What was Nicholas II’s reign like, and why did he have to abdicate?
Nicholas II
(1894-1917)
His background

• Deeply conservative (Like Al.III)
• Anti-semitic
• Had witnessed death of grandfather
• Educated by Pobedonostsev
• Married to a German wife (Alexandra)
1904 – Russo–Japanese War

Fought for glory and military prestige against an apparently inferior nation.

Nicholas referred to the Japanese scornfully as the “yellow monkeys”, showing how he viewed them. Plehve, the Minister of the Interior, claimed that a short victorious war would be for the benefit of Russia.

The war was a brutal humiliation, the Russian navy was comprehensively defeated and the army was outperformed.

The two impacts were that the Tsar and his government looked incompetent, and also the efforts to transport troops and supplies to the front line prevented sufficient supplies reaching the cities leading to starvation.
Growth of Terrorist threat

• 1904, terrorists killed Minister of the Interior – Plehve
• Replaced by moderate, Prince Sviatopolk-Mirskii, who lightened restrictions and censorship a little.
• In response, more liberal criticism was allowed
• Nicholas responded with a general manifesto for reform and liberalism; the lack of ACTUAL change created more popular dissatisfaction.
9th January 1905 – Bloody Sunday

In protest at the war, urban conditions and the perceived corruption of the government, a march was held to the Winter Palace to present the Tsar with a list of demands. It was peaceful and led by Father Gapon, a keen protester.

The Tsar refused to appear (he was not even at the Winter Palace) and soldiers fired on the crowd. Whilst the march was stopped, it also ended the popular belief that the Tsar was the people’s “Little Father” and on their side.

As a result, mutinies, strikes and marches broke out across Western Russia. One famous instance was the mutiny on the Battleship Potemkin.

This series of events became known as the 1905 Revolution.
Soldiers firing on the marchers on Bloody Sunday; this was filmed as a re-enactment by the Communist government in the 1920s.
October Manifesto

In response to the revolutionary activity, the Tsar was forced to declare his October Manifesto in 1905. It promised some reform, including a democratic government.

The Tsar did not see this all as a serious commitment, rather to him it was a temporary stopgap whilst he reasserted control. But when revolutionary activity threatened to break out in 1906 again he was forced to create the Duma.

The Duma was an advisory body, not legislative, meaning that it could advise the Tsar but not pass laws on their own.

Whenever the Tsar wanted to bypass the Duma, he used Stolypin to enforce Article 87 which dissolved the Duma long enough for the Tsar to take action without them. This was hugely unpopular.
The parties in the Duma...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lower class support</th>
<th>Middle class support</th>
<th>Upper class support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radical left</td>
<td>Moderate left</td>
<td>Extreme Rightists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialist Democrats</td>
<td>Conservatives</td>
<td>Nationalist Russian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Bolsheviks &amp;</td>
<td>(Moderate leftists)</td>
<td>parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mensheviks)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Other Right wing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Socialists           | Kadets               | Octobrists         |
| Revolutionaries      | Progressivists       |                    |

| Trudoviks            |                      |                    |

- Wanted complete socialist reform and power for the people (SDs favoured workers, SRs favoured peasants).
- Wanted greater reform, essentially a constitutional monarchy like UK where monarch’s powers are limited.
- Wanted democracy for Duma but with Tsar as the key source of political power.
- Favoured traditional structures with Tsar as dominant controller of decisions.
The first two Dumas...

Unsurprisingly, the first two Dumas were very left wing. This was because the majority of the voters were poor citizens, and so had sympathies for the extreme left. When the Tsar realised this, he closed the 1st Duma and called new elections. The 2nd Duma was more left wing and did not last much longer.

1st Duma (1906)
- 72 days
- Largely ignored
- Only 2/391 decisions became law.
- Closed by Tsar for being left wing

2nd Duma (1907)
- 5 months
- 200 Kadet deputies were banned from re-electing from 1st for “treason” (Vyborg Manifesto). This pushed voters to the extreme left.
- Little effect.
- Closed down on grounds of treason.
The last 2 Dumas...

The Tsar then changed the election rules to prevent left wing dominance. In the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Duma, 230 landowners could elect 1 deputy to the Duma. But city business men needed 1000 votes, middle classes needed 15000 votes, urban factory workers needed 60000 votes and peasants needed 125000 votes. These Dumas were more successful as the Tsar accepted them now that they were right wing led, but they were unpopular with the people and defeated the whole point of the October Manifesto (1905).

3\textsuperscript{rd} Duma (1907-1912)

- New rules of franchise limited electorate
- More right wing than before
- Some successes with land, education, Church and social reform until 1910.

4\textsuperscript{th} Duma (1912-1914)

- Continued work of 3\textsuperscript{rd} Duma
- Raised spending further on education. Tried to separate Church from state but failed.
- Tried to end drunkenness
- Ended in 1914 by Tsar.
- Topic link – later on the 4\textsuperscript{th} Duma would make themselves the Provisional Government, but to many people they were not legitimate due to the manipulated election rules.
Graph of the election results for the Four Dumas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1st Duma</th>
<th>2nd Duma</th>
<th>3rd Duma</th>
<th>4th Duma</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extreme Left</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Left</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Right</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More extreme Right</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key issue – note how left dominant the 1st and 2nd Dumas were, then how right wing the 3rd and 4th were. Can you explain this? If not, look back at the last page. How would this make you feel as a peasant? A middle class reformer? A member of the aristocracy?
Why are the Dumas important?

