Russia in 1917 was a powder keg, and one spark would ignite a fire that would engulf the entire nation and change the future of the world forever. The Tsarist family abscended from their people, believing that if life was good for them, then it was undoubtedly good for their people. The people did not agree and men with names such as Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin were making strides to bring this disagreement to the attention of those who lived in the palaces that dotted the nation.

Historians have spent decades examining the impact of the Bolshevik Revolution and how it all came to occur. Men such as E.H. Carr have spent years researching and writing multi-volume works on it, for the revolution, according to some historians, was the beginning of what later became known as the Cold War. Lenin, in 1917 stated that what was happening was a war of ideologies, one between communism and capitalism.

In 1962, Neil J. Smelser formulated his value-added model to assist historians and sociologists alike in their examination of these types of collective action. The purpose of this paper is to implement Smelser’s value-added model in the examination of the Bolshevik Revolution, in the hopes that it will help us gain a better understanding of the events that shook the very core of twentieth century history. This model is, although not a panacea to explain all the events of 1917, it does provide us a lens through which to view the events.

The paper will begin with an overview of the historical context, and then move onto a brief look at Smelser’s model and finally an application of his model in the context of the Bolshevik Revolution.

**Historical Context**

In 1917, Russia was teeming with unrest and dissension. One of the main sources was what was happening in the countryside regarding the agrarian productivity of the farmers. Despite the fact that Russia in acreage was immense, what existed was a land shortage due to the inclement Russian climate. What further compounded this issue was the fact that although serfdom was a thing of the past, there remained remnants of the past feudal relationships resulting in what became known as the “peasant problem “(Maklakov 1971: 4).

This problem yielded a highly dissatisfied population, giving them a widely unpopular view of the Tsar, his family, their fellow aristocrats and the lifestyle they enjoyed. As is the case in most class based societies, the class that is resented is fairly, if not completely, oblivious to the fact that they are resented. Living in a vacuum allowed the Tsar and his family to live in isolation away from the abject poverty and misery that befell the remainder of the
population.

The Russian citizenry was ready for change and the future leaders of what would become the Soviet Union were willing to nudge it along. The fact that the Russian people were ready for this change can be summed up in a statement by Leon Trotsky in 1935, “Russia embarked on the path of proletarian revolution, not because its economy was ready for socialist transformation, but because the economy could no longer continue to develop on the basis of capitalism” (Salomoni 2004: 98). This statement is significant, for if we remember Marxist thought, true communism would occur only after capitalism had run its courses, in essence, exhausting its lifespan before giving way to a period of transition, that would include socialism, before reaching a society that would have egalitarian benefits.

Lenin’s return from exile in 1917 hastened the pace of events. Returning from Finland, and as he began gathering more and more adherents as well as constituents, the Tsar and his family began to feel uneasy about the direction the nation was headed. The Romanov violent response to the first gathering of protesters only strengthened their resolve and made it quite clear to the Tsar that this rebellion would not go away quietly. Soon, events went from bad to worse. The royal family relocated their residence to Tobolsk in Siberia. Out of power and living in fear, the Romanovs hoped that the military would find a solution to this unrest and quicken their return to Moscow. But the solution never came and in 1918, Tsar Nicholas, along with his wife and four children were assassinated. The Bolshevik Revolution was over, but the communist revolution had just begun.

Before we begin to examine the Bolshevik Revolution in the context of Smelser’s model, it is wise to first cover exactly what his model is, and how it can applied in the study of this historic event.

**Smelser’s Value Added Model**

In 1962, Neil J. Smelser formulated his model for explaining collective action. In his immensely influential work *Theory of Collective Behavior*, he provides a definition of a value-oriented movement, “…a collective attempt to restore, protect, modify, or create values in the name of all the components of action; that is, it envisions a reconstitution of values, a redefinition of norms, a reorganization of the motivation of individuals, and a redefinition of situational facilities.” (1962: 313).

Within the context of our discussion, Smelser, in his other significant work, *Essays in Sociological Explanation* continues with the argument regarding strain and revolution, that the type of strain that can turn revolutionary is “bewildering – economic hardship, migrations of populations, defeat in war…value differences among different groups…” (1968: 99).

Within the framework of his model he included six components in this model based on the premise that in order for it to work correctly, all six components had to be present. The six components are as follows: structural conduciveness, structural strain, generalized belief, precipitating events, mobilizing for action and social control. His work, *Theory of Collective Behavior* will be cited throughout the presentation of these components.
1). Structural Conduciveness

This first premise pertains to the physical, cultural or physical context. In short, it is the environment that is present surrounding a particular event. Included in the environment would be organizations such as the church and military, as well as the system of government that oversees a respective society. Smelser posed the question, “what are the available means for expressing grievances?” (1962: 320-321). This is largely dependent on the system that exists within a society. A parallel can be drawn to Peter Eisinger’s political opportunity model. Eisinger in his 1973 article, The Conditions of Protest Behavior in American Cities, argues that change can occur when the system is neither entirely open nor closed. (1973:11-28). This wiggle room gives allowance for the expression of the grievances Smelser mentioned.

2). Structural Strain

This pertains to the conditions and/or problems that result from the structural context. Smelser addresses the fact that many studies have revealed that value-oriented beliefs arise under conditions of severe physical deprivation, such as hunger or disease (1962: 339), and cites the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 as an example. What is reemphasized in this component is the emotional aspect that is derived from the environment. Usually there are feelings of tension or anger.

3). Generalized Belief

This component pertains to the widely held attitudes and mindset of those who are experiencing some kind of strain, or what Durkheim labeled collective consciousness, a theme that runs constant in his monumental work, Suicide: A Study in

Sociology (Durkheim 1951), wherein the majority of people share similar beliefs and values. Within Smelser’s model, these beliefs are crystallized and help to explain the strain that a group experiences (1962: 348).

4). Precipitating Events

This fourth premise pertains to citing specific causes of events, or a catalyst that prompts action to be taken. This component is sometimes excluded by scholars, such as Dr. Jerry M. Lewis of Kent State University, for many include precipitating events to be included in the first two components. Lewis, in his work Sports Fan Violence in North America, excludes this component in his analysis of the Heysel Stadium Soccer Riot (2007: 155-176). According to Smelser, a precipitating event or factor is one, “that creates, sharpens, or exaggerates a condition of strain or conduciveness. It provides adherents of a belief with more evidence of the workings of evil forces, or greater promise of success” (1962: 352).

5). Mobilizing for Action

This fifth premise pertains to the specific actions taken by participants in response to the previous four components. The action can assume a variety of forms, such as protests or revolution. Smelser argues that whether a group organizes is largely dependent on the amount of social control that authorities exercise, or are willing to exercise when the collective action arises (Smelser 1962: 355).

6). Social Control

Smelser’s final premise pertains to how the authorities respond to the action(s) taken by participants. This action, like the response of participants, can vary. The
authorities may use violent means to quell a violent uprising, or they may accommodate the participants. The response taken by authorities is largely dependent on what system of authority is in place, such a dictatorship, democracy or a totalitarian regime. Again, the amount of control exercised by authorities is largely dependent on the political structure in which the collective behavior takes place (1962: 364).

Now that we have explored in some detail Smelser’s model, it is time to move on and examine the Bolshevik Revolution within its context.

**Analysis**

**Structural Conduciveness**

In November of 1917, the stability of Russia was tenuous. There was anger and resentment about Russia’s involvement in the First World War and the majority of the population was turning against its Tsarist overlords; they were looking for a change, and a drastic one at that. The current political regime was Tsarist, with Tsar Nicholas and the Romanov family dictating all policy that influenced how the common Russian citizen lived. Many Russians lived in poverty, while the Tsar Nicholas and his family lived in opulence throughout their various palaces.

The population was looking for a way out of the misery in which they existed, but was unsure how to go about gaining it, for at this time, the Tsar still held a tight grip on the military, which he used in order to maintain order. This latter sentence does address Smelser’s sixth premise, but it is relevant here for his model in this context goes full circle from the beginning to the end of the Revolution, for the Russian authorities made numerous attempts to quash the revolution.

**Structural Strain**

The obvious strain during the Revolution was the drastic and draconian system of how the classes within Russia were experienced by their various participants. The upper classes lived in grand houses, wanting for nothing, while the common Russian citizen struggle to survive regardless of whether they lived in cites or in the countryside. The members of these two classes are what Marx referred to as the *proletariat* and the *bourgeoisie*. These two terms would forever label the great struggle between the haves and the have nots for the remainder of history.

As feelings of unrest grew, even the military became disenchanted with the current regime and began to see, at the urging of the early communists who had infiltrated their ranks, that they were no better off than their non-military counterparts. The argument could be made that they were worse off considering that they were under more direct control from the Tsar than the remainder of the population.

The strike at the Kronstadt Naval Base sent a chill down the spine of those in Moscow and shook their belief that the military could be relied upon in the event of an uprising throughout the country. John Reed, an American present when all this took place, states in his account of the events, *Ten Days that Shook the World*, “at Kronstadt were twenty-five thousand sailors, convinced Bolsheviki and not afraid to die...” (1960: 96).
**Generalized Belief**

Those who mobilized for action did not all come from the peasant class. Many came from the military that saw themselves as being held under the boot of a distant ruler who was urging them to fight an enemy they did not understand. As the Bolsheviks began to permeate the ranks of the Russian army, they arrived at the belief that the real battle was not against Germany, but against the Tsar and his way of life. The peasants were all too familiar with hardship and welcomed the alliance of the military in their cause.

**Precipitating Events**

While the rest of Russia was going through domestic unrest, Lenin sat in exile in Finland. He knew that in order for Russia to be great and cast off the yoke of oppression set upon his people by the Tsar and his brethren. Additionally, first and foremost, Russia had to exit itself from the First World War. Germany knew that this was Lenin’s intention and that his return would destabilize Russia, and despite his being an enemy of Germany, Germany allowed his passage through Germany back to Moscow (Moorehead 1958: 173-187). In December 1917, Lenin signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (Kennan 1960: 37-42) officially removing Russia from hostilities.

This was a blow for the Allies, but allowed Germany some relief on the Western Front. More importantly though, for our discussion, withdrawing into itself, allowed the early Communists to pull all available resources and focus them into turning protests into revolution, and a revolution unlike the world had ever seen. Lying at the end of this paper is a timeline in which is highlighted the events that have been deemed to be those most important precipitating events leading up to the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.

**Mobilizing for Action**

The seeds of revolution had already been sown through the work of men like Lenin, Trotsky and Kerensky. Trotsky had been publishing an underground paper, Pravda, which would become the most prominent publication in the early days after the fall of the Romanov family and would serve as the trumpet for Lenin and the new Communist government. With Lenin now returned, the masses now had a somewhat awkward, yet charismatic leader who could now lead them from disjointed mobs into organized and purposeful action.

“Having obtained a majority in the Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies of both capitals, the Bolsheviks can and must take state power into their own hands” (Lenin 1917: 252). These words, written by Lenin in a letter to the Central Committee, makes a clear case about what the people needed to do in order to bring about change. He had written this letter to stress the importance of taking advantage that the Bolsheviks had the opportunity to take power and should not waste it, lest it never comes again.

**Social Control**

Despite the fact that Communists had succeeded in toppling the Tsarist regime, most evidently after the regicide of the Tsar and his family, there were those who remained loyal not only to the memory of the Tsar, but also to the idea of monarchy as the status quo. What emerged from this were two more groups, the Whites and the Reds. Whites were those still loyal to the Tsar and the old way of things, while the Reds became the army of the new Russian nation.
Discussion and Conclusion

Smelser’s value-added model is complex, just in the consideration that it contains six components, compounded by the fact that he believed that it could only be useful if all six were present when examining a historical event. This mandate to include all six does present somewhat of a problem, for as was cited concerning Dr. Jerry Lewis, not all scholars include all six components, such as precipitating events. Undoubtedly, Dr. Lewis would see precipitating events as part of structural conduciveness and not a separate component. Although Lewis, and surely others, does not include all six components in their respective analyses, it does not entirely devalue the usefulness of Smelser’s model.

Within the context of our discussion of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, each of Smelser’s components can be applied to help us examine this historic event. Following the events of 1917, the revolution as it unfolded, can in one way or another, fall into one or more of Smelser’s components. Overall, his model is invaluable, but there exists two major flaws.

The first flaw deals with the fact that the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 is so complex and detailed, that upon further examination, other theories need to be considered to join Smleser’s in order to gain a better understanding. The second flaw may be more apparent, at least to the author of this paper. The author lacked sufficient time to examine the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in the context of Smelser’s model.

Considering the complexity of this historical event and the author’s marginal knowledge of the value-added model, the author undoubtedly only touched the surface of this incredibly intricate event.

Despite the misgivings of the author regarding his own shortcomings, the fact remains that Smelser’s model is undeniably useful to assist in a better understanding of the Bolshevik Revolution. Again, it is not a panacea, but provides us with a framework with which to begin an analysis, for Smelser specifically mentions this revolution in Theory of Collective Behavior (1962: 319).
## Bibliography

### Historical Sources


### Sociological Sources


## Chronology of Events

(Salomoni 2004: 155-157).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>February 9</td>
<td>Demonstrations are held in Petrograd to commemorate Bloody Sunday of 1905</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>February 25</td>
<td>General strike in Petrograd</td>
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<td></td>
<td>February 26</td>
<td>Violence erupts in Petrograd. The army kills 150.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>February 27</td>
<td>February Revolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March 2</td>
<td>Establishment of temporary government</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March 7</td>
<td>Temporary government issues an arrest warrant for the Czar.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March 11</td>
<td>France, Italy and Great Britain recognize the temporary government.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April 3</td>
<td>Lenin returns from his exile in Finland</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April 4</td>
<td>The April Theses expound Communism in ten points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>July 3-5</td>
<td>“Days of July”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>December 2</td>
<td>Armistice signed with the Axis Powers.</td>
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