

# Causes of 1905 revolution

## Witte's economic reforms

- W's reforms industrialised to a degree.
- But they also created cities with poor conditions.
- This led to a concentration of people open to reformist political ideas.

## Alexander III's reactionary policies

- A.III's policies had repressed the people.
- This had caused discontent.
- This encouraged revolutionary ideas.

## Nicholas II's lack of reform

- People had expected N.II to introduce more reform than his father.
- When he had not, this led to dissatisfaction.

## The Russo-Japanese War

- A humiliating defeat for the Tsar.
- It seemed to prove that the Tsar was incompetent, and it exaggerated the problems people already felt.

## The growth of left wing ideas in Russia since the 1870s

- Growing poverty encouraged revolutionary ideas.
- At the same time, growing urban populations allowed easy spread of ideas.

## Problems in the countryside

- Growing population reduced land available.
- This increased poverty and unhappiness.
- In turn this encouraged revolutionary ideas.

## Problems in the towns

- As a result of industrialisation, towns grew.
- Urban populations, living in poverty, were open to revolutionary ideas.
- These ideas spread quickly amongst the masses.

## Bloody Sunday, 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 1905

- The last straw; the massacre of innocent protestors proved that the Tsar did not care for his people.

## 1905 revolution

- As a result of all of these causes, revolution broke out.

## Witte's economic reforms

Sergei Witte began reforming the economy of Russia in 1892 under Alexander III, and continued under Nicholas II until 1903.

His main aims were to industrialise the economy rapidly. This he achieved overall. It is true that Russia remained the most backward country in comparison to the whole of Europe, and her output and industrial base was low, but Witte succeeded in building thousands of miles of train track, as well as raising key industrial figures – coal production rose from 6,000 tonnes per year in 1890 to 16,000 tonnes in 1906, and iron and steel production rose from 2,000 tonnes in 1890 to 8,200 tonnes in 1900.

This was largely achieved by obtaining foreign investment in Russia to provide much needed capital. By the early 1900s, 600 million roubles had been invested by France. However increased taxation was also necessary from the population.

This all created growth in the existing industrial cities, and several previously small towns grew rapidly. Near Baku on the Iranian border, a whole oil industry sprang up, and whole industrial areas, like the Putilov Engineering Works in St. Petersburg, were developed.

The impact of all of this was to create a much larger urban, industrial population which lived in cramped conditions which were unhealthy and crowded. Although Witte tried to counter this with limited social reform, urban industrial areas became hotbeds for revolutionary ideas.

### Alexander III's reactionary policies

As a result of his training under Pobedonostsev, his conservative outlook on the world, the impact of seeing his father murdered and his poor grasp of the social and cultural makeup of his country, Alexander III became a very conservative, reactionary ruler.

Many of his policies were aimed at crushing protest and reinforcing autocratic rulership. A key decision was to increase the power of the secret police by forming the Okhrana and increasing their funding and their powers. Further to this, university teaching was limited and the content of courses prescribed by the government to prevent left wing ideas spreading among students. Poor families were barred from grammar school education, and newspapers were heavily censored.

It is true that some policies were aimed at helping the peasants, such as the Peasants' Land Bank, but these were far outweighed by the reactionary policies.

The result was that the population felt oppressed. Many turned to left wing groups, particularly in the cities, as a means to dream of greater freedom. This created a growing threat to the government.

### Nicholas II's lack of reform

Nicholas II succeeded from his father in 1894. Many had hoped that he might slacken up on the policies of Alexander III, but Nicholas II had learned his ideas from his father. He did have some training to be Tsar – he had led the 1891 Famine Relief Commission to provide food to the starving peasants, and Witte had insisted to Alexander III that Nicholas be made chairman of the Trans-Siberian Railway company so that he had an understanding of the new industries. However he was not bright; one of the members of the court wrote in a diary that he did not have the brains to run a post office.

Key amongst his ideas was his firm belief that the “divine right of kingship” must be maintained. He was encouraged in this by Pobedonostsev and also his wife, Alexandra. His wife was deeply unpopular with the royal court and the people, as she was a German and spoke almost no Russian.

Nicholas was particularly against democratic government, even though he had visited Britain and been impressed when he watched a debate in the House of Commons. He once said “I want everyone to know that I will devote all my strength to maintain, for the good of the whole nation, the principle of absolute autocracy, as firmly and as strongly as did my late lamented father.” This meant that he was unwilling to compromise with the growing popular demand for a parliament-type elected government.

