 to July 19 (Julian old style, June 4 to August 1, new style), 1917. Under the Bolshevik government he served as a military consultant and an inspector of cavalry from 1920 to 1924, after which he retired. His memoirs of World War I were translated in 1930 as *A Soldier's Note-Book, 1914–1918*.



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5. Lavr Georgiyevich Kornilov, Commander of Petrograd Military District



Imperial Russian general, who was accused of attempting to overthrow the provisional government established in Russia after the February Revolution of 1917 and to replace it with a military dictatorship. An intelligence officer for the Imperial Russian Army during the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05) and a military attaché in Beijing (1907–11), Kornilov became a divisional commander during World War I. Captured by the Austrians at Przemysl (March 1915), he escaped in 1916 and was placed in command of an army corps.

After the February Revolution Kornilov was put in charge of the vital military district of Petrograd (St. Petersburg) by the provisional government. His determination to restore discipline and efficiency in the disintegrating Russian Army, however, made him unpopular in revolutionary Petrograd. He soon resigned, returned to the front, and participated in the abortive Russian offensive in June against the Germans in Galicia.

On August 1 (July 18, Old Style) Prime Minister Aleksandr Kerensky appointed him commander

in chief, but conflicts developed between Kornilov and Kerensky, owing to their opposing views on politics and on the role and nature of the army. At the end of August, Kornilov sent troops toward Petrograd; Kerensky, interpreting this as an attempted military coup d'état, dismissed Kornilov and ordered him to come to Petrograd (August 27). Kornilov refused, and railroad workers prevented his troops from reaching their destination; on September 1 he surrendered and was imprisoned at Bykhov.

6. Nikolai Vissarionovich Nekrasov, Minister of Transport, Kadet Party



During the February Revolution Nekrasov was one of the architects of the Duma Committee, and together with Kerensky and Engelhardt, he was among the most active and influential organizers of revolutionary forces in the Duma. He is especially credited with leading the efforts to manipulate the movement of the imperial train while on its way from General Headquarters to Petrograd (which led to Nicholas' abdication).



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Note: not to be confused with Nikolay Alexeyevich Nekrasov, the Russian poet, writer and publisher, who died in 1878.

7. Aleksandr Ivanovich Konovalov, Minister of Trade and Industry, Progressist



Born into a prosperous family engaged in textile manufacturing, Konovalov was educated in England and later headed the stock society that controlled his family's holdings. Active in politics, he was leader of the Progressive Party and served as a deputy to the state Duma, at one point acting as assistant chairman. In August 1915 he helped to organize the Progressive Bloc, a coalition of liberal parties in the Duma that issued a demand for sweeping reforms, which the Tsar and his ministers rejected.

After the abdication of the Tsar in March 1917, he joined the Constitutional Democratic Party. He was appointed minister of trade and industry during the first two cabinets of the provisional government and served as Kerensky's vice-premier during the last coalition.

He was arrested along with other members of the provisional government on October 25 (Julian) 1917, in the Winter Palace but was set free soon thereafter. Soviet historians claim that he was one of the organizers of the unsuccessful Kronstadt Rebellion (1921) by members of the Russian Baltic fleet, but other observers dispute this. After leaving Russia, he participated in several anti-Soviet emigré organizations.

Note: not to be confused with Aleksandr Vladimirovich Konovalov, a Russian lawyer and politician, and since May 2008, Minister of Justice.

8. Pavel Nikolayevich Pereverzev, Minister of Justice, Socialist-Revolutionary Party

After the February Revolution, in March 1917 he was appointed prosecutor of the Petrograd Court of Justice. As such, he traveled to Kronstadt, where he unsuccessfully demanded that the sailors release the officers they had arrested. He sought to introduce into the legal framework the issue of the arrest of leaders of the tsarist regime, having achieved that arrests could be made only with the written order of the prosecutor of the court of law (otherwise all those arrested would be released within 24 hours).

In the second (first coalition) composition of the Provisional Government, Pereverzev was appointed Minister of Justice. He continued the practice of his predecessor A.F. Kerensky on the appointment of lawyers for key posts in the department. In June 1917, he achieved the eviction of the anarchists from the summer cottage occupied by them by the former Minister of the Interior P.N. Durnovo, personally present during her assault by the troops.

In July 1917, in a situation of anti-government speech by the Bolsheviks, he ordered the information provided by the counterintelligence to be published on his financial relations with the German authorities. The publication of



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materials caused a sharp decline in the popularity of the Bolshevik party, however, the key figures of the Provisional Government - Alexander Kerensky, Mikhail Tereshchenko and Nikolai Nekrasov - condemned the actions of the minister not agreed with the government. After that, Pereverzev resigned and soon again went to the front at the head of the sanitary detachment. The question of the reliability of data on the relations of the Bolsheviks with the Germans remains debatable.

According to Alexander Demyanov, who was his comrade (deputy) in the ministry, Pereverzev was “a clean and honest man”, but “a great dreamer, a programless and inept administrator.”

9. Andrei Ivanovich Shingarev, Minister of Finance, Kadet



A Russian doctor, publicist and politician, he was a Duma deputy and one of the leaders of the Constitutional Democratic party (Kadets).

Shingarev was several times elected to the State Duma. After the February revolution, he led the food committee; in the first Provisional Government he was the Minister of Agriculture, and later he held the post of Minister of Finance. In July 1917 Shingarev resigned from Provisional Government, as he was against the agreement with the Verkhovna Rada. He was an active member of the irregular freemasonic lodge, the Grand Orient of Russia's Peoples

10. Aleksandr Apollonovich Manuylov, Minister of Education, Kadet



1861-1929, Russian economist and politician. He was one of the founding members of the Constitutional Democratic party (Kadets) and was the Rector of Moscow State University between 1908 and 1911. He was the Minister of Education in the first Provisional Government and from 1924 was in the central administration of Gosbank, the Soviet state bank. Russian economist and politician, rector of the Imperial



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Moscow University, Minister of Education of the Provisional Government.

11. Viktor Mikhailovich Chernov, Minister of Agriculture, Socialist-Revolutionary Party



In 1899 Chernov went to live in Switzerland where he studied philosophy at Berne University. He returned in 1901 and helped establish the Socialist Revolutionary Party.

George Buchanan claimed: "Chernov was a man of strong character and considerable ability. He belonged to the advanced wing of the SR party, and advocated the immediate nationalization of the land and the division among the peasants awaiting the decision of the Consistent Assembly. He was generally regarded as dangerous and untrustworthy."

In the Provisional Government of 1917 Chernov was appointed as Minister of Agriculture. However, he resigned in September. Chernov strongly opposed the Bolsheviks during the October Revolution. In 1918 the Soviet government closed down the Constituent

Assembly and banned the Socialist Revolutionary Party and other anti-Bolshevik parties. Chernov left Russia and lived in Czechoslovakia before moving to the USA. Chernov died in New York in 1952.

12. Matvey Ivanovich Skobelev, Minister of Labour, Menshevik



Of bourgeois origin, Skobelev was a Menshevik and conducted work in Baku. From 1906 to 1912 he lived abroad. Skobelev became a deputy to the State Duma in 1912, representing Transcaucasia and leading the Social Democratic faction. During World War I, he was a Social Chauvinist.

After the February Revolution of 1917, he joined the Executive Committee of the Petrograd soviet and later became deputy chairman of the soviet. From May to August 1917 he served as minister of labor in the bourgeois Provisional Government and deputy chairman at the first convocation of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee.

After the October Revolution of 1917, Skobelev left the Mensheviks. He went to Transcaucasia



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in 1918 and emigrated from Menshevik-dominated Georgia to France in 1920. Beginning in 1924, he was a Soviet foreign trade official.

13. Alexey Vasilyevich Peshekhonov, Minister of Food, Popular Socialist Party

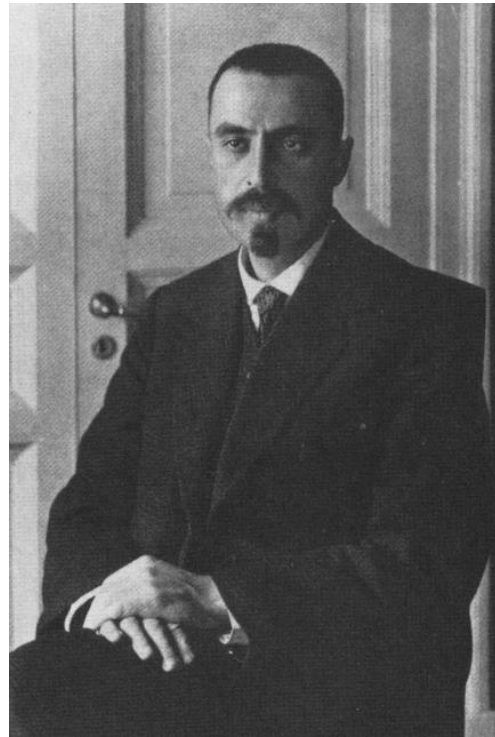
After military service 1888-91, he worked as a village teacher and later as a statistician for the Tver and Orla zemstvo councils, then the Kaluga province zemstvo administration where he became head of the statistical service (1896-1898). During this period he published noted studies on rural life that earned him entry into employment as a journalist in St. Petersburg (1899). He was also during this period several times arrested for his political activities, imprisoned or banished from his place of residence.

In February 1917 Peshekhonov assumed leading roles as a delegate in the Petrograd Soviet of Worker's and Soldier's Deputies, with strong engagement on agrarian issues. He favoured co-operation of the Soviet with the (Kadet) Provisional Government, and in May 1917 joined the coalition government then formed as minister of food supplies.

14. Irakli Tsereteli, Minister of Post and Telegraph, Menshevik

A Georgian politician and a leading spokesman of the Social Democratic Party of Georgia and later Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) during the era of the Russian Revolutions.

