William Tyler | 1917: Two Revolutions, One Year

– And welcome to everyone who's tuned in. If you're tuning in from Britain, well, thank you very much for doing so on what has been the hottest day of the year wherever you are in Britain. We're just not used to it, are we? But I'm going to talk today about one year: 1917 in Russia. 1917 because it witnessed two revolutions, a revolution in February, and then the revolution in October, the October Marxist Revolution, Linen's revolution, which almost everyone is familiar with. But I'm going to try and go through the events of 1917 to provide not an in-depth view, I can't do that in an hour, but to give you a sort of feel for 1917. If you remember from previous talks I'd given, before 1917, the last serious attempt to overthrow Nicholas II and his government and tsarism in general had come nearly a decade before the beginning of the first World War. In other words, the 1905 revolution, which broke out as a result of the appalling performance of Russia in the Russia, Japanese war of 1904-1905. In January of 1917, the year that we're interested in, in January on the ninth of the month, over 140,000 Russian workers went on strike. They went on strike to celebrate the 12th anniversary of Bloody Sunday in the revolution of 1905. So there is our link between the 1905 revolution and the 1917 revolutions. But 1917 was very different than 1905. In 1905, Russia was in the process of losing a war, but a war that was far away from St. Petersburg and Moscow right on the other side of the world. But in 1917, the war was coming very close. The war, the first World War and the German invasion of Russia were causing concern. Indeed, you could say that by 1917 things in Russia were more than beginning to fall apart. Aside from the war itself, the great problem was the high price of food caused by the shortage of food. There weren't men on the farms. The men had been conscripted into the army. Russia was short of food. And in a society like Russia of 1917, that meant the poor, the rural poor, but in particular the industrial working poor in cities like Moscow and St. Petersburg suffered the most. In the new book that's been published, I think first published this year, "The Shortest History of the Soviet Union", which is on one of my Russian book lists on my blog, the author, Sheila Fitzpatrick, writes this. "A wave of popular discontent in the winter of 1916-17 started with women workers queuing from bread in Petrograd." Petrograd was the name that, in the war, St. Petersburg was called. They changed the name because some Petersburg sounded too German. And so it was changed to Petrograd in the same way that, in Britain, the little dog which was a Dachshund was German, and we began to call them sausage dogs instead. All sorts of names changed, not least the name of the British royal family from Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, you couldn't be more German than that, to the artificial surname of Windsor. So Russians did the same with Petrograd. "A wave of popular discontent in the winter of 1617 started with women workers queuing for bread in Petrograd and spread into the armed forces from which men, sick of being cannon fodder, started to desert. As the spring agricultural

sowing grew near, more and more peasant soldiers left for their villages, their officers proving powerless to stop them."

So we've got two things happening. Two key things. Not anything desperately political but practical. People were starving, particularly in the cities, but they were beginning to starve in the army, too. And the army was suffering from desertion, and the officers seemed unable to do anything about it. So in brief, we can say that the army was crumbling and civilian society was. The emperor, Nicholas II, had gone to the front himself to bolster morale and, god help us, take charge with no real military experience at all. And worse than that, the tsarina, Alexandra, was left in charge of the home front in St. Petersburg. She was German and suspected of being a spy. She was desperately hated because of her relationship with Rasputin, and she was coming apart, not just because of the war, but the state of her son Alexis with his haemophilia. She had become quite strange I think by 1917, morale falling right across Russia. Then in February of 1917, matters came to a head, and Mark Galeotti in "A Short History of Russia", which we've used before, writes this. "In February 1917, matters came to a head when the garrison of the Capitol, Petrograd, refused to put down bread riots, and even elite guard regiments mutinied." And many of you will remember the scene in the Hollywood blockbuster "Nicholas and Alexandra" where there are women who burst into a food store, a granary store, after the bread. And the film shows you that there's almost nothing left in the granary store except right at the back there are some sacks of flour. Right at the very back. The women rush to the very back and are just about to pull them down and carry them off when a troop of cossacks arrive on horseback in the warehouse, and they go forward slowly towards the women. An officer raises his sabre. And I remember in the cinema sort of closing my eyes, 'cause it's clearly he's going to do that, and one of the women's heads is going to come off. Instead of which, he aims above the woman's head, splits a sack of grain, and the grain falls down. The soldiers had refused to fire on the women, and soldiers and civilians were now united against the government. It was an extraordinary scene, and it's a scene that we can catch firsthand. Written by a young tsarist officer called Sergei Kournakoff. Kournakoff had been educated by British tutors, spoke English with perfection, and wrote an account of the war and the Civil War afterwards in a book called "Savage Squadrons".

