

Introduction: Before the Revolution

In 1861, the Russian Empire extended seven thousand miles from east to west and encompassed one-sixth of the surface of the globe. Stretching from the Arctic Ocean to the Black Sea, from Prussia to the Pacific, Russia was the world's largest country. An empire as diverse as it was large, Russia held seventy-four million people who spoke more than one hundred different languages, came from over one hundred distinct ethnicities, and practiced most major and many minor religions. Trying to hold together the huge and diverse empire created enormous problems for Russia's rulers.

How was Russia governed?

Though Russia was unrivaled in size, it was considered by many Western Europeans to be an extremely backward country. The Renaissance and Reformation, with their emphasis on the importance of the individual, had hardly touched Russia.

Since 1613, Russia had been governed by the tsar (emperor) who possessed complete authority. Though the state bureaucracy assisted the tsar in the operation of his government, no political parties were permitted. Below the tsar and his bureaucracy were privileged nobles who owned much of the country's land. Below them was the majority of the population, millions of serfs (peasant farmers) who worked the land in virtual slavery.

Tsarist Russia had no legislature and no constitution. Russian subjects were not entitled to freedom of speech, assembly, or worship. Any public dissent or opposition was stifled or stamped out by the tsar's secret police. The government carefully censored all publications. Though the power of the tsar was absolute and life was filled with hardships, many Russians regarded the tsar as a representative of God and a force for good.

What were the political groups struggling for the future of Russia?

The tsars had the loyalty of much of the gentry (land-owning nobility) and the masses. But generations of repression by the government, and the suffering of millions had generated political movements among intellectuals seeking change in Russia. There were also numerous non-Russian minorities (including Poles, Jews, Finns, and Ukrainians), seeking to free themselves from the tsar's rule. Although there were many different groups, by the early twentieth century they could be divided into two basic categories: socialists and liberal reformers.

Socialists: There were many socialist groups with differing goals and plans. The socialists hoped to create a classless society that would end the exploitation and suffering of the peasants and workers. This included dismantling the capitalist economic system by taking the "means of production" (land, factories, etc.) from the owners and placing them in the hands of the state. The socialists knew that they would have to rally peasants and workers to their side.

Liberal Reformers: Liberalism was a political ideology based on the ideas of the Enlightenment. Liberal reformers believed that they could put in place western constitutional practices and the rule of law to solve Russia's problems and correct the injustices of the past.

The readings in this unit will take you back to a time when Russia's future hung in the balance and will help you to explore the competing visions for Russia. The first reading explores the events from the emancipation of the serfs to the Revolution of 1905. Part II covers the period from 1905 to the eve of the Revolution in early spring 1917. You will then be asked to address the questions Russians debated at that time. An epilogue explores the aftermath of the Russian Revolution and its impact on the twentieth century.

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.

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.

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.

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 peasants.

Photo courtesy of the New York Public Library.

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

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.

What 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



The Tsar’s residence is called the Winter Palace. In front of the palace stands Alexander’s Column.

Photo courtesy of Getty Images.

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



Nicholas II and his family.

Photo courtesy of Jupiter Images.

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-

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 prob-

lems: 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



"Bloody Sunday." A poster depicts the events of January 9, 1905.

Photo courtesy of the New York Public Library.

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

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.

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 to the Western calendar.

Part II: “We Can No Longer Live Like This”—1905-1917

With the Revolution of 1905, the Russian people had won new political and social freedoms. By the time the revolution was put down, newspapers had sprung up, and political parties had been formed. The Duma had also been established. These changes ensured that the tsar could no longer exclusively control politics. Russians had tasted new freedoms and developed a sense of their power to influence events. When the government regained its footing, it realized that it could not revoke the new political freedoms without convulsing society once again. Never again would the Russian people place their full trust in the tsar.

How did the various political groups regard the aftermath of the 1905 Revolution?

The workers and peasants that made up the rank and file of the socialist movements were not nearly as interested in political freedoms as they were in social reform, and they had learned that liberal leadership would not help them achieve their goals. Returning to the harsh drudgery of their jobs, the demoralized former strikers took heart at the numbers of workers who gradually came forward to join their unions. Those who owned property—the more conservative nobles and the small middle class—came away from the 1905 Revolution with genuine fear of the lower classes.

