

# LIFE IN THE LAND OF THE TSARS

## Overview

“ A revolution is a struggle to the death between the future and the past. ”

FIDEL CASTRO

Politics plays a crucial role in the way the past is remembered and recorded. So, when did the **old regime** in Russia begin? Not in 1534 with the reign of Ivan the Terrible, or 1613 when the **Romanov Dynasty** began, but in 1917. The 'old regime' is a revolutionary term, as 'old' only applies when something 'new' appears. Revolutionaries must criticise the former regime in order to legitimise their own achievements. Additionally, the revolutionaries' own situations are often tenuous as they desperately search for solutions to the same conflicts that downed the former government. Hence, the former regime is termed 'old' implying 'outdated' and 'backward', compared to the achievements and progress of the 'new' revolutionary government.

In pre-1917 Russia, the Romanov Dynasty seemed to represent what had always been and would ever be. However, revolutions occur because conflicts and tensions create unrest within a country. Therefore, this chapter analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the land of the tsars: the political system of autocracy; the social hierarchy of **privileges** that divided the gentry from the peasant; and the economic reality of industrial workers and **peasants**. Despite the problems evident in the Tsar's regime, was revolution inevitable?

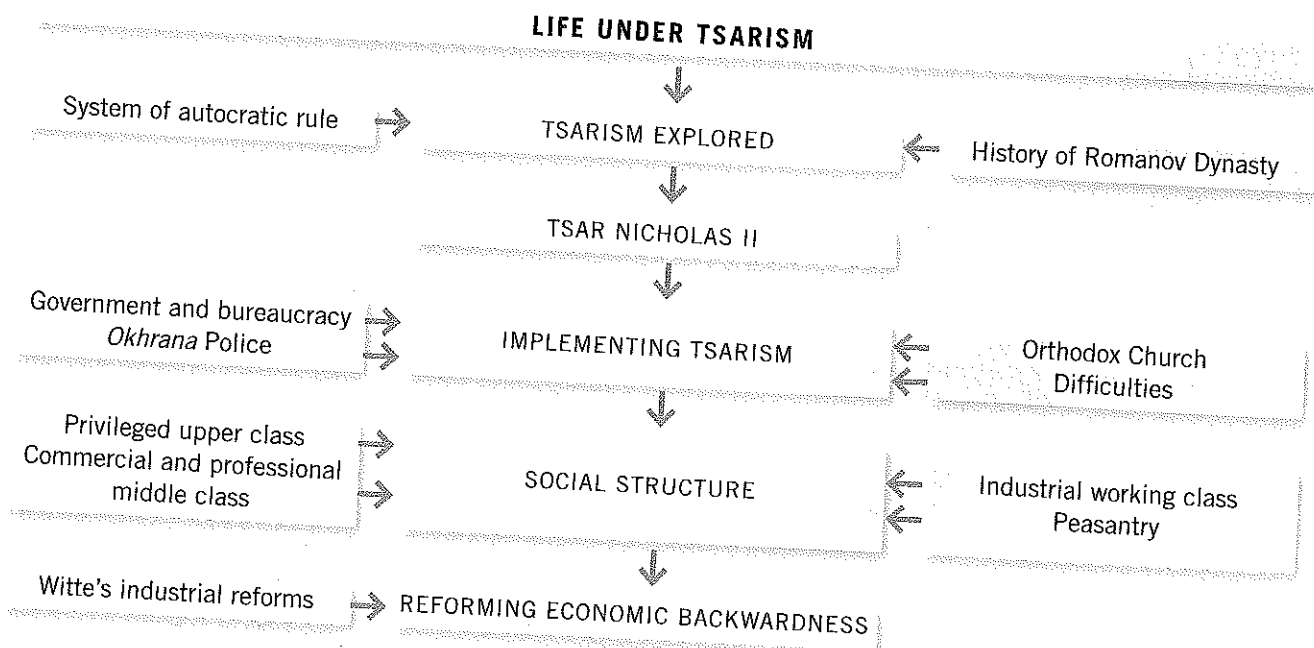
old regime  
the revolutionary name  
given to the period ruled  
by the tsars, indicating  
that the revolutionaries  
had introduced a new and  
better society

Romanov Dynasty  
the series of rulers  
beginning with Michael  
Romanov in 1613

privileges  
economic and social  
benefits given to the upper  
social classes due to birth  
rather than talent or merit

peasants  
the lowest class in the  
social system who were  
dependent on making a  
living from either owning  
or renting land

## Flow of chapter



## Key issues

- What was tsarism?
- Leadership profile – Tsar Nicholas II
- How was tsarism implemented?
- Why did the social structure promote privilege?
- What attempts were made to reform Russia's economic backwardness?