So when I'm reading from this book in a second, it is Kournakoff's own words. It's not translated. He wrote it in English, and he was in St. Petersburg at this time. And why was he in St. Petersburg? Well, he'd been wounded at the front, and had gone to St. Petersburg to recover. And this is what he describes he saw on that February day in 1917. He's watching some soldiers marching who've come out of the barracks, and he's looking at the barrack wall and he says, "A heavy body jumped from the barrack wall behind my back to the pavement. A tall sergeant with a face like a viking. He looked at me and panted, ' Revolted! The

colonel's dead!' 'Who's revolted? What are you talking about?' I shouted at the sergeant, at the same time feeling my automatic in my pocket. Another disorderly body in the yard behind the wall. The sergeant shouted to the marching platoon, 'Hey, the whole regiment has revolted!'" The little officer who's little more than a boy, they'd run out of officers, "The little boy yelled to his ranks, 'Silence!'" This is the key moment. Kournakoff was there and he said, "The little officer yelled, 'Silence!' The word clashed in the air with another word from the ranks, 'Enough!' The line of shoulder rifles crumbled. The officer ripped out his revolver and shot once at the revolting men. In the front rank, the pug-nosed giant aimed his rifle and fired point-blank. The officer threw up his arms and fell backwards. His face was scarlet and black." Kournakoff began to take his own pistol out of his pocket, but he dropped it in the cold. He had one arm in the sling and he dropped the pistol. And the (indistinct) sergeant put his foot on it and said, "'Go home quick (indistinct). We won't touch a wounded officer but others might. Go quickly.' I stood there, petrified, disarmed, hopeless. Leaving the body of their officer in the middle of the street, the soldiers led by the tall sergeant started running back towards the barracks. The snow around the boy's head was getting red. A bullet wound overhead and broke a branch in the gardens across the street, frightening a flight of crows. Behind the wall, the barracks roared." Kournakoff simply writes, "The revolution was here. I'd actually seen it crashed down on Russia." I think it's a marvellous description from an eye witness. "I had actually seen it crashed down on Russia." And pent up blood, that was Russian society in 1917, finally burst in those February days in St. Petersburg and spreading across Russia. Spreading across Russia. All that happens basically on the 26th and 27th of February 1917. On the 28th of February, the tsar still at the front knows what's going on in St. Petersburg, Petrograd, and decides to return. But he finds that difficult, because the railway has been broken. He gets as far as Pskov, and he can't go further. In St. Petersburg itself, two governments now vie for power. First of all, the Duma, that is the Parliament, MPs in the Parliament seek to take control of Russia. But Marxists established a Soviet in Petrograd. A Soviet simply means a council.

So you've got two governments, you've got the government of politicians who've elected themselves officers to run the country, ministers to run the country, and you've got the Soviet in, the Petrograd Soviet. The Soviet in Petrograd is replicated in other places around the country. Whereas the Parliament, the Duma, who establishes a Provisional Government, seeks to control all of Russia, but in truth, nobody is now in control of Russia. However, on the first of March, Britain and France recognised the Provisional Government of the Duma as the official government of Russia. Why? Because they dare not let Russia out of the war. If Russia leaves the war, then Germany only has to fight on the western front and knock on the western and eastern front. On the 2nd of March, the tsar finally

met a committee of Parliament. They said basically, "It's up, abdicate." He realised that there was no other course for him but to abdicate. He abdicated foreign for himself and his haemophiliac son, Alexei, who clearly wasn't possible, could not possibly be a tsar. And he abdicated in favour of his brother Michael. And Michael said, "Look, okay, I don't mind being tsar, but I will only be tsar if I'm offered the crown by a constituent assembly elected by the people." So it's a no-go. Now so on the 3rd of March 1917, the Romanov rule in Russia, which had begun 300 years before, ends. And with it, ends tsarism. And in its place there's a choice between the Provisional Government inching towards some form of democracy, constitutional democracy, and the Soviets inching towards a Marxist state. The Provisional Government got moving quickly. They issued a set of what they described as liberal principles by which they intended to govern. It included civil rights and civil freedoms, amnesty from political prisoners, and they promised a genuine democratic election later in the year for what they describe as a constituents assembly. We would call it a parliament. They wanted to not use the word Duma, because that had all the luggage of the past. It was called a constituent assembly. We would call it a parliament. Americans, the same, we call it Congress. They were going to elect members. They also issued a decree abolishing the death penalty. On the 9th of March, they detained Nicholas II, the Tsarina, the four daughters, and the little boy, and placed them under house arrest. Now, the name associated with the Russian Revolution above all others is Lenin, but Lenin wasn't in Russia. Lenin was in exile in Switzerland, but he finally arrived in Russia on the 3rd of April 1917, courtesy of the German government. So why did the Germans help Lenin? Well, because the Marxists would have, and indeed, were to sue for peace with Germany and were prepared to make concessions of land to Germany in return for German cash to establish a communist state. Lenin arrived at the Finland Station in St. Petersburg, and on that occasion, he began making speeches in Russia. This is the first occasion, and they are very, very strong speeches, certainly not placatory in any sense whatsoever. This is the new book, "Russia: Revolution and Civil War, 1917–1921" by Antony Beevor, which is also on one of my lists. "Inside the Finland Station, a group of sailors from the vaulted fleet formed an improvised guard of honour for him, but Lenin took no pleasure in his reception and showed little courtesy to those who greeted him. He rapped out two speeches, one to the sailors, and the main one to the crowd outside from the top of an armoured car. The dismay of most of his listeners, he attacked the Provisional Government, implicitly criticising his audience for having accepted it at all and dismissed any idea of unity between socialist parties." Let's just be clear what that means. He's rejected the Provisional Government. Well, because it's democratic. That's certainly a long way form Marxist. But the Marxists in Russia were split between two main parties, the Bolsheviks led by Lenin and the Mensheviks. And the split had occurred some years earlier in 1903, and it was a split on policy. When they split in 1903, Lenin claimed to have the majority. Therefore, they were called Bolsheviks, the

