The Russian Revolution

Part I: The Beginning of the End—1861 to 1905

Not only did Russia lag behind Europe politically, but its industry and trade were also largely underdeveloped. The Industrial Revolution, steaming ahead in Europe, had barely begun in Russia. Modern agricultural technologies, chemical fertilizers, and advanced crop rotation—all well known on Western European farms—were rarely used in Russia. Russian grain yields were the lowest in Europe.

Who were the serfs?

In 1861, nearly 90 percent of the Russian population consisted of subjugated peasants—serfs and state peasants—who were mercilessly exploited. While serfdom had long since disappeared in the West, where it was scorned as a relic of the Middle Ages, it still flourished in the Russian countryside. Serfs lived in approximately 750,000 small villages dispersed throughout the Russian Empire. Most serfs farmed the land communally on open-field strips, using the same techniques employed by previous generations. They worked the land of the nobles or the state and paid rent to their landlords in the form of cash, produce, or labor. On the bottom rung of the social ladder, these uneducated laborers lived in misery, struggled through hard times and periodic famines, and occasionally rebelled against their masters. The serfs, producing the food that fed the giant country, made up the unstable foundation of the Russian Empire.

How did the serfs feel about the tsar?

Despite a hard life full of misery and periodic famine, the serfs did not, on the whole, blame the tsar for their fate. Traditionally, they considered the tsar to be a good-hearted monarch who loved each one of his subjects and wished peace and harmony for even the poorest among them. To millions of illiterate Russian peasants steeped in the traditions of the Russian Orthodox Church, the tsar was a representative of God. The tsars used the Russian Orthodox church as a means to control

Russian peasant family units were grouped together in communes. These communes typically consisted of between four and eighty households that worked together to farm the communal land. In addition, the communes maintained order, equitably reapportioning land and administering justice. As a result of out-dated farming techniques, a short growing season, a harsh Russian climate, as well as the high demands of most landlords, the majority of serfs lived in deep poverty.

What was life like for the serfs?

For most peasants life was extremely harsh and lasted an average of only thirty-five years. Living very simply in small, dark, and dank cottages, the peasants often shared their modest homes with chickens and other farm animals. Most lived in remote villages that lacked schools or communication with the rest of the world. The head of each household maintained authority over its members and their belongings. In general, the interests of the collective family unit came before those of the individual.
the peasants and crush their political opponents.

**Tsar Alexander II**

Tsar Alexander II (1855-81) came to power at a time when economic pressure and social unrest were growing in Russia. Many of the tsar’s advisors had noted that Russia was quickly falling behind the industrializing countries of the West. The inept performance of Russia’s army against British and French forces during the Crimean War of 1853-56 served to focus their concerns. Modern navies and weaponry had enabled the French and British to triumph over Russia on Russian territory. The defeat in the Crimean War, coupled with an antiquated agricultural system and the worsening economic problems forced Russia to consider national reforms.

_What was Alexander II’s first step toward modernization?_

Some of the tsar’s advisors believed that the first step towards Russia’s modernization was the elimination of the system of serfdom. In 1861, by the stroke of the tsar’s pen, tens of millions of serfs were liberated and a new system of land transference was established. The state allotted land belonging to ex-serfholders to peasant communities; it encouraged—and eventually required—the peasants to acquire these allotments through forty-nine-year mortgages. The ex-serfholders got immediate compensation, and the state took on the job of collecting the mortgage payments. The serfs were granted personal freedom.

> “It is better to abolish serfdom from above than to await the time when it will begin to abolish itself from below.”

—Tsar Alexander II to Moscow nobility, March 1856

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_How did the peasants feel about the new land-transfer system?_

Most peasants initially welcomed emancipation. It did not take long, however, for peasant moods to sour as the unfair nature of the new system began to sink in. Nobles, compensated directly by the state, kept the best land for themselves while the state sold less valuable land to the peasants at prices above its worth. The payments proved to be a substantial burden. Paying rent to the nobles had merely been replaced by paying the state. In addition, the peasants, legally bound to the commune, could not leave without paying their share of the commune’s total payments. The peasants’ social position had technically changed, but poverty among peasants increased more rapidly than prosperity.

To make matters worse, between 1861 and 1917, the population of the empire more than doubled while agricultural productivity stagnated. This overpopulation was a major cause of peasant poverty. With climatic conditions severely restricting growing seasons, Russia’s farmable land (only about 11% of its total) was under severe pressure from the population explosion.

_How did the nobles feel about the emancipation of the serfs?_

Like the peasants, the nobles began to question the reforms of the 1860s. With the loss of their serfs, many nobles could not adjust to their new circumstances. They were not prepared to exchange their life of comfort and ease for a life working the land as farmers. Many nobles continued spending money as they did before, despite their lower income. As a result, many nobles accumulated large debts. In order to pay off these debts, these nobles were forced to sell even more pieces of their land. With this came increasing discontent.

_How other reforms did Alexander II institute?_

In addition to the emancipation of the serfs, the tsar and his government instituted other reforms. Alexander II introduced jury trials and relaxed censorship laws. The tsar also created local elected assemblies known as zemstvos, which were established to address issues such as road maintenance, irrigation, primary education, and taxation. Although
nobles generally dominated the zemstvos and the power of the local councils was meager, for Russia the councils represented a significant departure from the absolute authority of the tsar.

The “Tsar Liberator,” as he was nicknamed for his efforts, also took steps to increase industrial production. To reduce the industrialization gap between Russia and the West, Russia began an ambitious program of state-supported reforms. In addition to setting up state-run industries, the Russian government invited foreign and domestic entrepreneurs to build factories in Russia. Millions of former serfs, forced off the land by the population explosion, supplied potential factory owners with a large pool of cheap labor.

The tsar’s expansion of the railroad system also provided the former serfs with opportunities for employment. When Alexander II took the throne there was only one railway line in Russia. The tsar realized that advances in transportation needed to be a high priority if Russia wanted to modernize. To build railroads, steel was necessary. Russia’s vast coal and iron ore resources supplied the raw materials for steel making, and new mills were erected. Russian railroads expanded to approximately 15,500 miles by 1880. Ultimately, the expansion of railroads facilitated increased grain exports. Grain exports were a vital source of foreign currency, which could then be reinvested into more industrialization.

Why did some people grow frustrated with industrialization?

Not everyone thought that industrialization benefited Russia. Many sections of the population were largely disappointed with the results of the reforms. A group of educated, city-dwelling Russians adopted an extremist approach. They did not seek compromise with the government, they sought its overthrow. These “populists,” as they were known, opposed industrialization, and objected to capitalism’s impact on the peasantry. They argued that capitalism destroyed rural peasant communities by breaking up the communes and forcing people into the cities. They wanted to maintain the Russian peasants’ traditional communal group ethic because they believed it guaranteed equality among the people and represented Russia’s future. They became increasingly convinced that only through revolution would they be able to attain real land and liberty for the Russian people.

Populist attitudes led thousands of students and intellectuals to “go to the people” (the peasants) in 1873-4. Their effort was motivated by the desire to establish personal connections with the downtrodden peasantry. Many of these were propagandists, convinced that they could persuade the “simple folk” to join the revolutionary cause. The movement “to the people” ended with the mass arrests of the young radicals.

Why did some of the populists resort to violence?

Unable to convince the peasants to adopt their radical program, many populists went underground and turned to violence. In 1879, The People’s Will, an extreme terrorist group of populists, secretly formed. After six unsuccessful attempts on Tsar Alexander II’s life, the group finally achieved its goal. In 1881, the People’s Will assassinated the tsar.

Tsar Alexander III

In response to his father’s assassination, the new Tsar Alexander III (1881-94) began his reign by launching a harsh crackdown against political activity in Russia. The new tsar wanted nothing to do with reforms. Instead, in an attempt to reestablish order, he enacted counter-reforms.

What steps did Alexander III take to roll back his father’s reforms?

Alexander believed that western ideals were incompatible with “the very nature of Russian character.” He felt that it was necessary to purify Russia from non-Russian and revolutionary elements. To this end, the tsar employed a policy called Russification, which aimed at assimilation of non-Russian peoples. The policy, which especially targeted...
languages and religions, hoped to turn non-Russians into “true Christians, loyal subjects, and good Russians.” Poles, Finns, and Jews, among others, were encouraged to accept the Russian language, administration, and Russian Orthodox religion. Rigid censorship was imposed.