- They are an example of Nicholas not understanding the problems of the people.
- They prove that the Tsar was not willing to introduce real reform at the cost of his power.
- Once the Tsar failed to allow real democracy, it was clear to the people that he was not listening. He might have well not have introduced the Dumas, although they had some successes, because by manipulating the elections, he defeated the whole reason why he had introduced them in the first place.
Summary of Russia, 1914

- A dissatisfied and poor population
- A weak Duma that was manipulated and powerless
- An inefficient Tsar with a foreign and unpopular wife
- The Tsar, in 1905, lost his ‘divine’ image of ‘little father’
- A backwards economy
Two key characters

• Rasputin and Stolypin are both crucial in the slide towards revolution caused by the unpopularity of Tsar Nicholas II

• Both are important in the Tsar’s image, not because of what they did but because of how they were portrayed…
Character 1 - Stolypin

- Stolypin was the Prime Minister of the Duma.
- He was chosen by the Tsar, not elected by the people.
- As each Duma was dissolved, he remained in charge.
- He was seen as the Tsar’s man.
What did Stolypin achieve?

• He brought in limited reform with the Duma, including new laws allowing peasants to buy land.
• He also introduced National Insurance and improved education
• He stimulated economic growth to improve the finances of the country.
Why was Stolypin not fully successful then?

• His association with the dissolving of the elected dumas.

• Not all peasants wanted to replace traditional farming styles.

• Some peasants who sold their land found themselves homeless or jobless.

• Stolypin dealt severely with those who opposed the Tsar and had 3,000 hanged. The gallows were nicknamed ‘Stolypin’s necktie’.

• Stolypin continued Russification, which was unpopular with the different racial groups.
Stolypin’s downfall

- Was holding things together until 1910.
- He met opposition over a bill to extend Zemstva powers which would limit power of noble land owners.
- Tsar ordered him to use Clause 87 to suspend Duma for 3 days to pass the Bill.
- This blatant royal abuse of the Clause cost Stolypin his supporters and left the Duma broken and discontented.
- In 1911 he was shot whilst at the theatre. But he would likely have been dismissed in 1912 anyway.
Character 2 - Rasputin

Healer, sex maniac, or governmental fake?
Who was Rasputin?

- Rasputin was a mystic hermit who claimed to have spiritual healing powers.
- In 1907, he apparently cured the son of Nicholas and Alexandra who suffered haemophilia. Historians debate whether this is possible.
- He became a family favourite, ‘Our Friend’ in letters.
- He became so influential that he could soon appoint and dismiss government ministers.
Why was he so unpopular?

- Rumours of his **hedonistic** lifestyle offended traditionalists.
- Ministers disliked his influence on the Tsar and Tsarina, and his power in government.
- His power was seen to prove the corruption in the government.
- In WW1, when the Tsar went to command the army, the Tsarina and Rasputin were left in charge of Russia. This was deeply unpopular.
What did Rasputin have to do with 1917?

• On the one hand, Rasputin did very little directly to do with 1917 events, especially as he was killed in 1916...

• BUT:
  – He gave evidence that the Tsar was incompetent.
  – He divided many political figures from supporting the royal family.
  – He provided a source of anti-Tsarist satire and comedy which damaged Nicholas’ reputation.
A popular cartoon postcard produced by anti-Tsarist groups. It was intended to portray the Tsar as stupid and unwittingly in the power of “evil” Rasputin. The Tsarina, shown as much more calculating and malicious, is also in the control of Rasputin but seems to be more willing. Rasputin simply looks malevolent and threatening.

Key learning point – it is highly unlikely that any affair did occur between Alexandra and Rasputin, but this is irrelevant. The key point is that people THOUGHT that there was.
1916 - Killing Rasputin involved:

- Arsenic in cakes and wine
- Shot in the back
- Shot several more times
- Beaten with a club
- Thrown into a river and drowning

This story was told by people who were there, but it was told several years later. It may or may not be true. If it is not true, what could have influenced the story?

There are also multiple conspiracy theories. The most believable is that it was a British Secret Service hit. Who knows? What is important is how people perceived him.
Rasputin dead...
So, the total list of causes of the abdication of Nicholas II in 1917...

- Loss of reputation after 1905
- Failures of the Dumas to promote stability
- The unpopularity of Stolypin
- The public view of Alexandra and Rasputin
- The impact of WW1
- The Tsar’s decision to go to the frontline
- Bad decisions such as the Lena goldfield massacre

The three points in red are not in these notes. Look them up in your class notes or textbook.
Practice question

• The main cause of the Tsar’s abdication was his association with political figures who were unpopular and seen as corrupt.

• Do you agree with this statement? (30)

  – You should consider ways in which this is a true statement, and ways in which it is not correct, in other words other causes of the abdication. Then you should decide which factor is the most important, and why.