majority. That's all it means, the majority party, Bolsheviks. Mensheviks were the party with the least support, according to Lenin, and the titles Bolshevik and Menshevik actually stuck. But the point about all of this is that there were serious differences between them. The main difference is the Mensheviks were prepared to work with other parties. This was the Marxist ideology. You worked with other parties until you can get rid of the other parties. They were prepared and indeed later do join, in 1917, the Provisional Government. The Bolsheviks want none of that. Lenin said, "We have gone too far. We are not going to have this middle stage of Marxism whereby we have a government which is not truly Marxist but has some Marxist influence, and then we take it over. "No," he said, "we want arms struggle to get rid of the Provisional Government and to establish a Bolshevik government." He's absolutely clear on this, and it's a major, major statement that he's making as he arrives back in April 1917. On the 18th of April, the Provisional Government announces publicly to the world that it is not going to withdraw from the war against Germany, but that is not well received by most of the Russian people. It was, in fact, a mistake. When you look back on it, it was definitely a mistake. So why did they want to continue the war? They were facing mass desertions at the front. They couldn't afford to run a war. It's the war that's caused the whole thing, if you like, to collapse. So why? Because they needed investment. Whereas Lenin was happy to talk to Berlin, they were anxious that London and Paris would not withdraw money and investments in Russia. Moreover, they were very fearful that Germany would demand land, land in the rest of Russia. In fact, they gained that land in early 1918 when Lenin's government did a deal with them at the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which took Russia out of the war. But one of the penalties that Russia had to pay was to give land over to Germany. Of course, that all changed in 1918-1919. That's a different story. But at this point in 1917, the reason that the Provisional Government wants to continue the war, not because they think they could win, not because of any ideology, but because they were desperate for western funds from Britain and France. The Marxists, that is to say the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, went on arguing internal debates, endless debates about policy and politics.

Meanwhile, Kerensky, who is the name we associate most with the Provisional Government, Kerensky was by this time the war minister, and he ordered an offensive in Galicia. Now, Galicia you all know because we've been following the war in Ukraine. Galicia is where Lviv is on the borders of Poland. Then, it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Polish Galicia was part of Austria-Hungary. It was Poland then, not Ukraine, but it was part of Austria-Hungary. And Kerensky launches an attack in Galicia to try and divert attention from the failings of the government at home with the food crisis, but it was disastrous. 400,000 Russians died or were wounded. Exact figures were unknown, just under half a million in this one. It was a dreadful, dreadful moment. The chaos and the crisis continued, made worse by this June Offensive in Galicia, which had failed. What I find

extraordinary about the Provisional Government is not that it collapsed in year October 1918 without a murmur but that it continued as long as it did between February 1917 and October 1917. In July, the faced a crisis, which historians call the July Days beginning on the 4th of July. On the 4th of July in Petrograd, St. Petersburg, workers and soldiers revolted, demanding that either the Soviets, that is the general council spread across Russia or mainly controlled by Mensheviks, or the Bolsheviks took control. In other words, get rid of the Provisional Government. We don't mind what comes next, they said, as long as it supports the workers i.e. us Marxists whether it's Mensheviks and we have a government of Soviets or whether it is Bolsheviks with a central Marxist government. But amazingly, enough troops remained loyal to the Provisional Government to crush it, and they did. Following that event four days later, Kerensky becomes prime minister and is joined in a coalition by Mensheviks. It's an attempt to broaden the base of the Provisional Government. This new government under Kerensky reintroduces the death penalty, because the generals were pointing out that they were losing troops hand over fist by desertion and mutiny, and they needed the weapon, they needed the weapon of the death penalty to try and halt it. Well, the death penalty was reintroduced, but in truth, it was too late even for a measure as Draconian as that to help. During these days of July, very short-lived revolt, Lenin wasn't in St. Petersburg. He was in Finland, then part of Russia. He was in Finland recuperating, and he wasn't there. So because of Kerensky taking command, sending troops to crush the rioters, inviting socialists to join the Provisional Government, listening to the generals, and abolishing the death penalty, somehow the Provisional Government survived July and that is I think a remarkable achievement. Incidentally, Kerensky himself got out of Russia in 1917, and eventually, well, he came to London, but eventually, he lived in New York. And he died in New York as late as 1970. It's amazing to think that, isn't it? 1970, he died in New York. If you're my age or thereabouts, 1970 seems only like yesterday. In fact, I met a lady in the city (indistinct) while I was principal at London who had been his secretary. She was British. She'd been his secretary in London, amazingly so, in the early '20s. So it's really quite up to date is this. This is what Michael Lynch writes in the book that we were using last week. "The Provisional Government once led by Prince Lvov, now led by Alexander Kerensky, was the old Duma in a new form. When the foreign minister at the beginning of the Provisional Government had read out the list of ministers, someone shouted, 'Who appointed you lot then?' And the reply was, 'We were appointed by the revolution itself.' But there were two crippling weaknesses in the Provisional Government," says Lynch. "Throughout the eight months of its existence," February to October 1917, "It was not an elected party. It had come into being as a rebellious committee of the old Duma. As a consequence, it lacked legitimate authority." They were planning an election in November, 1917, which will give it legitimacy, because it would establish a constituent assembly. Think Congress, think houses a Parliament. "It had no constitutional claim