## What was tsarism?

### Defining tsarism

Understanding Russian psychology is essential to understanding the importance of the system of tsarism. Russian culture has traditionally relied on a strong central leader.

“*Russian society is very much like a colony of bees, in which royalty is a natural necessity. Just as the colony would cease to exist without its queen so, too, would Russian society cease to exist without the Tsar.*

AUGUST VON HAXTHAUSEN, *Studies on the Interior of Russia* (1844)

The Fundamental Laws of the Empire were statements issued in 1716 and again in 1832. They described the Tsar as being ‘an **autocratic** and unlimited monarch’ and stated that ‘God himself commands his supreme power be obeyed’. ‘Tsar’ is the Russian word for ruler and ‘tsarism’ is used to refer to this system of one-person rule. These autocratic powers of the tsar are explained by Australian historian Marilyn Hoysted:

“*Neither a constitution nor other institutions limited the Tsar's authority. All law emanated from the Tsar. Russian officials swore an oath of loyalty to him personally, not to the state. Civil servants and ministers needed his permission to resign ... Nicholas II believed Autocracy to be a sacred trust and Russia the dynasty's patrimony to be handed on to his own son intact.*

HOYSTED, *The Russian Revolution: A Student Handbook* (2001), P. 8

### Tracing tsarism

**Beginning of Romanov Dynasty** – After years of political uncertainty, Michael Romanov became Tsar of Russia in 1613. This began a 300-year dynasty, during which Michael Romanov's direct descendants ruled Russia, and which only ended with the **abdication** of Nicholas II in 1917. The Romanovs adopted the double-headed eagle from the Byzantine period for their coat of arms, implying that they were as powerful as the Roman Empire.

**Peter the Great (1682–1725)** – Peter I's rule was characterised by a forceful drive to westernise Russia. In order to create a ‘window to the west’, a new capital city

was built in 1712 on the Baltic Sea which he called **St Petersburg**, after himself. This impressive legacy was also an appropriate symbol of the autocratic dominance of Peter I, who engaged in foreign wars, introduced conscription and raised taxes.

**Catherine the Great (1762–96)** – Catherine was the most notable of the three women who occupied the Russian throne for the majority of the 1700s. She was greatly influenced by the progressive thinkers of the Enlightenment and this encouraged the development of the educated classes, called the **intelligentsia**. During the nineteenth century, the members of this intellectual elite gradually began to see themselves as members of a new class that would liberate the Russian people.

**Nicholas I (1825–55)** – Despite his censorship and use of secret police, it was during conservative Nicholas I's reign that Western **ideas** took hold in Russia. A significant philosophical divide appeared within the intelligentsia between those ‘Westerners’ who welcomed the Western influence into Russia, and the ‘slavophiles’ who believed that Russia's unique and traditional culture needed to be protected and promoted. Opposition to autocratic rule emerged in the work of Russian writers such as Herzen and Kropotkin, and novelists such as Tolstoy and Turgenev.

**Alexander II (1855–81)** – The Crimean War (1853–56) against the Turkish Empire for control of the Black Sea revealed major problems in Russian society and sparked significant reforms. Alexander II issued an **Edict of Emancipation** in 1861 which abolished serfdom, freeing 40 million peasants. A new system of administration was established called the **mir**, meaning village commune, which controlled land and property redistribution. In 1864, **zemstvos** were created; these were elected assemblies that represented the landowners, peasant communities and townspeople. Such assemblies, or local councils, had significant control over local finances, health care and education facilities, road and bridge maintenance, and improvement to agriculture. Just as significant as Alexander II's reforms were the circumstances of his death. His bloody **assassination** by means of a bomb, by members of the radical revolutionary group called The People's Will, began a strict period of political repression known as ‘the Reaction’. To remember his death, a magnificent church was built called ