

Problems of Rapid Industrialization in Russia

Russia in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century was a massive empire, stretching from Poland to the Pacific, and home in 1914 to 165 million people of many languages religions and cultures. Ruling such a massive state was difficult, and the ruling monarch, Czar Nicholas II, was not a very good ruler.

The industrial revolution came to Russia largely in the 1890's, with ironworks, factories and the associated elements of industrial society. While the development was neither as advanced nor as swift as in a country like Britain, Russia's cities began to expand and large numbers of peasants moved to the cities to take up new jobs.

By the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries, millions were in these tightly packed and expanding urban areas, experiencing problems like poor and cramped housing, bad wages, and a lack of rights in their jobs. The government was afraid of the developing urban class, but more afraid of driving foreign investment away by supporting better wages, and there was a consequent lack of reforming legislation. The urban workforce often remained closely linked to the peasants, being a traveling worker or retaining land in the village.

These workers swiftly began to grow politicized and chafed against government restrictions on their protests, forming a fertile ground for the socialist revolutionaries who moved between cities and exile in siberia. In order to try and counter the spread of anti-Tsarist ideology, the government formed legal, but neutered (powerless), trade unions to take the place of the

banned but powerful equivalents. In the revolutions of 1905 and 1917, heavily politicized socialist workers played a major role, although there were many different factions and beliefs under the umbrella of 'socialism'.

Source: Causes of the Russian Revolution,

<http://europeanhistory.about.com/od/russiaandukraine/a/Causes-Of-The-Russian-Revolution.htm>

The Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905)

Q: When and why did the Russo-Japanese War break out?

A: It broke out on 8 February 1904. The Russians and Japanese had been jostling for some years for control over Korea and Manchuria, which they both regarded as strategically and economically important.

Q: Who won the war?

A: The Japanese won every battle. The Russian naval forces based in Port Arthur were rattled by the losses they suffered in February 1904, and even more so by the death of their most charismatic commander, Admiral Stepan Makarov, when his flagship was blown up by a mine in April 1904.

Eventually the fleet was destroyed by the Japanese forces besieging Port Arthur from the landside, and the port itself surrendered in January 1905. The Russians sent another fleet to the far east to redeem the situation but, after an epic voyage, that too was obliterated by the Japanese at the battle of Tsushima in May 1905.

Q: What was the historical significance of the war, and what were the long-term effects?

A: The Japanese victory greatly encouraged nationalism in Asia and Africa. It was the first war in which a non-European nation had defeated a great European power using all the resources of modern technology.

In Russia the war led to revolts that presaged the revolution of 1917, and showed how politically destabilizing defeat would be in future conflicts.

The only part of the Russian state that had performed effectively was the

Trans-Siberian Railway, which had kept hundreds of thousands of troops supplied thousands of miles from St Petersburg.

The War demonstrated the general weakness of old-fashioned autocracies, like Russia, which could not mobilize the support of the whole people - every European autocrat involved in the First World War was to be overthrown.

Source: History Extra: <http://www.historyextra.com/feature/your-60-second-guide-russo-japanese-war>

Bloody Sunday in St. Petersburg:
About 200 people died and 800 were wounded during the
march led by Father George Gapon on January 22nd, 1905.

That Sunday morning in St Petersburg, some 150,000 people gathered at the six designated assembly points to converge on the Winter Palace and present a petition to the Tsar, Nicholas II, who as the 'little father' of his people would surely be bound to sympathize with them. The march was organized by an Orthodox priest, Father George Gapon, head of the Assembly of Russian Factory and Mill Workers, one of the several trade unions set up the previous year with the approval of the ministry of the Interior to be a safety valve for grievances and to promote loyalty to the regime. Gapon, however, alarmed the authorities by his socialist attitude and took advice from the Union of Liberation, an organization of middle-class liberal intellectuals campaigning for parliamentary democracy. At the beginning of January, when four of his members were sacked from their jobs, he started a strike which spread rapidly until 120,000 workers were out.

Dressed in their Sunday best, with the women and children at the front, the marchers carried icons, crosses or pictures of the Tsar. They sang hymns as if in a religious procession and the less optimistic of them had prepared themselves for martyrdom. Their petition, inspired by the Union of Liberation, asked for the working day to be cut to eight hours, for the right to strike and for the election of a constituent assembly by secret ballot and universal suffrage. They never reached the Winter Palace, where Nicholas was in any

case not in residence. Not thinking the situation was seriously threatening, he had gone off to the country.