A member of the Menshevik faction of the RSDLP, Tsereteli was elected to the Duma in 1907, where he gained fame for his oratory abilities. Shortly after entering the Duma, Tsereteli was arrested and charged with conspiracy to overthrow the Tsarist government, and exiled to Siberia.



Returning to the government in the aftermath of the 1917 February Revolution, he took up a leading position in the Petrograd Soviet and accepted a position in the Russian Provisional Government as Minister of Post and Telegraph, and briefly as Minister of the Interior. Concerned that political fragmentation would lead to a civil war in Russia, Tsereteli strived to broker compromises between the various leftist factions in the Russian Revolution and was the force behind efforts to work together with the middle classes, to no avail. Renowned for his speaking ability.

After the Bolsheviks seized power of the Russian government during the October Revolution, Tsereteli returned to Georgia. He worked as a diplomat at the Paris Peace Conference, where he lobbied for international recognition and assistance for the newly independent Democratic Republic of Georgia.



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15. Vladimir Nikolaevich Lvov, Ober-Procurator of the Most Holy Synod, Progressist



Born in a noble family Lvov. During the February Revolution, he became a member of the Provisional Committee of the State Duma. He served as the chief procurator of the Holy Synod in the first and the second Provisional Governments. In April 1917 he initiated the publication of a decree of the Provisional Government on changing the composition of the Holy Synod, who left from his former members only the Archbishop Sergius (Stragorodsky).

He actively supported the activities democratically and reformist clergy (in particular, on his initiative by the editor "All-Russian Church Public Herald" liberal professor Boris Titlinov was appointed) with his support, the All-Russian Diocesan Congress of representatives of the clergy and laity was held. He was a supporter of the convocation of the Local Council, considering that the majority of its participants will be supporters of reforms (this assumption was not justified).

His emotional nature, peculiar authoritarian management style displeased the majority of the representatives of the episcopate. According to Metropolitan Eulogius (Georgievsky), part of the Pre-Council Council, Lvov during his time as ober-prosecutor "He was a dictator and he overtook a lot of bishops", "made the business atmosphere of our meetings annoyed, hysterical tone, prejudiced ill will towards the bishops - he did not help the work, but interfered".

16. Nikoloz Semyonovich (Karlo) Chkheidze, Chairman of the Petrograd Soviet, Menshevik



A schoolteacher who helped to introduce Marxism into Georgia in the 1890s, he was elected to the Russian State Duma in 1907. He became the leader of the Menshevik faction of the Russian Social-Democratic Party and earned a reputation as a spokesman for extreme left-wing positions, including opposition to participation in World War I.

In 1917, on the outbreak of the February revolution, he became chairman of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, in which he vainly sought to conciliate the moderate and radical elements. His vacillations helped to discredit the original leadership of the Soviet, which was soon swept away by the rising tide of Bolshevism.

After the Bolsheviks seized power, Chkheidze returned to Georgia and became president of the



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assembly that created the independent Transcaucasian Federal Republic (April 1918). When the Bolsheviks overthrew the Menshevik regime in Georgia in 1921, he emigrated to France, where he later committed suicide.

17. Pavel Nikolayevich Milyukov,
Constitutional Democratic Party (the Kadets)
Leader



Russian statesman and historian who played an important role in the events leading to the Russian Revolution of 1917. He remains one of the greatest of Russia's liberal historians. In 1903 and 1904–05, he visited the United States, where he gave public lectures on Russian history and politics. As a convinced “Westernizer,” Milyukov saw tsarist absolutism as the main obstacle to Russia's progress.

He served as foreign minister (March–May 1917) in Prince Lvov's provisional government. As foreign minister, Milyukov clung to Russia's wartime alliances. He resisted heavy pressure from inside and outside the government to send a note to the Allies redefining his country's war aims, for which he was forced to resign. Thereafter Milyukov endeavoured to counter the new coalition government's leftward swing by rallying the moderates, but with little success.

18. Alexander Guchkov, Octobrist Party
Leader



Statesman and leader of the moderate liberal political movement in Russia between 1905 and 1917, Guchkov was the son of a wealthy Moscow merchant, Guchkov studied at the universities of Moscow and Berlin, traveled widely, fought against the British in the South African Boer War (1899–1902), and headed the Russian Red Cross during the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05).

After the Revolution of 1905 compelled Nicholas II to issue the *October Manifesto*, creating a constitutional monarchy, Guchkov helped found the Octobrist Party, to support the emperor's manifesto and attempted to work with the government to enact more reforms; in 1910–11 he was president of the State Duma.

Guchkov was sent by the provisional government to Pskov, where he formally received Nicholas' abdication. He regretted Russia's transformation from a constitutional monarchy into a republic, but accepted the post of Minister of War and The Navy and tried to unsuccessfully to restore discipline in the army.



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He resigned a few months later when a major political controversy developed over aspects of the provisional government's foreign policy.

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