

On the improvement of order in the state

The disturbances and unrest in St Petersburg, Moscow and in many other parts of our Empire have filled Our heart with great and profound sorrow. The welfare of the Russian Sovereign and His people is inseparable and national sorrow is His too. The present disturbances could give rise to national instability and present a threat to the unity of Our State. The oath which We took as Tsar compels Us to use all Our strength, intelligence and power to put a speedy end to this unrest which is so dangerous for the State. The relevant authorities have been ordered to take measures to deal with direct outbreaks of disorder and violence and to protect people who only want to go about their daily business in peace. However, in view of the need to speedily implement earlier measures to pacify the country, we have decided that the work of the government must be unified. We have therefore ordered the government to take the following measures in fulfilment of our unbending will:

1. Fundamental civil freedoms will be granted to the population, including real personal inviolability, freedom of conscience, speech, assembly and association.
2. Participation in the Duma will be granted to those classes of the population which are at present deprived of voting powers, insofar as is possible in the short period before the convocation of the Duma, and this will lead to the development of a universal franchise. There will be no delay to the Duma elect already been organized.
3. It is established as an unshakeable rule that no law can come into force without its approval by the State Duma and representatives of the people will be given the opportunity to take real part in the supervision of the legality of government bodies.

We call on all true sons of Russia to remember the homeland, to help put a stop to this unprecedented unrest and, together with this, to devote all their strength to the restoration of peace to their native land.

Once the October Manifesto had been introduced, most middle class protestors quit protesting and returned to their lives. However, the radical left wing working groups continued to strike. They demanded an 8 hour day and the Bolsheviks called for new strikes in November 1905. This, combined with the fact that the revolution was no smaller because the middle classes had left, allowed the government to deal with the revolution brutally. Workers and police fought across barricades in Moscow and 1000 workers died. Troops returning in December from the Russo-Japanese War helped the police to restore order.

Some began to hope that this combination of firm repression against radicals combined with mild reform (the Manifesto) might be a new way forward for the government. But others believed that the Manifesto was simply empty words.

Witte wanted to draw up a government which would united behind the Tsar, but too many liberals demanded further change and reform. They demanded a "constitutional assembly" which would completely rewrite the rules of government. This was unacceptable to the Tsar; the liberals split into the Octobrists and the Kadets, depending which side of the issue they took.

Before the Duma could meet in May 1906, the Tsar published The Fundamental Laws, which were the rules for the Duma to follow. When you read them, compare them to what had been promised in the October Manifesto above – how much had the Tsar changed what he had promised?

The Fundamental Laws (extracts)

1 The Russian State is one and indivisible....

3 The Russian language is the general language of the state, and its use is compulsory in the army, the navy and state and public institutions....

4. The All-Russian Emperor possesses the supreme autocratic power. Not only fear and conscience, but God himself, commands obedience to his authority.

5. The person of the Sovereign Emperor is sacred and inviolable.

7 The sovereign emperor exercises power in conjunction with the State Council and the State Duma.

8 The sovereign emperor possesses the initiative in all legislative matters. The Fundamental Laws may be subject to revision in the State Council and State Duma only on His initiative. The sovereign emperor ratifies the laws. No law can come into force without his approval. . . .

9. The Sovereign Emperor approves laws; and without his approval no legislative measure can become law.

10. The Sovereign Emperor possesses the administrative power in its totality throughout the entire Russian state. On the highest level of administration his authority is direct; on subordinate levels of administration, in conformity with the law, he determines the degree of authority of subordinate branches and officials who act in his name and in accordance with his orders.

12 The sovereign emperor takes charge of all the external relations of the Russian State. He determines the direction of Russia's foreign policy. . . .

13. The Sovereign Emperor alone declares war, concludes peace, and negotiates treaties with foreign states.

14 The sovereign emperor is the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian army and navy.

15 The sovereign emperor appoints and dismisses the Chairman the Council of Ministers and individual Ministers....

Learning point – look at point 3 in the Oct.Man. which promises the right of the Duma to control laws. Then look at points 4, 7, 8, 9 and 10 in the Fun.Laws. How has this changed? How would the centre and left wing parties respond to this change? Was Nicholas II wise in this? Was the Duma what the people had expected?