Russia’s secret police redoubled its efforts against suspected revolutionaries. The secret police were at liberty to imprison, exile or sentence revolutionaries to death. New officials called “land captains,” recruited from the lower nobility, were granted an array of powers over the peasants, who called them “little tsars.” Most alarming to the peasants, the land captains could order public whippings for minor offenses, such as failure to pay taxes or pasturing cattle on nobles’ estates.

With public dissent and opposition stifled, those who chose to voice disagreement with the regime had to do so illegally. Disgruntled Russians, especially those privileged to receive higher education, chafed under the many restrictions that pervaded their lives.

“They give us a comprehensive education, they inculcate in us the desires, the strivings, the sufferings of the contemporary world, and then they cry, ‘Stay slaves, dumb and passive, or else you will perish.’”
—Political theorist Alexander Herzen

What were the consequences of the 1891 famine?
In the summer of 1891, the situation worsened. Famine and disease struck the thirty-six million peasants who lived between the Ural Mountains and the Black Sea (an area twice the size of France). The government tried to handle this crisis by itself, but both the bureaucracy and the transport system proved not to be up to the task.

With the Russian economy dependent on the constant infusion of foreign currency, the government actually encouraged grain exports during the famine.

“Even if we starve we will export grain.”
—Russian government slogan

Hungry and discontented, the peasants became increasingly bitter. Many communities staged small-scale revolts and land seizures.

For months the government banned newspaper reports on the famine, calling it just a “poor harvest.” In November 1891, the government admitted the truth and asked the public to form voluntary aid organizations. Volunteers and committees sprung up all over Russia in response. In the end, half a million peasants perished from famine and disease in 1891-1892. The famine crisis crystallized a political and social awakening among educated Russians.
Why did the ideas of Karl Marx hold such appeal after the famine of 1891?

One important piece of the political awakening involved the ideas of Karl Marx. In 1872, Marx’s book *Capital* had been ignored by the Russian censors, who felt that it was too difficult for anyone to bother to read. The censors would ultimately realize their mistake. Although the work had sold slowly in Europe, it became a hit with Russian intellectuals.

After the failure of their “to the people” movement, intellectuals seized upon Marx’s ideas as a means for transforming their society. Marx was a sharp critic of the capitalist economic system and the processes of industrialization. His ideas held great appeal because they explained the social world systematically. He argued that ultimately, through the efforts of the working class, a socialist, classless society would develop that would end exploitation and provide for all members of society.

Marx’s ideas were adapted into a political philosophy known as Marxism. Marx’s appeal among Russian intellectuals grew dramatically after the 1891 famine because his ideas seemed to offer explanation for the causes of the famine. Many intellectuals also believed Marx’s “European ideas” could help Russia become more like Europe.

The intellectuals knew that they would have to rally the peasant and working classes—the “masses”—to their cause through education and organization. Marxists refer to this process as building “class-consciousness.”

“We seized upon Marxism because we were attracted by its sociological and economic optimism, its strong belief, buttressed by facts and figures, that the development of the economy, the development of capitalism, by demoralizing and eroding the foundations of the old society, was creating new social forces (including us) which would certainly sweep away the autocratic regime together with its abominations. With the optimism of youth we had been searching for a formula that offered hope, and we found it in Marxism.”

—Nikolai Valentinov

Tsar Nicholas II

In the midst of these difficult times Tsar Nicholas II (1894-1917) assumed the throne after the death of his father, Alexander III. Though determined to rule with the absolute authority as his ancestors had, he lacked the

More about Marxism

The writings of the German philosopher Karl Marx provided Russian intellectuals with a “scientific” system to analyze the world. Two of his most important works were the books: *The Communist Manifesto* (1848, written with Friedrich Engels) and *Capital* (1867).

Marx viewed human history as a series of struggles between social classes. These struggles, which he argued date back to the dawn of humanity, involve a fundamental conflict between the owners of property (land or factories) and those who labor on that property. This relationship surrounding the ownership of property is called the “relations of production.” In each of a series of historical stages, the oppressed lower classes eventually rise up against the property-owning class and overthrow it.

According to Marx, industrial capitalism would be the final stage. This stage pits factory owners against factory workers. In a revolution, workers would seize power from factory owners. Eventually, private property would be abolished and a socialist society would evolve. Marx believed capitalism would be succeeded by an economic system—socialism—in which the people themselves control the “relations of production.” With the end of capitalism, workers would labor out of a sincere desire to contribute to the well-being of their fellow humans.
intelligence and strong personality of his father. Like his father, Nicholas II relied heavily on the secret police and heavy-handed tactics to maintain order. He was a reluctant reformer whose weakness led his advisors to jockey for power. Russia could scarcely have had a less competent ruler at a worse time: a tsar determined to lead from the throne, yet incapable of providing the leadership Russia needed.

**Why did peasants migrate to the cities?**

As food shortages worsened, more and more peasants flocked to the cities to fill jobs created by increasing industrialization. Russia’s urban population increased from seven to twenty-eight million. Though industrialization had been under way in Russia for some time, government efforts spurred it ahead in the 1890s and into the twentieth century. Russian officials introduced policies that helped bring more money into the country. It could then reinvest the money in industrialization. Russia also borrowed huge amounts of money from France.

> “The inflow of foreign capital is...the only way by which our industry will be able to supply our country quickly with abundant and cheap products.”
>
> —Finance Minister Count Sergei Witte

The system of modernization succeeded in moving Russian industrialization forward. By 1913 Russia would be the fifth largest industrial country.

**What were some of the negative effects of industrialization?**

As industrialization increased, jobs on railways and in dockyards, mines, construction sites, and factories opened. The millions of the new working class lived in overcrowded and unsanitary housing and worked for more than twelve hours a day. Pay was low and conditions were extremely unsafe.

Workers banded together. Many urban workers belonged to groups organized around rural regions of origin. These ties helped maintain the values of egalitarianism and collective action that drove life in the peasant communes. Hostility toward authority, which stemmed from years of oppressive conditions as peasants and serfs, grew.

This hostility toward authority, coupled with the poor living and working conditions, culminated in large-scale strikes. Some workers began to organize illegally. Once organized, the workers, on occasion, showed great solidarity, standing up to management and state authority. The working class came to be seen as a promising source of recruits for the ranks of Russia’s revolutionary political parties.

**How did the system of modernization contribute to growing unrest?**

The long period of repression and unrest began to boil over near the turn of the century. By 1902 it was clear that the policies introduced under the system of modernization had brought in their wake enormous pressures on Russian society. It was also plain that the system, like the agrarian decrees of the 1860s, created more problems than it solved.

In addition, an economic downturn in 1899 led to dissatisfaction among the small middle class. Their restlessness was rooted in envy of the freedom enjoyed by Western businessmen. Nobles suffered as their own incomes diminished and the countryside be-
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came more dangerous. Uprisings, strikes, and discontent across the country reached a new level by 1903.

Throughout society, Russians were extremely unhappy with the autocracy, angered by its disregard for human life and liberty. Other ethnic groups (i.e. Jews, Poles, Ukrainians, Armenians, etc.) were also pressured by the constant focus on Russification. People wanted a constitution, and their patience was nearing its end. The pieces and players were in place for Russia’s revolutionary era.

What were the major political groups that sought change in Russia?

Though open political dissent was stifled by the tsar, two broad political groups opposed to the tsar had emerged in Russia by the first years of the twentieth century. The first group consisted of liberals who supported evolving to a more Western European system of government. They came largely from the middle class. These liberals valued individual liberty and saw the role of the state as protecting the rights of citizens. The second group consisted of socialists, who worked to gather the support of workers and peasants for revolutionary change in Russia. The two major revolutionary socialist parties of early twentieth-century Russia were the populist Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs) and the Marxist Social Democrats (SDs).

The Socialist Revolutionary party was the most radical. Its ancestors were the People’s Will (the terrorist cell responsible for the assassination of Alexander II twenty years before) and, more broadly, the entire populist movement. The SRs, whose slogan was “Land and Liberty,” were known as a party of the peasants. In reality, they were a party of intellectuals who saw themselves as leaders championing the peasants’ cause.

They called for two monumental changes: socializing all land and transferring it to the communes, and replacing the monarchy with a democratic republic. Both of these ideas had some support among the peasants—Russia’s largest social group. The SRs had three problems: the peasants’ wide geographic dispersal, which complicated effective political activity; the party’s loose organization; and police opposition. Like the People’s Will, the SRs engaged in political terrorism. In 1902, starting a campaign of violence, they murdered the tsar’s minister of the interior. Other assassinations soon followed.

Other radicals turned to Marxism and formed the Social Democratic party. They believed that as Russia industrialized and became more capitalistic, it was becoming more fertile ground for socialist activity focusing on the working class instead of the peasantry. In 1902 Vladimir Lenin, one of the most radical SDs, insisted that a successful revolution depended on revolutionary intellectuals building a stronger sense of working-class consciousness among workers. Lenin wanted to form a radical party to lead the workers into revolution. The next year, the Social Democratic party split in two: the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks. Lenin was a Bolshevik, who because of his political views spent some seventeen years of his life outside of Russia.

How did war with Japan increase tension?

The first fires of Russia’s revolutionary era were kindled by the spark of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5). The construction of the Trans-Siberian railroad line had brought Russia and Japan into conflict over their ambitions in Manchuria and Korea. Tsar Nicholas II and his advisors assumed that war with Japan would be easy.

The war proved disastrous for Russia. The army fought with outdated weapons and was poorly supplied. Thousands of Russian soldiers’ lives were wasted in bayonet charges against well-fortified machine gun and artillery positions. As casualties and expenses mounted, the opposition increased its criticism of the government and the cry for a new constitution grew louder. In December, Japan captured twenty-five thousand Russian prisoners and seized Russia’s Pacific fleet. A war which Russia’s interior minister had welcomed as “a short victorious war” to stem the revolutionary movement, ended in clear
defeat. The defeat provided fuel for the fires of Russia’s revolutionary era.

The 1905 Revolution

A short time later the revolutionary era began. On January 9, 1905 in St. Petersburg, 150,000 workers, their wives, and children peacefully marched to the tsar’s Winter Palace to bring a petition of economic grievances to him. The marchers carried religious icons and crosses, as well as large portraits of the tsar, and sang hymns as they made their way to the center of the city. Thousands of the tsar’s troops confronted the demonstrators and fired on them, killing forty and wounding hundreds. There were clashes elsewhere that day in the capital. By day’s end, approximately two hundred lay dead and eight hundred were wounded.

“Bloody Sunday,” as the day was later known, permanently altered the attitudes of the people toward the tsar and his government. The centuries-old view of the tsar as a benevolent protector of the people was destroyed. Frustration turned to anger around the country.

“I saw these looks of hatred and vengeance on literally every face—old and young, men and women. The revolution had been truly born, and it had been born in the very core, in the very bowels of the people.”

—Bolshevik Martyn Liadov

Later that day, enraged workers rampaged through the streets, heaving rocks at the troops, assaulting policemen, looting stores, and breaking into the houses of the rich. Until then, it had been mostly liberals, revolutionary activists, and university students who advanced the idea of limits on the tsar’s authority. Workers and peasants now joined the fray.

What began as a demonstration became a revolution. The events of Bloody Sunday were followed quickly by an increase in public violence and demonstration all over Russia. There were uprisings by workers, students, liberals, soldiers and peasants alike. The zemstvo congress called for a constitution and countless individuals and societies called for reforms.

“We can no longer live like this,” declared the headline of a leading newspaper. Many Russians began repeating this phrase among themselves.

How did Tsar Nicholas deal with the worsening situation?

The rapid changes within Russia and the increasing complexity of the world required strong and creative leadership on the throne. Tsar Nicholas II was anything but that leader. He refused to accept that danger faced his dynasty, despite the fact that the rest of his government was terrified by the deteriorating situation. He was convinced that foreign agents had instigated the march on Bloody
Sunday and that most of his subjects were happy with his leadership. During the autumn of 1905, as his empire seethed with discontent, he spent much of his time hunting birds. When an advisor told him he might need to make some political concessions to calm the situation, Nicholas replied, “one would think you are afraid a revolution will break out.” The advisor replied, “Your majesty, the revolution has already begun.”

