Preconditions for the Russian Revolution

• Peasants oppressed by debt, land-hungry, want land of landowners.
• Rapidly growing industrial working class, suddenly thrown into that class from peasant or artisan status, open to socialist agitation.
• Capitalist class, middle layers resent autocratic rule and power of landowners.
• Autocratic, repressive, inflexible monarchy clinging to power and resisting reform.
Features of the Revolution

- Key role of war and its effects undermining a weak monarchical regime.

- Initially many classes supported change in the old regime, but process of radicalization gradually pushed moderate middle groups to the side.

- Workers created new representative institution in process of revolution, the soviet, which played key role in revolution.

- Revolution based on mass action by urban working class, sailors, soldiers, and peasants.

- Bolsheviks were able to come to power in the revolution by winning active support from masses of workers, soldiers, and sailors, and passive support from peasants, for their program.
The New Regime

Question: Why did the first attempt to build a socialist system – which was supposed to be a workers’ democracy – rapidly turn into a repressive, authoritarian system?

1. Russian traditions and culture
2. Banning private property leads inevitably to dictatorship
3. Encirclement by hostile capitalist powers
4. Loss of political base as working class was dispersed and destroyed by Civil War → party was substituted for working class
5. Democratic centralist party in power tends to create authoritarian regime
6. Need to squeeze majority of peasants in order to develop rapidly
Stages of the Regime

1. War Communism 1918-20
   Nationalization and central planning by necessity.

2. New Economic Policy (NEP) 1921-28
   Mixed economy with large private sector.
   Some planning but largely market system.
Socialist Primitive Accumulation Debate

Early/mid 1920s:

Right Position: Bukharin argues for keeping NEP for a generation and gradually developing industry, gradual shift to fully state-run industry, planned economy, and cooperative agriculture.

Left Position: Trotsky and Preobrazhansky argued for rapid industrialization and encouraging peasants to join cooperatives quickly, taxing peasants to get resources for industrialization.

Stalin sided with Bukharin, warned against exploiting peasants and breaking worker-peasant alliance.

Result: Left opposition defeated, Trotsky exiled.

Late 1920s:

Stalin takes up position favoring rapid industrialization and collectivization, condemns and isolates Bukharin.