His ministers meanwhile had decided to block the march short of the Winter Palace. Thousands of armed troops were stationed at key points, but there was not expected to be any need for force. When the advancing columns appeared, however, while some of the soldiers fired warning shots into the air, some panicked and fired straight into the packed crowds. At the Narva Gate, where Father Gapon himself led the marchers, forty people were shot dead and the horrified Gapon cried out, 'there is no god anymore, there is no Tsar'. At the Troitsky Bridge, Marchers were charged and slashed with sabers by Cossack cavalry and on the Nevsky Prospect cannon were used against the crowd.

The day's total death toll is put at about 200 with 800 more wounded.

If anything was needed to undermine common people's allegiance to the Tsar, this was it. Gapon prudently retreated abroad, while a wave of protests and strikes across the country built up into a full-blown revolution which presently forced Nicholas II to issue the October Manifesto, promising to introduce democracy. Gapon returned and was murdered by the government agent. The Manifesto had drawn the revolutionary movement's teeth, for the time being.

Source: History Today: <http://www.historytoday.com/richard-cavendish/%E2%80%98bloody-sunday%E2%80%99-st-petersburg>

World War 1

The First World War provided the catalyst for Russia's revolutionary year of 1917. The war itself went badly from the start, prompting the Tsar to take personal charge in 1915, a decision that placed the full responsibility for the next year of failure on his shoulders. With over 9 Million casualties in the war, the population was decimated and the need for more soldiers grew. As demand for ever more soldiers increased, and the peasant population grew angry as young men and horses, both essential for the war, were taken away, reducing the amount they could grow and damaging their standard of living.

Russia's most successful farms suddenly found their labor and material removed for the war, and the less successful peasants became ever more concerned with self-sufficiency (taking care of their daily essentials like finding food), and even less concerned with selling a surplus, than ever before. Inflation occurred and prices rose, so hunger became endemic (widespread)

Source: Causes of the Russian Revolution:

<http://europeanhistory.about.com/od/russiaandukraine/a/Causes-Of-The-Russian-Revolution-2.htm>

Russian Revolution of 1905

The Revolution of 1905 was aware of mass political and social unrest that spread through vast areas of the Russian Empire, some of which was directed at the government. It included worker strikes, peasant unrest, and military mutinies. It led to constitutional Reform including the establishment of the State Duma of the Russian Empire, the multi-party system, and the Russian Constitution of 1906.

The Russian Revolution of 1905 began St. Petersburg on Jan. 22 when troops fired on a defenseless crowd of workers, who led by a priest, were marching to the Winter Palace to petition Czar Nicholas II. This ‘bloody Sunday’ was followed in succeeding months by a series of strikes, riots, assassinations, naval mutinies, and peasant outbreaks. These disorders, coupled with the disaster of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), which revealed the corruption and incompetence of the czarist regime, forced the government to promise the establishment of a consultative duma, or assembly, elected by limited franchise. Nonetheless, unsatisfied popular demands provoked a general strike, and in a manifesto issued in October the czar granted civil liberties and a representative duma to be elected democratically (basically created a constitutional monarchy)

The manifesto split the groups that collectively had brought about the revolution. Those who were satisfied with the manifesto formed the Octobrist party. The liberals who wanted more power for the duma consolidated in the Constitutional Democratic party. The Social Democrats, who had organized a soviet, or workers’ council, at St. Petersburg, attempted to continue the strike

movement and compel social reforms. The government arrested the soviet and put down (Dec, 1905) a workers' insurrection in Moscow.

When order was restored, the czar put forth the Fundamental Laws, under which the power of the duma was limited (he basically took back full control of the government and took all power away from the Duma). Some attempt at economic reform was made by the czar's minister, Stolypin, but his efforts failed. At the same time Stolypin ruthlessly suppressed the revolutionary movement. When World War I broke out in 1914, most elements of Russia (except the Bolsheviks) united in supporting the war effort. However, the repeated military reverses, the acute food shortages, the appointment of inept ministers, and the intense suffering of the civilian population created a revolutionary climate by the end of 1916. The sinister influence of Rasputin over Czarina Alexandra Feodorovna, whom Nicholas had left in charge of the government when he took personal command of the armed forces in 1915, destroyed all support for the czar except among extreme reactionaries.