upon the loyalty of the Russians and no natural fund of goodwill on which it could rely." You might say it was doomed. Now, it would not have been doomed if this was the one and only political opposition or it was the only gig in town. But it wasn't the only gig in town, because you've got the Marxists. And the Marxists have sold their policies within the factories of early 20th century Russia. The rural areas really don't count in these two revolutions. The Duma, the provisional parliament they established, is middle class. And for those of you planning on revolution, you have to have large numbers of people. Middle class-led and working class cannon fodder. Lenin and the leaders of the Bolsheviks and indeed of the rival Mensheviks were middle class. They needed a working class basis to conduct a revolution. And they had that easily at hand in Moscow and St. Petersburg, Petrograd, in the factories. The Duma did not. It was middle class. It did not have a way into. And all these clever arguments don't wash. Lenin is well aware of that. Peace, that's what people want. The Provisional Government continued with the war. Land, they didn't want the old system of virtual feudalism still. They wanted access to land. The irony is, of course, that under Marxism they never got access to the land, but that doesn't matter. That's what they'd wanted. They wanted peace, they wanted land, and above all, they wanted food, and the Provisional Government was unable to provide them with food. And the Marxists, Lenin and the Bolsheviks in particular, realised that these were what the people wanted, and that's what they gave them. They gave them peace, first of all. Then, they took over the distribution of food supplies. And although it was minimal, it's something. Land, well, they got rid of the landowners, the feudal system at the top, but that didn't mean, that didn't mean that the people at the bottom of the rural areas gained land.

And we later move into the collective agricultural system in Russia, but that's a different story. The story in 1917 is the Provisional Government was unable to deliver anything that the mass of the people wanted. They'd met the challenge of the July Days. There's now a second challenge to the Provisional Government in August 1917. And this was a challenge from one of its own generals, a man called General Kornilov. General Kornilov had made his opinions very well known after that terrible June Offensive in Galicia where the Russians have lost 440,000 lives. He was the general in command, but he blames the government in St. Petersburg. And Lynch writes this. "General Kornilov, the commander on the southwestern front, called on the Provisional Government to halt the offensive," which they refused to, "and direct his energies to the crushing of political subversives at home." He wanted to crush the Marxists. Now, there's lots of questions about Kornilov. He was right-wing, but how right-wing? He was a tsarist, yes, he was a monarchist. Was he right-wing enough that he might have wished to establish himself as a military dictator? Some of us are still nervous that if Putin falls from power he will be replaced by a general who will be more the right, well, that's the wrong word to use in the 21st century, will be more authoritarian even

than Putin. He didn't approve of the Provisional Government and its liberal democracy views. So when he threatened to advance on St. Petersburg, he said he was coming to sort out the Marxists, but they were quite clear that he was coming to sort out them in the Provisional Government, as well, and maybe first and foremost. "By late August," says Lynch, "The advance of German forces deeper into Russia began even to threaten Petrograd itself. Large numbers of refugees and deserters flocked into the city, heightening the tension there and increasing the disorder. General Kornilov declared that Russia was about to topple into anarchy." Well, that's true. "And that the government stood in grave danger of a socialist-inspired insurrection." Also true. "He informed Kerensky, the prime minister, that he intended to bring his loyal troops to Petrograd to save the Provisional Government from being overthrown." That's what he said, but would he have seized power? We don't know. I'll read on. "Accounts tend to diverge at this point in their description of Kerensky's response. Those who believed that he was involved in a plot with Kornilov to destroy the Soviets and set up a dictatorship argue that Kerensky had at first fully supported this move. It was only afterwards, when he realised that Kornilov also intended to remove the Provisional Government and impose military rule, that Kerensky turned against him." I don't buy that, actually. "Other commentators sympathetic to Kerensky, including me, maintained that he had not plotted with Kornilov and that his actions had been wholly consistent. They also emphasised that a special commission of inquiry into the affair in 1917 cleared Kerensky of any complicity. But," says Lynch, "however the question of collusion is decided, it was certainly the case at Kerensky publicly condemned Kornilov's advance. He ordered him to surrender his post, and he placed Petrograd under martial law. Kornilov reacted by sending an open telegram." Quote, the telegram Kornilov sent. "People of Russia, our great motherland is dying. I, General Kornilov, declare that under pressure of the Bolshevik majority in the Soviets, the Provisional Government is acting in complete accord with the plans of the German general staff. It is destroying the army and is undermining the very foundations of Russia." Kornilov now arms everyone that wants to be armed in Petrograd. Come and collect arms to defend the government against Kornilov. Dreadful mistake, because this enables the Bolsheviks in particular to get arms which they previously didn't have. So in order to defeat one enemy, Kornilov, he's arming another enemy, the Bolsheviks. This isn't going to end well, and we know, of course, it does not end well. It certainly doesn't, but he needed an army, because Kornilov never reach Petrograd. Let me share this. "As it happens, the weapons were not needed against General Kornilov. The railway workers refused to operate the trains to bring his army to Petrograd. When he learned of this and of a mass workers' militia formed to oppose him, General Kornilov abandoned the advance and allowed himself to be arrested. He was to die early in April 1918 in the Civil War, killed by a stray bullet." But don't forget Kornilov's story, because there may be a Kornilov in 2022 or 2023. The idea that,

"Get rid of Putin and you get a democratic government," is, in my view, naive. Who knows what will happen? It's possible, but I think more likely is a 21st century General Kornilov. We'll see. The Provisional Government, we're now in August of 1917, staggers on. Lenin now returns to Petrograd. He'd fled earlier after the failure, after it looked as though he might be arrested. He now returns. He attended a meeting of the Bolshevik committee on the 10th of October and argued, again as he had earlier in the year, for an armed insurrection to topple the Provisional Government. He convinced the central committee of the Bolsheviks, and they began to plan an offence. They held a final meeting on the 24th of October, 1917, and through the Military Revolutionary Committee, which the Bolsheviks had set up to deal with Kornilov, he had a ready-made structure and organisation. And the Bolsheviks had been armed, as I said, by Kerensky. And Lenin ordered them to secure key transport, communication, printing, and utilities hubs, and they did so without violence. They besieged the Windsor Palace, took it, and arrested the ministers in the Provisional Government. All of this is blown up into fantastic films in the Soviet era, but in fact, it was not... Yes, it was a revolution, but it was almost a bloodless revolution. It happened so quickly. There was no real resistance from the Provisional Government as, as we've seen, Kerensky fled first to London, then to New York. The Bolsheviks announced that the Provisional Government was overthrown, and they declared the formation of a new government. And the new government was going to be called the Council of the People's Commissars. Lenin was offered the position of chairman, and he said, "No, let Trotsky do the job," but they insisted, and Lenin became chairman of this Council of the People's Commissars, in effect, president and Prime minister of Russia. The Mensheviks attended a major Marxist council of the Bolsheviks on the 26th and 27th October and condemned Lenin for his illegitimate seizure of power and the risk of civil war. Lenin wasn't bothered. He ignored it largely. The Provisional Government said, "We will hold elections as," sorry. Lenin's government said, "We will hold elections as promised by the provisional government in November 17th." Lenin himself didn't approve. The elections were held, and the Bolsheviks only took a quarter of the vote. And Lenin said, "This is because we didn't have time to explain to people why they should vote for us." If you're cynical, "We didn't have time to screw them to vote for us." It didn't matter. It didn't matter. When the assembly met, Lenin and the Bolsheviks got rid of it, PDQ, on the grounds that it was counterrevolutionary. People are now well aware of what sort of government the Bolsheviks would be. It is as authoritarian as Nicholas II's government. So much for the liberal democracy of the Provisional Government of Prince Lvov and then Kerensky. So much for the more moderate Mensheviks who would've dealt with other left-wing parties, not Marxists. Instead, we have a very determined Marxist party led by Lenin who doesn't want anything to do with democracy either liberal-wise or Marxist-wise. Everything will be centrally controlled. And that, of course, is what is to go on right through to 1989. He refused

to establish a coalition government. In March 1918, the Bolsheviks changed their name from Russian Social Democratic Labour Party to the Russian Communist Party. So the Bolsheviks of 1917 become the Communist Party of 1918 right through to 1989.

So democracy had lost out. A military coup d'etat had lost out. The Mensheviks with a lighter control and more democracy even if Soviet (indistinct) lost out, and they ushered in a centralist, Marxist Bolsheviks state. Russia enters another period of the most appalling autocracy that perhaps the world has ever seen under Stalin and subsequently under other leaders right the way through until the fall of communism in '89. And some of you listening may object to me saying that and say, "Yes, but I would want to argue," you might say, "that Marxism is alive and well. Or at least don't use the word Marxist." You might well want to say that, and you can't be criticised for saying that autocracy still rules in Russia. And remember, Putin was a Marxist, Putin was a Bolshevik, Putin was a member of the KGB, and Putin's songbook is the songbook of Marxism with the Marxism word taken out and whatever word you want to put in. Autocracy will do. Putinism if you like. And so Russia in 2022 appears as autocratic as Nicolas II's Russia in 1917 and as autocratic as Lenin's Russia of 1917. Worrying. Before I finish, some of you may say, "But what of the imperial family?" Under house arrest by the Provisional Government since the 9th of March, 1917. They remained a problem in October 1917 when the Bolsheviks took part, and they were moved eastwards across the Urals into Siberia. This is how Antony Beevor takes up the story. Now, I think probably those of you who had a soft spot for Nicholas and his family probably lost that soft spot when you heard about the anti-Semitism of Nicholas and his wife, Alexandra, from the last talk by Trudy. So you may be less inclined for the Hollywood version of violins in the background, tears in the audience for this family who had ruled Russia as autocrats for 300 years, who Nicholas II and Alexandra were the last bearers of the titles tsar and tsarina and were pathetic people, out of their depth but worse than pathetic, as well, allowing dreadful things to happen not least against Russian Jews. So you may not be as enthusiastic as the Russian Orthodox church is today to regard Nicholas as a martyr to Christianity. The world is a funny place. This is what Patrick Beevor says. We're now in 1918. On the last day of April 1918, the former tsar and tsarina had reached Yekaterinburg in the Urals, the symbolic border between Europe and Asia. It'd also been one of the stops along the Via Dolorosa for prisoners condemned to trudge all the way to their Siberian exile under Romanov rule. The Bolsheviks' plan had been to bring Nicholas and Alexandra back from Tobolsk which was north, northeast of Yekaterinburg, but bring them back from Tobolsk where they were house prisoners. To bring them back from Tobolsk to Moscow for a show trial presided over by Trotsky, exactly like the show trial of King Charles I in England. But the internal threats to the regime, the Marxist regime, regime, Communist regime, had grown suddenly during the spring, as had rumours of rescue plots planned by monarchist groups,