“The wave of anarchy that is advancing from all sides, and that at the present time threatens the legal government, would quickly sweep away any revolutionary government: the embittered masses would then turn against the real or presumed culprits; they would seek the destruction of the entire intelligentsia [class of intellectuals]; they would begin indiscriminately to slaughter anyone who wears German [i.e. European] clothes.

—Prince E.N. Trubetskoi, November 1905

In February 1906 the liberal Kadet party formally denounced the strikes, the land seizures, and the Moscow uprising. Among many intellectuals, deep pessimism prevailed over the future.

“...whether we remember or forget, in all of us sit sensations of malaise, fear, catastrophe, explosion.... We do not know yet precisely what events await us, but in our hearts the needle of the seismograph has already stirred...”

—Poet Alexander Blok

Who was Petr Stolypin (1862-1911)?

Onto this uncertain stage stepped Petr Stolypin. Appointed as prime minister in 1906, Stolypin was from an old noble family and supported the monarchy. Stolypin understood that the crown’s survival depended on two factors: the restoration of order and genuine cooperation with the Duma. Stolypin believed that agrarian reform was essential if the problem of peasant rebellion was to be cured. Stolypin believed that a stable land-



Peasants making bricks by hand.

Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.

owning class of peasants, which would have a comparable stake in Russia to that of the gentry, had to be created.

“First of all we have to create a citizen, a small landowner, and then the peasant problem will be solved.”

—Petr Stolypin

Stolypin confronted an enormous task. The country continued to be wracked by peasant unrest and terrorism. During 1906 and 1907, Socialist Revolutionaries and anarchists killed or injured nine thousand people. Forty-five hundred of their victims were officials.

During Stolypin’s first three years in office, the government shut down hundreds of radical newspapers and labor unions. Almost sixty thousand political prisoners were executed, imprisoned, or exiled without trial for participating in allegedly radical activities. The army tried thousands of peasants in field courts-martial. Many were executed. The hangman’s noose became known as “Stolypin’s necktie,” and the railroad cars used to transport political prisoners to Siberia were dubbed “Stolypin carriages.”

How did Stolypin attempt to bring about agrarian reform?

Stolypin wanted to create a class of prosperous, conservative small farmers, much like the families that worked the land in France and the United States. To achieve his aim, Stolypin sought to break up the village communes in which peasants held land collectively.

Acting with the tsar’s power to rule by decree when the Duma was not in session, Stolypin enacted his most important law in November 1906. This law enabled peasants to separate from the commune and set up private farms.

Stolypin believed that the agrarian problem could not be solved by taking over private estates, as advocated by liberals and Socialist Revolutionaries: there simply was not enough land in private possession to meet the needs

of the rapidly growing peasant population. For Stolypin, the solution lay in more intensive cultivation to yield larger harvests. He wanted to drive the poorer and inefficient peasants off the land by allowing them to sell to more productive and wealthier peasants.

He thought the best means to this end was to allow privatization of peasant landholdings. Stolypin also gave peasants the right to homesteads in Western Siberia where agriculture was possible. Some 2.5 million moved to Siberia.

The new law set up procedures for a household to withdraw from the commune and claim ownership of its allotment of land. The household could then set up its own farm or sell the land. Between 1906 and 1916, 2.5 million households filed petitions to claim ownership of their allotments. This sum represented 14.5 percent of total communal acreage. Those who used the new legislation tended to be poorer peasants who wanted to sell their allotments.

Why did the socialist-bloc refuse to work with Stolypin?

The Duma’s socialists disliked Stolypin and refused to work with him, in part because the electoral law favored the rich, so that the peasants and workers whom the socialists championed were grossly underrepresented in the Duma. With this impasse, the tsar dissolved the second Duma in June 1907.

Acting when the Duma was dissolved, Stolypin drastically changed election laws. The new system of voting favored large landowners and the wealthy. One percent of the population now elected the Duma. By changing the election laws, Stolypin produced a third Duma with a conservative majority, which then approved the new election laws.

Stolypin’s brutal repression of radicals, persistent attempts to weaken the communes, and high-handed style of governing made him many enemies. In September 1911, while attending the opera, he was assassinated by a double agent who served both the police and the terrorist cause. It was never learned which

side the assassin was working for at the time of the murder. It is even possible that jealous high-level officials in the tsar's government were involved.