Weak Leadership by Czar Nicholas II

Russia was ruled by an emperor called the Czar, and for three centuries this position had been held by the Romanov family. They ruled alone, with no true representative bodies: even the Duma, an elected body created in 1905, could be completely ignored by the Czar when he wished to, and he did. Freedom of expression was limited, with censorship of books and newspapers, while a secret police operated to crush dissent, frequently either executing people or sending them to exile in Siberia. The result was an autocratic regime under which republicans, democrats, revolutionaries, socialists and others both chafed and were increasingly desperate for reform. Some wanted violent change, other peaceful, but as opposition to the Czar was banned, opponents were increasingly driven to extreme measures.

The Czar - Nicholas II - has sometimes been accused of lacking the will to govern. Many historians have concluded that this wasn't the case; the problem was that Nicholas was determined to govern while lacking any idea or ability to run an autocracy properly. Nicholas' answer to the crisis facing the Russian regime - and the answer of his father - was to look back to the seventeenth century (100 years prior) and try to resurrect an almost late-medieval system, instead of reforming and modernizing Russia. This was a major problem and source of discontent which directly led to the revolution.

Source: Causes of the Russian Revolution,

<http://europeanhistory.about.com/od/russiaandukraine/a/Causes-Of-The-Russian-Revolution.htm>

Peasant Support of the Bolsheviks

In 1916, a full three quarters of the Russian population were peasants who lived and farmed in small villages. In theory their life had improved in 1861, before which they were serfs who were owned and could be traded by their landowners. 1861 saw the serfs freed and issued with small amounts of land, but in return they had to pay back a sum to the government, and the result was a mass of small farms deeply in debt.

The state of agriculture in central Russia was poor, using techniques deeply out of date and with little hope of improving thanks widespread illiteracy and no capital invest. Families lived just above the subsistence level, and around 50% had a member who had left the village to find other work, often in the towns. As the central Russian population boomed, land became scarce. Their life was in sharp contrast to the rich landowners, who held 20% of the land in large estates and were often members of the Russian upper class. The western and southern reaches of the massive Russian Empire were slightly different, with a larger number of better off peasants and large commercial farms. The result was by 1917, a central mass of disaffected peasants, angry at increased attempts to control them, and at people who profited from the land without directly working it.

The common peasant mindset was firmly against the upper classes and the landed nobility. The Bolsheviks (members of the social Democratic Workers Party/Communism) strongly appealed to many peasants because they promised to turn over the land to the peasants and workers. The Bolsheviks

slogan was “Peace, Land, Bread” and many peasants believed the Bolsheviks and communism would give them a better life.

Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and the Communist Manifesto

“The Communist Manifesto,” published in 1848 by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, was among the most influential writings in world History. Marx theorized that all human history was defined by a class struggle between the ruling class and the working class. He further argued that the working class would eventually overthrow the ruling class and usher in a Utopian society in which all property was owned by society as a whole. Marx’s philosophy was highly influential in the development of communism in Russia and throughout the world.

Marx taught that industrialization and capitalism were necessary steps for society to go through before the working class could arise and institute communism. Before the Communist Revolution the Russian Empire was a monarchy, ruled by a tsar. Russia was largely an agricultural country and was in the very early stages of industrialization during Marx’s lifetime. Because of this, the Russian government didn’t consider Marx’s writings to pose a serious threat. Marx’s writings were allowed to be distributed in Russia even though they were banned in many other Countries. “The Manifesto” and “Das Kapital” became influential to many of the early Russian socialists and communists.

Marx’s writings had a profound impact on Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky, who would in turn promote communist ideas in Russia through publication of a Marxist periodical called “Iskra” -- “The Spark.” Lenin became the most influential figure in early Russian Communism. Russia’s many social, economic, and political problems provided a fertile ground for communist/socialist ideals and it spread quickly throughout the country.

Marx's and Engel's ideas soon ignited a fire in the peasants and working class citizens of Russia who demanded better living conditions and the right to rule themselves. Many Russians believed that the ideas put forth in the Communist Manifesto would provide them with a better life, and joined communist and socialist parties. Soon these groups would lead a revolution that would overthrow the Czar and establish the first communist nation in the world.