because now Russia is in civil war. The Reds, communists, against the Whites, all sorts of anti-communists, Russian armies, but also foreign armies including American, Japanese, British, French. But here in Yekaterinburg, the Czechs, let me just read. "The biggest danger had arisen with the result of the Czech Corps at the end of May 1918, little more than 200 kilometres south of Yekaterinburg." They thought that the Czechs were out to rescue the tsar. "The royal couple and their five children were held in the Ipatiev House, a rather gloomy residence of a railway engineer. Now, the Marxists renamed it the House of Special Purpose, a sinisterly unspecified designation. It had been converted into an improvised prison with a wooden palisade all around to block view." In both directions, they couldn't see out. The tsar wrote in his diary." Certainly is a prison regime now, and Beevor says, "Yes, but it was still far more comfortable than a real prison. They had their own rooms, and after dinner, the ex-tsar would read to his wife and their daughters or they'd play Bezique, and they'd get messages that they might be rescued." And that's the dreadful thing. Their hopes rise. Are they just outside and we can't see them? "At the end of June 1918, gunfire could be heard in the distance as the Czechs advanced. On the 29th of June, the former tsar noted that, 'In recent days, we received two letters, one after the other, in which we were warned to prepare ourselves for a rescue by persons devoted to us, but several days have passed without anything happening. It was torture to wait in an atmosphere of uncertainty.'" Nicholas II made the last entry in his diary on the 13th of July 1918. He wrote they're still concerned about the little boy. Not so much a little boy now, bigger boy. "Alexis has had his first bath since Tobolsk. His knee is better, but he cannot yet bend it completely. The weather is gentle and pleasant. No news from outside." Lenin didn't want the murder of the tsar placed at his door. And so the final decision to murder the tsar and tsarina and the five children was given to the Ural Soviet to make the final decision so that Lenin could wash his hands in public and say, "I didn't do anything." Of course, he was behind the scenes. "In the early hours of the 17th of July 1918, the Imperial family was woken in the Ipatiev House and shepherded down to the basement by the guards, half of whom were Hungarian communists and their commander was Vasily Yurovsky. The former tsar had to carry his son Alexei in his arms as the boy couldn't walk down the stairs." Alexei, the former tsarevich, and his four sisters, mother and father, his doctor, and a servant were placed at one end of the room and asked to sit on chairs. They thought they were leaving when the doors opened, and, at virtually point-blank range , the soldiers fired. When the first shots were over, one of the daughters were still alive, because the bullets hadn't gone through her bodice, which was lined inside so that they could get them out with jewels. So that she was bayonetted to death. The boy, Alexei, was in a pool of blood but not dead, and they shot him with two bullets to the head. They were taken outside of Yekaterinburg, and their bodies were dumped and burned. And Anthony Beevor writes, "The murders of the Romanovs, together with others of their relatives and friends, represented a declaration of total war in

which the sanctity of human life, as well as notions of guilt and innocence, counted for nothing." They are the first, if you like, to die in this era of Marxism, which is to dominate Russia for the whole of the 20th century. Many more are to follow them to their deaths. And those wishing to argue that nothing much has changed know that many impudent Russian have disappeared or been shot on trumped up charges. It's desperately, desperately sad. I didn't know quite how to finish this talk. And this is me with one quotation. I've written, "The horrors of Russian history continued into the Civil War through to 1921 between the Whites and the Reds." And as Beevor writes right at the end of his book. He writes this. "All too often, Whites represented the worst examples of humanity. For ruthless inhumanity, however, the Bolsheviks were unbeatable. Not a bad phrase to open when the war with Ukraine is over. If any Russian is ever brought to an international court, isn't that a sentence you could revisit and put into modern language? For ruthless inhumanity, the Russians were unbeatable. But the true horror of Soviet Russia is the rule of Stalin, which as I said earlier, truly will address later this week concentrating on Stalin and Russia's anti-Semitic pogroms to give you just a flavour of the horror of this man. I find Stalin... I find it impossible really to talk about Stalin, and that's why Trudy is talking about Stalin and the Jews. Well, she is the expert and I'm not, but it will stand for all of Stalin's horrors. And I will take up the story next week of victory under Stalin in 1945, of Stalin's death, increasingly paranoid in 1953 by which time the Cold War has started. So next week is the end of World War II, the end of Stalin, and the beginning of the Cold War. But thank you very much for listening this evening. And I'm sure I've got questions. Oh, I've got lots of sort of personal answers to Wendy about what to me about Worthing.