A Country in Turmoil

Russia between 1911 and 1914 was a country in turmoil. The political impasse continued as a fourth Duma was elected in 1912. The new Duma was as unrepresentative of the entire population as was its predecessor. A resurgent conservative bloc hoped to restore its ideal Russian social order. The Union of the Russian People (URP), gained more adherents as it stepped up its street campaigns and violence against Jews and those they suspected of harboring revolutionary ideas. The tsar supported the URP, hoping that someday it would become the basis for a political party able to challenge the socialists. It would never become a significant political factor.

What were the economic conditions?

Although the political environment was chaotic, economic conditions were mixed. In 1906, the Ministry of Finance negotiated a series of massive loans from Western European banks so as not to be dependent on appropriations from the new Duma. This sparked renewed growth of both Russian and foreign-owned industries. Iron and coal production increased as did Russia's imports and exports. Russia was the world's leading grain exporter.

But conflict increased on the land and in the factory. Between 1910 and 1914, seventeen thousand peasant disturbances were reported in European Russia. Workplace violence returned with a vengeance in 1912, after the massacre of 350 striking gold miners in Siberia by government troops. During the following two years, three million laborers participated in over nine thousand strikes.

On the eve of World War I, the highly volatile Russian Empire stood poised on the edge of disaster. In addition to the sharp political divisions, ethnic tensions simmered just under the surface. Ukrainians, Jews, Poles, Finns, Latvians, Armenians, and many other

ethnic groups harbored grievances against the Russian rule. They also had their own political aspirations. They often resented each other as well as the Russians who ruled and lived among them.

All these passions were held in check only by a weak tsar and weak government. Sooner or later there would again be violence.

How did World War I affect Russia?

In August 1914 Russia joined World War I as a member of the Allied Powers. Despite Russia's progress between 1885 and 1914, the country's industrial capacity still lagged far behind that of the other countries fighting in WWI. Serious weapons shortages were one major problem that Russian troops faced.

“Unarmed men had to be sent into the trenches to wait till their comrades were killed or wounded and their rifles became available.”

—Report from a British officer in Russia

Germany's heavy artillery often destroyed Russian units before they ever saw their foe. The Russian armies lacked the guns and shells to respond. By the end of 1916, Russia's casualties were approximately 3.6 million dead or badly wounded, in addition to 2.1 million prisoners of war.

“They drove us and we went. Where was I going and why? To kill the Germans! But why? I didn't know. I arrived in the trenches, which were terrifying and appalling. I listened as our company commander beat a soldier, beat him about the head with a whip. Blood poured from the poor man's head. Well, I thought, as soon as he begins to beat me, I'll skewer him with my bayonet and be taken prisoner. I thought who really is my enemy: the Germans or the company commander? I still couldn't see the Germans, but here in front of me was the commander. The lice bit

me in the trenches. I was overcome with dejection. And then as we were retreating I was taken prisoner.”

—A Russian draftee

Poorly armed, poorly trained, and led by cruel and often incompetent officers, the Russian armies and soldiers suffered greatly.

When Russian armies retreated, the Russian military commanders applied a “scorched-earth policy” of destroying anything that might be of use to the advancing German military, including shelter and food supplies. Millions of Russian refugees streamed eastward where they interfered with the movements of the Russian military. In addition the refugees required shelter and food which were in short supply. The influx of hungry and discontented refugees brought more problems to Russia’s cities.

How did Russia finance its war effort?

Russia financed its war effort by increasing taxes, securing foreign loans, and increasing the supply of paper money six times over. Government debt and inflation skyrocketed. Between 1914 and 1916, prices tripled, but wages only doubled. The pressures on the urban population rose even higher as some six million war refugees and new hires crowded the cities. Capitalists raked in record profits while workers strained to pay daily expenses.

How did the Russian public regard the war?

While the war had initially been greeted by public displays of patriotism, the huge losses and obvious incompetence of the tsar’s government demoralized both soldiers and civilians. Just as with the famine of 1891-2, educated society decried this mismanagement and created its own voluntary organizations (approved by the government) to increase war production, coordinate the military supply effort, and provide social services.

