

## **Module 03: 1917 — Did the War Cause a Revolution?**

### **Introduction**

The First World War ended a century of relative peace in Europe and profoundly altered the liberal order of European nation-states. Although all of the belligerent powers entered the war confident that victory would be attained quickly, the multilateral conflict soon developed into a protracted war of attrition exacting enormous economic, political, and human costs. The war resulted in the dissolution of the Austrian, Ottoman, German, and Russian empires, and bore immediate fruit in a wave of revolutions between 1917 and 1920. In Russia, military setbacks, food shortages, popular unrest, and a crisis of political leadership brought on the abdication of the tsar and the demise of the Romanov dynasty in February of 1917. Over the next eight months, a provisional government struggled in turn to establish itself as a legitimate political authority, to address long-standing social and economic grievances, and to revive the stalled war effort. Failure on all of these fronts enabled the revolutionary Bolshevik party to come to power on a deceptively simple platform of "bread, land, and peace" in a second revolution in October 1917. The event of the second revolution and its far-reaching consequences would become central to global politics of the twentieth century.

War was clearly one of the causes of Russia's revolutionary crisis. The present module, however, examines the many factors contributing to the revolutionary upheavals in February and October 1917. As you read through the module and study the evidence, keep the following question in mind: How significant were immediate events, long-term social and economic developments, the crisis of political authority, and the stresses of war to the revolutions in February and October of 1917?