“The tragic aspect of the situation is that the Tsar is living in an utter fool’s paradise, thinking that He is as strong and all-powerful as before.”
—From the diary of an advisor to the tsar, October 1, 1905

The Revolution of 1905 climaxed in September and October with the first general strike in Russian history. The strike was led by a workers’ council (known as a Soviet), which was led by Leon Trotsky. He belonged to the Mensheviks—a socialist group who believed that a post-revolutionary government would initially have to be led by the middle class. The government, economy, and public services ground to a halt as millions of workers protested. Lawlessness exploded around the country.

On October 9, Count Witte, a senior adviser, presented the tsar with a list of recommended reforms, which came to be known as the October Manifesto. The reforms outlined in the manifesto included an expansion of civil liberties, a limited monarchy, a legislature elected by universal suffrage, and legalization of trade unions and political parties.

“The slogan of “freedom” must become the slogan of government activity. There is no other way of saving the state.... The advance of human progress is unstoppable. The idea of human freedom will triumph, if not by way of reform, then by way of revolution.”
—Count Sergei Witte

Opposition Political Groups in 1905

Liberals: Favored evolutionary change towards a more Western European system of government. There were two main liberal parties, the Octobrists and the Constitutional Democrats (Kadets).

Kadets: Concentrated on political reforms and the introduction of civil rights and universal suffrage.

Octobrists: Named for the October Manifesto of Tsar Nicholas, which they saw as a basis for cooperation. They opposed universal suffrage.

Socialists: There were two major socialist parties: Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries. They favored a revolutionary remaking of Russian society.

Social Democrats: Developed political ideology based on Marxism. Split in 1903 into the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks.

Socialist Revolutionaries: Favored transferring land to the peasant-run communes. Radical group that utilized terrorist methods. They often disagreed with the Marxist ideology of the Social Democrats.

Nicholas’s top advisors frantically urged the tsar to sign this October Manifesto. Nicholas very reluctantly signed.

How did the manifesto split the liberals?

While millions of Russians joyously hailed the manifesto and cancelled the general strike, others of various liberal political groups were divided about their feelings concerning the manifesto. Some, like the liberal Octobrist party, saw the document as the basis for good-faith cooperation with the government. This party supported moderate political reforms and a limited suffrage and was willing to participate in a post-manifesto government. Other liberals, like the Constitutional Democrat
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Mensheviks and Bolsheviks

Mensheviks: The Mensheviks were Marxists who wanted a socialist party where the masses participated in all aspects of the party structure. Political repression under the tsar forced them to operate in secret, but they were not comfortable with the methods of the Socialist Revolutionaries and opted for a patient and gradual approach to political change. The Mensheviks believed that Russia was not ready for socialism—it would come to Russia only after it had been achieved in the West. The Mensheviks’ goal was to pave the way for that revolution by organizing the workers and helping them toward greater class consciousness.

Bolsheviks: The Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, were Marxists who favored a socialist party that was directed from the top by a small, elite core. Lenin believed that only a secret and highly trained organization of militant revolutionaries could prevail. In Russia, they would need to become a tight-knit, highly disciplined group before the masses could be properly brought to the party. Lenin argued that workers needed the leadership of Bolshevik leaders to guide their work in the street and the factories.

(Kadet) party, questioned the tsar’s willingness to deliver on the promises of the manifesto. They withheld acceptance of the manifesto and worked for further concessions. In addition to splitting the liberals, the manifesto also increased the separation between the liberals and the socialists. After October, the liberals focused on moderate political reforms while the socialists pursued radical political and social change.

How did conservatives react?

To the dismay of many liberal political groups, unrest continued to increase. Socialist-inspired violence was now met by violence from conservatives, much of it sponsored by the tsar. Just hours after the October Manifesto was signed, fighting broke out again on the streets. The divide between the conservatives and the revolutionaries polarized the country.