During the summer of 1915, the Duma, which had not been in session for almost a year, reconvened. Two-thirds of its members

formed a broad coalition called the Progressive Bloc, composed of all factions—except extremists—on both the socialist and conservative sides. The Bloc’s chief concern was winning the war, and its members were convinced that this could not happen unless the tsar appointed a new ministry supported by the public. Remarkably, some of the tsar’s own ministers openly agreed with the Bloc and volunteered to step down in favor of new appointees acceptable to the Duma.

Defying the Bloc’s demands, Tsar Nicholas fired many of his ministers and dismissed the Duma. In addition, he decided to go to the front and, despite his total lack of military experience, assume personal command of the army. He did so in the hopes of reviving the morale of the troops.

The Monarchy Self-Destructs

Nicholas’ decision to go to the front allowed his wife, the Tsaritsa Alexandra (who was German by birth), to play a more significant role in Petrograd (as the capital had been renamed in 1914, in a patriotic change from the German-sounding St. Petersburg). Opposed to any sort of political reform, the empress persuaded her absent husband to replace many of his remaining ministers with her own favorites. She, in turn, relied on the counsel of Rasputin, the peasant “holy man,” who had acquired considerable influence at court due to his mysterious healings of her hemophiliac son. Convinced that she and Rasputin were Nicholas’s only indispensable advisors, Alexandra peppered her husband with letters on governmental matters.

“And guided by Him [God] we shall get through this heavy time. It will be hard fighting, but a Man of God [Rasputin] is near to guard yr. [your] boat safely through the reefs—little Sunny [Alexandra] is standing as a rock behind you, firm and unwavering.”

—Tsaritsa Alexandra

Who was Rasputin?

Nicholas's dependence on his wife, together with her complete trust in the semi-literate Rasputin, severely damaged the prestige of the monarchy. Rasputin's reputation was scandalous. He openly bragged of his control over jobs in the government and church hierarchies. He received bribes and sexual favors from those who desired his intervention on their behalf. Rasputin himself encouraged false rumors that he had been sexually intimate with Alexandra. These tales alienated Russians of all social backgrounds, from other members of the royal family to the lowest-ranking foot soldier.

This appearance of appalling corruption in high places extended to the war effort. It was said that the tsaritsa and her circle were German spies and that Nicholas gave his cousin, Kaiser Wilhelm II, advance notice of Russian troop movements. These rumors, although untrue, nevertheless infuriated many members of the public, who increasingly directed their wrath over Russia's wartime failures at the royal family. Some prominent Russians, including members of the royal family, privately discussed the need for a coup d'état. They became persuaded that a change in leadership could revive the war effort, preserve the state, and stave off a revolt. In December, 1916 Rasputin was murdered in a plot involving three nobles, including the tsar's favorite nephew. After Rasputin's death, Nicholas and Alexandra grew ever more isolated and more resistant to reform.

How did the war affect the civilian population?

World War I both created and exacerbated severe economic difficulties. By late 1916,



Rasputin (center) surrounded by members of the court.

Photo courtesy of Jupiter Images.

with the mobilization of some fifteen million men and the direction of all resources to the war effort, the population endured shortages of boots, firewood, kerosene, soap, sugar, and textiles. While good harvests produced plenty of food in rural areas, the railroads could not get food to the cities fast enough to satisfy demand. By the winter of 1916-17, the cities confronted a critical food shortage.

Led by women (who stood in line for hours to secure food for their families), riots began to occur. To make matters worse, during that winter a serious fuel shortage coincided with the coldest weather in years. The temperature in public workplaces and private homes in Petrograd was reported to have stayed between forty-four and fifty-nine degrees Fahrenheit. The police, whose job it was to monitor urban unrest, recorded ominous signs. Unrest and anxiety grew in intensity, reaching new sections of the general population.

“Mothers, exhausted from standing endlessly at the tail of queues, and having suffered so much in watching their half-starving and sick children, are perhaps much closer to a revolution than (the Duma leaders).”

— Police report

“We will soon have a famine.... In the suburbs of Petrograd you can see well-dressed women begging on the streets. It is very cold. People have nothing to burn in their stoves. Here and there at night they tear down wooden fences. What has happened to the twentieth century! What has happened to Civilization! The number of child prostitutes is shocking. On your way somewhere at night you see them shuffling along the sidewalks, just like cockroaches, blue with cold and hungry.”