Q & A and Comments

– Mike says, oh, now that sounds interesting. Mike says, "If you ever want to get a good laugh, as well as an educational experience, search oversimplified Russian revolution on YouTube. You won't regret it, it's incredible," exclamation point.

– Monty,

Q: "Would you be willing to do a lecture on the role of the anarchist leading up to the Russian Revolution?"

A: I'm always willing to do what I'm asked to do, but I can't do that now because we've got the whole series organised. What might be possible at some future date is I'm happy to talk about anarchism in general, because it was a movement in 19th and early 20th century, which burst out just before the first World War in Liverpool, for example. Anarchism is very interesting. I have a friend who is

actually an expert on anarchist history. I'm happy to talk about it, but it would have to be a separate one-off, and I would take it broader.

– Other people responding to Wendy. Victoria asked a question I cannot answer.

Q: "I had thought, is the Duma from dumat, to think?"

A: I don't speak Russian, Victoria? If that's so, then it will be linked for sure.

– Parliament is to speak, yes. Parler from French and Norman French in Britain, yes. And parlement in the old French system, which didn't mean parliament in an English sense, spelled differently with an E instead of an I–A. Parlement, parliament. But that's another story. We may be doing some French history, and in which case, I shall have to explain to you the difference.

Q: "Why would Germany want to give Russia money to help create a communist state? Wasn't Germany fascist? Isn't that the opposite of communism?"

A: Yes, but they wanted Russia out of the war, because remember, in 1917, America enters the war, and so Germany is anxious to take Russia out of the war, or it can see it will be defeated. That's why.

– "Germany wasn't fascist." Well, it depends. No, Germany was an autocracy under the Kaiser. It wasn't fascist as... You're right, Bernard, it wasn't fascist in terms of, and Victoria you're right, it wasn't. But the terms now, what fascism actually means, has got so twisted now that I'm not sure we can use it anymore except to describe Portugal, Spain, Italy as fascist states. But Germany is a Nazi state. There are differences, as many of you know, between Nazism and fascism.

Q: "Concerning your statement that Marxism is anti-democratic, is it perhaps more accurate to say that Marist Leninism involved the anti-democratic?"

A: Yes, you're right Richard. What one should say is that Marxism in practise has always been anti-democratic. Would it need to be so? Because in theory it doesn't have to be, but in practise it has. That's another big question, but you're quite right.

– Oh, somebody said, I like that. "Sorry, William, must be bad connection." You don't have to apologise for leaving. I'm just pleased anyone's still there at the end. Somebody says they find that there's a bit of an echo. I don't know why that should be now. I don't know, I think it's more probably, Helena, I'm sure it's probably more to do

with yours than mine, because other people would've experienced the same as you, and they don't seem to have done. Maybe it's my voice (indistinct).

- Yes, yeah, yeah, yep, nope. November 1918, the October Revolution. No, the October Revolution and the Balfour Declaration, I think you mean 1917. I think you're... No, I'm not going down there. I think there's a bit of confusion in that.

- Yep, well, yeah, there's a comparison between Russia and Israel. That's a much bigger and wider story. No echo in Willow Glen. What a lovely place to live, Joel, Willow Glen.

- And who is this; Irene. Oh, Irene, hello.

Q: "Isn't it horrendous how it appears that Russia has long been prepared to throw its people into battle as cannon fodder, Napoleonic War, first World War, this period, World War II, and even now in Ukraine with no respect for human life?"

A: Yes, but it isn't the only country. Would it be nice if we could live without war? Then, the lion can lie down with the lamb, but we're humans, and it's never going to be like that.

- Oh, that's a good question, Michael-

Q: "Is it possible that authoritarian regimes exist or even thrive because a large number of people in those countries prefer being told what to do, overtaking their own initiative, and vice versa in democracies?"

A: Ooh, I'm with you until you put vice versa in democracies, really. Most people are interested in getting on with their day-to-day lives and are not interested in politics. If politics intrudes on their lives, whether it's democratic or authoritarian, or on lives of those people they know, then they become interested. That's a deeper question.

Q: "Is Edmund Wilson's "To the Finland Station" on your list?"

A: No. Soviet means council. I think I said that, good. White Russians are Belarussians, Carly. Belarussia, Belarus today.

- "Whilst (indistinct) the events 1917 to events of today is interesting and perhaps amusing, it's nonetheless highly speculative and unlikely to reflect current events, in my view." Absolutely, Bernard, you're very welcome to your view. All I was saying is that the likelihood that an autocracy can be overthrown by a move to the right led by the military, is perfectly viable and, in Russia, seems to mean more likely. But yours and my opinion are equally valid, and

we might both be wrong.