The most influential conservative group was the Union of the Russian People (URP), formed in October to mobilize pro-tsarist sentiment. The tsar, who wore the Union’s badge, provided money for its newspapers and secretly supplied it with weapons. The Union formed paramilitary groups called the Black Hundreds, which paraded through the streets displaying banners, crosses, and portraits of the tsar, while concealing brass knuckles and knives in their pockets. The Black Hundreds took to the streets beating Jews and those they suspected of having democratic sympathies.

How did the tsar attempt to put down the revolution?

Encouraged by the display of violence from conservatives, the government now felt that the time had come to repress the revolution. In early December the government shut down the St. Petersburg Soviet (workers’ council) and arrested its leaders. News of the Petersburg Soviet’s dispersal prompted an armed revolt by the Moscow Soviet, where the Bolsheviks had much influence. The police and army tried to subdue this uprising but the workers fought back. More than a thousand people died in savage street fighting before the

Anti-Semitism

During the reign of Tsar Nicholas II, Jews were frequent targets of organized violence known as pogroms. Although the pogroms were not instigated by the government, the tsar saw these pogroms as acts of patriotism by “loyal Russians.” Nicholas hoped to use widespread anti-Semitism to rally opposition to those who opposed his regime. The campaign drove many Jews toward the revolutionary movement.
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government restored order.

Throughout the country, socialists were arrested, imprisoned, flogged, exiled, killed, or forced into hiding. The army razed entire villages and imprisoned thousands of peasants. When the jails filled up, peasants were simply shot. Estimates of the number killed by the tsarist’s regime during the six months after the October Manifesto total fifteen thousand with an additional twenty thousand wounded and some forty-five thousand people deported or exiled.

What were the results of the October Manifesto?

Within six months of issuing the October Manifesto, Nicholas enacted his interpretation of its provisions. Freedom of the press, assembly, and association were introduced in Russia. For the first time in history, Russians could now legally form political parties and labor unions. (The government could still place particular provinces under martial law, thereby revoking these and other freedoms.) Plans were announced for elections and for the organization of the new government.

The tsar was to share power with a two-chamber legislature. Half the members of the upper house, the State Council, were to be appointed by the tsar and the other half were to be elected by the nobility and clergy. The lower house, the State Duma, was to be comprised of elected representatives. The Crown kept the power to appoint and dismiss ministers; declare war and make peace; dismiss the Duma at his whim; and enact laws when the Duma was not in session, although the new law was nullified if the Duma did not approve at its next session.

The peasants and workers had grown in political awareness and power, but these new political reforms fell short of the sweeping social change they had sought. Their living conditions remained the same, and the hardship they faced in the factories continued.

It soon became obvious that Nicholas had signed the manifesto only to defuse the October crisis. The tsar disdainfully regarded the new legislature as an advisory, not a law making body, and maintained the right to revoke the concessions he had made in the October Manifesto. The tsar felt his actions were consistent with the letter of the document, but they were clearly not in accord with its spirit.

How did the different political factions see the October Manifesto?

Russia’s radicals saw this new plan as a sham; the Socialist Revolutionaries and some Social Democrats boycotted the first Duma elections. The liberals were divided, since the Octobrists decided to participate fully in the new government while the Kadets preferred an oppositional role. The Kadets won the largest number of seats. When the Duma convened in April 1906, the Kadets demanded the abolition of the State Council, the seizure of large landed estates, amnesty for all political prisoners, and a ministry responsible to the Duma. Nicholas was not about to consider any of these proposals. In July he dissolved the Duma and called for new elections, hoping that the voters would seat a more conservative majority. But this time the socialist parties decided to participate in force and, to the dismay of the tsar and his advisors, they made substantial gains at the expense of the liberals and conservatives. Deep conflict pervaded the government.

During the Revolution of 1905 the divided Russian people failed to coordinate their efforts and the armed forces stayed loyal to the tsar. As a result, the government shuddered, but did not fall.

Note: During the period covered in this reading, Russia used a calendar which was thirteen days behind the one used in Western Europe. Russia adopted the Western calendar in 1918. The revolutions of 1917, known to Russians as the February and October revolutions (and referred to this way in these pages), took place in March and November according the Western calendar.