## The growth of left-wing ideas in Russia since the 1870s

Under Alexander II, a number of organisations had appeared such as the People's Will, Black Repartition and Land & Liberty. These had been mainly anarchist groups with the sole aim of collapsing the government and society.

From the 1880s, many of these groups started to look to Marxism instead of anarchism, in order to create a revolution that would lead to an equal, communist state. The most significant of these groups was the Russian Social Democratic Party, led by Lenin. This formed in 1898 from a large number of smaller Marxist groups.

Although these groups were not large before 1898, their ideas spread quickly amongst the industrial workers in the towns. Some peasants also adopted the ideas, but since Marxism focuses on industrial workers, not agricultural (farming) workers, it was of less interest to them.

One main factor in the growth of these ideas therefore, is the growth of towns thanks to Witte's plans, and also the reactionary nature of Alexander III and Nicholas II's plans, which caused a lot of dissatisfaction.

The main groups were:

- *Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs) who promised an end to tsardom, equal rights and land sharing for the peasants.*
- *Social Democratic Party (SDP) who promised an end to tsardom, equal rights and communal power for industrial workers.*
- *Liberals, who promised a western style of government, where a parliament would be elected to help the Tsar.*
- *National groups, who promised to free various minorities from Russian control.*

### Problems in the countryside

In the late nineteenth century, the population of the whole of Russia was growing at a rapid rate. It rose from 60 million in the 1860s to around 132 million by about 1910.

The largest growth was in the countryside. This meant that local communities of land, known as *Mirs*, or village communes, had to keep redistributing land to the villagers. Each time, families had to have smaller and smaller areas of land. In 1877, the average family had 35 acres (about 25 football fields), whilst in 1905 they only had 28 acres (about 15 football fields).

The result was that families could produce less food. At the same time, Witte was putting taxes up to fund his vast industrialisation program. The impact on families was harsh, and there were severe famines in 1891, 1892, 1898 and 1901 which made conditions even worse.

As a result, many peasants came to resent the policies and taxes of the government. Armed uprisings, or *jacqueries*, started to occur with increasing regularity. Usually it involved peasants attacking local landlord or government buildings to destroy records of tax arrears.

### Problems in the towns

The rapid industrialisation led to a movement of workers from the countryside to the towns. Some towns were already industrial centres, but others appeared quickly from what had been small towns and villages. The industrial workforce rose from 1.4 million in 1890 to 2.6 million in 1906. This was still a small percentage of the overall population of Russia (125 million in 1897), but they were concentrated in small areas.

The majority of these workers lived in poor conditions. Most lived in barrack-style factory accommodation, or in cheaply constructed shanty-towns. Aside from alcohol, there was little entertainment to be enjoyed, and food supplies were poorly organised and of low quality. As with most early industrial towns, overcrowding and poor sanitation made them unhealthy places to live and illness was commonplace.

Not only the living conditions, but also the working conditions were poor. Factories were dangerous, and although Witte set up factory inspection teams and limited working hours, serious accidents were commonplace.

The result was that the population of industrial cities soon became unhappy, and revolutionary, left-wing ideas started to spread quickly. Occasionally these broke out into riots and strikes.

## Russo-Japanese War

Russia desperately wanted a port in the east that did not freeze in winter, such as Vladivostok. They achieved this by renting Port Arthur off the Chinese, and getting permission to build a rail line to it from Siberia through the Chinese territory of Manchuria.

But the Japanese also wanted economic control of the region. Japan had also been industrialising and wanted the resources in the region. In February, 1904, the Japanese made a surprise attack on Russian forces. They captured Port Arthur, destroyed the Russian Pacific fleet, and defeated the army units in Manchuria.

Back in Russia, popular feeling demanded a war, and the Tsar thought that a quick successful war would distract the people from the problems. He did not consider that they might lose; he dismissively spoke of an easy victory over the “yellow monkeys”.

The Japanese sent troops down the Trans-Siberian railway. They also ordered the Baltic fleet (near Europe) to make the 18,000 mile voyage to Port Arthur, which took 7 months. En route, disaster happened – British fishing trawlers flashed their lights at the fleet, which panicked and opened fire on their own ships and the trawlers, sinking several British boats and killing several on both sides. Once the fleet reached Manchuria, they were decisively defeated in the Straits of Tsushima by the Japanese. The army, arriving later was forced to surrender.

The whole thing was seen as a humiliation for Russia and the Tsar in particular. It made them look weak and foolish. It is true that most Russians thought that it was a long way away, and so stayed loyal to the Tsar, but the damage had been done. The Tsar had lost some of his special status amongst the population by appearing incompetent.