Q: "Were the Bolsheviks also Marxists?" Yes. "Is that the same as communist?"

A: Yes, it became so. Yes, all those words are interchangeable. Churchill always referred to Russian communists as Bolsheviks throughout his life.

Q: "How did they take over?"

A: Well, because they simply got rid of it. They closed it down. This is not democracy. When the constituent assembly met, they accused it of being against, they accused it of being counterrevolutionary and closed it. And nobody could challenge them, why? Because they had armed groups on the streets. It's a coup d'etat.

– Until Trudy spoke, Nicholas and Alexandra were almost the heroes, ask why Hollywood, Tim.

Q: "So who were the Whites?

A: I think I explained groups who were anti-Marxist of various sorts, some Monarchists. There were also groups that were fighting the continuation of World War I. In order to establish a democratic government in Russia.

– King George V refused to give sanctuary in Britain to the Zionist family. Yes, and he did so because he and Nicholas looked as though they were twins, and he was frightened if the tsar came here a revolution would spread here in Britain. Prime Minister Lloyd George wanted to send a war ship to rescue him.

A: "Why didn't the Kaiser make a deal to save them?"

A: Why would the Kaiser make a deal to save Nicholas? He doesn't care a damn about Nicholas. Nicholas to him is a family traitor.

Q: "Why kill the children, too? Well, the answer... "I think it's shocking how they were not rescued by other royals."

A: Well, other royals weren't in a position to do so. Germany couldn't rescue anyone. They're at war; they can't get there. Britain, the royals do not have the power to do that. And why kill the children? Well, killing the children , excuse me. Killing the children is to ensure that there isn't someone to carry on flying the Romanov flag post the revolution.

– Peter, "Bolsheviks' inhumanity is unbeatable. The Nazis did pretty well." Yes, and that wasn't actually the quote, Peter. What Beevor

says, and remember he is writing about Russia. And he says, "All too often White represented the worst examples of humanity. For ruthless humanity, the Bolsheviks were unbeatable." Well, that's true. And when you start comparing, it's like comparing Stalin to Hitler. I think it becomes a bit meaningless to be honest. It's good job I know you, Peter, or else I wouldn't say that if I didn't know you. But I think you have to look at these things sometimes separate. It's very difficult to make comparisons.

Q: "Can you speak about Anastasia?"

A: Not particularly. She was one of those shot. There was all this mystique, because people came to be Anastasia and got other people to believe them, including members of the imperial family. There is now no doubt. Once communism fell, they exhumed the bodies. It is her. They took the Duke of Edinburgh's DNA, 'cause he was related to the Romanovs. She is dead, she died with all the rest of the imperial family.

– Oh, well, that's nice, people, thanks very much. I'll talk to you... Well, no, Jackie, you've asked a question about Stalin and Jews in his family. That's one to ask Trudy, and she will be talking about that I'm sure.

– Oh, Clara, your grandmother was an anarchist. Oh, wonderful. Did she place a bomb anywhere exciting?

– No, I will try. It's up to people planning Lockdown, but I'm happy to do a talk about anarchism. It's very interesting. Oh, the person who said their grandmother was an anarchist, would you be kind enough to let me know whether she was Russian or English or whatever?

– "No problem with your voice." That's not what many people say, Brian. My voice, it booms around.

– "Where and when did the famous steps in Odesa figure?" Sorry, Martin, don't know that.

– Yes, the Russian calendar didn't change. They had the old calendar in 1917. Lenin's government changes the calendar. I've got to look on my... 24th of January, 1918. And there's a 13-day gap. When we changed in Britain in the 18th century, there was an 11-day gap.

Q: "What would it take outside for a foreign intervention to convert such a well-established autocracy like Russia into a democracy?"

A: Ralph, that's an American view. You can't force people into a democracy. That we should have learned during the latter part of the 20th, 21st century from America, imperialism. You cannot impose democracy on people who don't want it.

- "I haven't seen 'Nicolas and Alexandra' on Netflix."

- Abigail,

Q: "What happened to the imperial extended family?"

A: Some were shot as were the imperial family, others escaped, including his mother, Maria, Empress Dagmar, who was the sister of Alexandra. She was brought out by a British warship from the Black Sea. She came to London and she was such an appalling menace that George V got shot at her back to her family in Denmark where she was equally... Well, in order to keep her there, George V provided money to his relatives in Denmark so that this woman would not come back to Britain.

- Oh, Nanette, "I was also an anarchist when I was 12," I love that, "but changed my view after I was better informed." Oh, dear, right, okay, I like that.

- And Abigail gives us references to, oops, to Stalin. And that looks I think about everything, and it's about a quarter to two. So I think that's probably the time I should say thanks and farewell, is that right?

- [Judi] Yes, thank you, William. That was fascinating, thank you so much. And we'll see you soon.

- You're welcome. You will, and I'll say bye-bye to everybody.

- [Judi] Thank you, everybody, see you soon. Bye-bye.

- Bye-bye.