—Writer Maxim Gorky

At the same time, the number of strikes approached that of the pre-war period. Workers began to call openly for a change of regimes. These strikes stimulated the socialist parties to renewed recruiting activity in the factories, universities, and army garrisons. In the barracks, demoralized soldiers, disgusted at the futility and the huge human costs of the war, decried governmental paralysis.

By this time, the government, led by an obstinate tsar, had proven itself to be incompetent. The divisions in Russian society were clear. Conditions were ripe for a revolution.

The 1917 Revolution Begins: The February Days

In February 1917, the capital city of Petrograd experienced the first upheavals of the Russian Revolution. The weather that winter was unusually bitter, with the average temperature for the month an icy fifteen degrees below zero. Petrograd’s latitude made matters worse. The city was located so far north that the sun, when it was visible at all, could be observed just a few fleeting hours each day.

How did geography affect the revolution?

Petrograd’s geography played a significant role in the course of the revolution. The city was built where the Neva River emptied into the Gulf of Finland. The river, its branches, and a network of canals divided the city into

separate districts. The city center, surrounded by the Neva and the Fontanka Canal, was the enclave of the prosperous and the powerful. It contained the tsar’s splendid Winter Palace, government buildings, and elegant residences. Smaller palaces and fashionable stores lined the well-policed main street which radiated southeast from the city center. Ringing Petrograd’s core were the gritty industrial suburbs; these districts were situated on islands. The largest factories were located here, along with the grimy apartment buildings which housed the workers. The city’s stylish core could be isolated from the industrial suburbs by drawbridges.

Early 1917 saw two great strikes in the capital, each of which idled tens of thousands of workers and scores of factories. Labor unrest and student protests occurred daily. On February 22, in response to a labor dispute, managers at Russia’s biggest metal and munitions plant locked out all thirty thousand of their workers. Angry workers marched toward the city center but were stopped by police. Some workers met with Alexander Kerensky, a socialist leader in the Duma. They warned him that “something very serious might happen.”

Compared with the preceding weeks, Thursday, February 23, was a somewhat warmer day, with a high temperature of 5 degrees below zero. It was the start of several days of mild weather, with high temperatures from February 24-28 ranging from 6 to 46 degrees above zero. The better weather prompted Petrograd’s residents to emerge from their homes onto the streets. These days witnessed the demonstrations and bloody clashes which brought the 300-year-old Romanov dynasty to an end.

What was the strike of the women textile workers?

February 23 was International Women’s Day for the socialists. That morning, at several factories in the industrial district of Vyborg, frustrated women textile workers met to vent their anger over the serious food shortage. They were furious that ten to twelve hours of labor a day had to be followed by hours

waiting in line at the food stores, with no guarantee that any provisions were available. Clamoring for “Bread!,” they left their factories and headed for the metal plants, looking for their men.

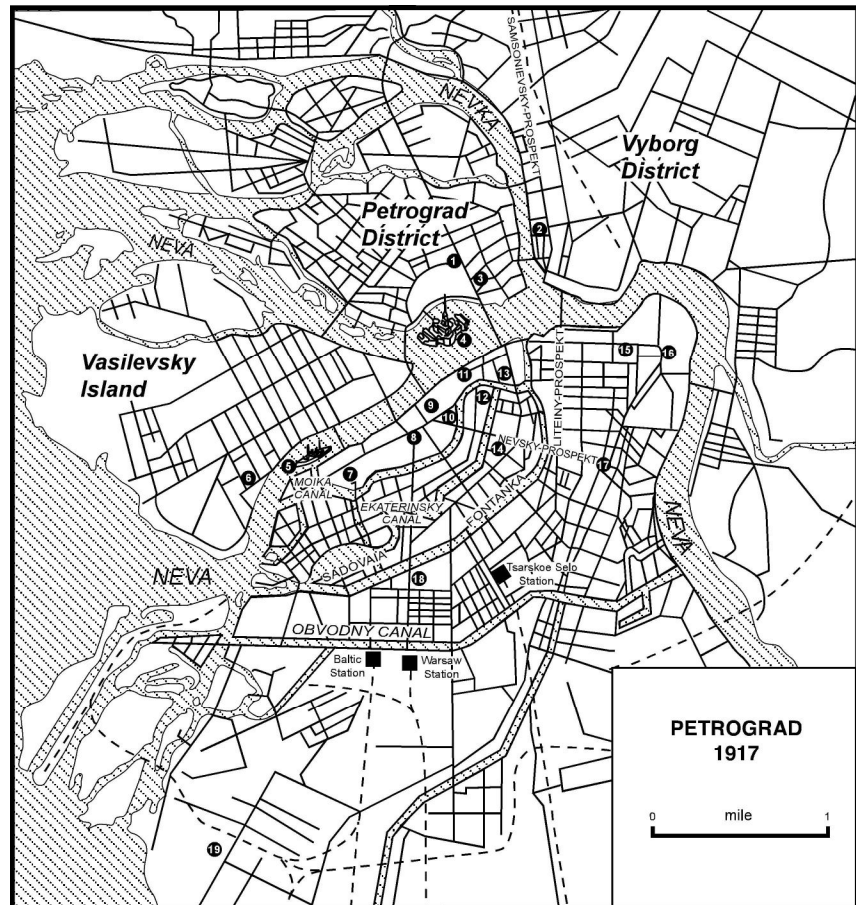
**“Down with the war!
Down with the high
cost of living! Down
with hunger! Bread
for the workers!”**

—Chant of women textile workers

Throng of militant women textile workers surged from one factory to another as additional workers joined the crowd. Eventually, over 100,000 workers, one-third of the city’s total, went on strike, and some tried to march to the city center before going home.

On Friday, February 24, workers went to their factories, but not to perform their normal tasks. Instead, they met to organize a continuation of the strikes and demonstrations of the previous day. More than 200,000 strikers—the largest number since the start of the war—left their jobs and tried to march to the city center. Many were armed with tools, knives, and pieces of iron.

“Comrades, if we cannot get a loaf of bread for ourselves in a righteous way, then we must do everything: we must go ahead and solve our problem by force.... Comrades, arm yourselves with everything possible—bolts, screws, rocks, and go out of the



- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 Gorky's house | 11 Winter Palace |
| 2 Bolshevik headquarters, Vyborg District | 12 <i>Pravda</i> editorial offices and printing plant |
| 3 Kshesinskaya Mansion | 13 Pavlovsky Regiment |
| 4 Peter and Paul Fortress | 14 City Duma |
| 5 <i>Aurora</i> | 15 Tauride Palace |
| 6 Finland Regiment | 16 Smolny Institute |
| 7 Central telegraph office | 17 Znamenskaya Square |
| 8 War Ministry | 18 Petrograd Regiment |
| 9 Palace Square | 19 Putilov factory |
| 10 General Staff headquarters | |

factory and start smashing the first shops you find.”

—A striker

Despite opposition from the authorities, many strikers, joined by students, housewives, shop clerks, and other sympathizers assembled at Znamenskaya Square in the city center. This square was an enormous open space centered on a mammoth statue of the tsar’s father, Alexander III, on horseback. Before dispersing, the throng listened to fiery anti-tsarist speakers.

It was difficult if not impossible for many to hear what was being said. But after years of political repression, those in the square knew that they were witnessing the beginning of something important. The open defiance of the tsar in front of the police meant that the old order was crumbling.

What role did soldiers play in the growing demonstrations?

During the next two days, events became increasingly violent. On Saturday, a general strike nearly shut down private businesses and public services as marchers filled the streets. Middle-class residents began to join the protests. The crowds became bolder, while some soldiers, assigned to assist the police, openly expressed hesitation about taking action against the marchers.

Many of these soldiers were new recruits and came from the working-class areas of Petrograd. As a result, many of the soldiers had much in common with the demonstrators. Women demonstrators often pleaded with the soldiers, telling them of the hardships their families faced while their male relatives were away fighting in the war.

These pleas weakened military discipline. In a memorable incident, one unit of Cossacks (irregular cavalry) refused to help the police quell a demonstration. Furthermore, this

unit charged the police and killed their commander. That night the tsar, having received reports of the strife in the capital, sent a telegram from his military headquarters ordering the use of decisive armed force to suppress the conflict. Sunday was a day of bloody confrontation. Large numbers of demonstrators converged on the city center, where they were met by soldiers under orders to fire into the crowds. Hundreds of demonstrators were gunned down. The worst clash occurred at Znamenskaya Square, where soldiers of the Volynsky Regiment killed over fifty protestors.

Why was the soldier's mutiny important?

Monday, February 27, was the turning point in the events: the day of the soldiers' mutiny. It began with troops of the Volynsky Regiment who, repelled by their own part in the previous day's carnage, had decided to disobey future orders to fire on demonstrators. When their commander issued this order, he was shot in the back. The Volynsky soldiers left their barracks and set out for other regiments to persuade their troops to join the mutiny. By day's end about 66,000 uniformed soldiers had cast their lot with the striking workers. The military cohesion of the Petrograd garrison was gone. At least 170,000 firearms made their way from military arsenals and weapons factories onto the streets.

Not surprisingly, the streets became even more violent. The crowds invaded prisons and released eight thousand inmates, the vast majority of them common criminals. They took destroyed police stations, along with their records, the court buildings, and prisons. Armed gangs looted shops and broke into the houses of the well-to-do. Some robbed or raped their inhabitants. The February Revolution in Petrograd was violent and bloody.



Photo courtesy of Jupiter Images.

Men and women stand in line to collect their bread.

Casualty statistics varied, but ranged from approximately 1,500 to 7,500 killed or wounded.

Having squandered the support of its own people, and having lost the loyalty of its armed forces, the Romanov dynasty collapsed. On March 2, Nicholas II abdicated, or resigned.

What was the reaction to the abdication of the tsar?

In the aftermath of February's events, many Russians felt a sense of euphoria. A three-hundred-year old dynasty had collapsed in a few days. For several weeks, Russians experienced what seemed to be absolute freedom.

“A miracle has happened, and we may expect more miracles...almost anything might happen.”

—March 23, 1917 poet Alexander Blok

Many viewed the revolution as a great moral rebirth of the Russian people—some likened it to Christ's resurrection on Easter.

Others believed it would take Russia in a more Christian direction and that evil, drunkenness, and theft would vanish.

Dual Authority

As the soldiers' mutiny and prisoner releases of February 27 sealed the monarchy's fate, the would-be leaders of a new Russia gathered in the two wings of the Tauride Palace, the center of a new governing authority in Russia. With some reluctance, several leading officials in the Duma appointed themselves as the new leaders of a Provisional Government. The Provisional Government met in the right wing of the Tauride Palace. In addition to the self-selected Provisional Government, workers and soldiers voted in elections for representatives to a new governmental body—the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. The Petrograd Soviet met in the palace's left wing. And in March and April, these two bodies attempted to provide leadership in the wake of the tsar's abdication.

The first concern of this new “dual authority” was to restore public order, which



Protesters gather at Znamenskaya Square in February 1917.

Photo courtesy of Getty Images.



Photo courtesy of Jupiter Images.

Headline in *The New York Times* on Revolution in Russia.

could only be accomplished by convincing the thousands of mutinous troops to return to their barracks. Fearful of retribution for their mutiny, the soldiers sought immunity and protection. In response, on March 1 the Soviet unanimously approved Order Number One which gave the soldiers immunity. The Soviet could overrule any military order. As a result, the Soviet received the soldiers' allegiance.

The Provisional Government was led by the Constitutional Democrat party (Kadets). The Kadets were able to seize this power (which in the end proved slight) because many of their more radical socialist counterparts were not interested in negotiating for power within the existing society. Instead, these socialists wanted to create a new society altogether. They advocated revolution rather than gradual change through political development. Additionally, many socialist leaders had been exiled under the tsar and were just beginning to return at the time that the Provisional Government was established.

The Provisional Government sought to exercise formal authority over Russia's domestic and foreign affairs. Prince Georgii Lvov, a well-respected "public man" who had previously gained renown for his services to his country in times of famine and war, was chosen as prime minister.

During its first weeks the Provisional Government passed a series of dramatic reforms. The government outlawed capital punishment, reformed the judicial system, and took steps to place the police under control of local government. The Provisional Government also granted the political freedoms of assembly, press, speech, and universal suffrage. The government repealed legal restrictions that applied to religion, class, and race. Russian citizens struggled to keep track of the new laws and freedoms.

How did the Revolution spread throughout Russia?

The revolution quickly reached the rest of the country by telegraph. In each major city, a Petrograd-style dual authority model was followed, with a Public Committee taking the role of the Provisional Government, while a soviet of workers' and soldiers' deputies represented the lower classes. This process occurred with breathtaking speed, amid much popular acclaim. During March and early April, the revolution also came to small towns and villages.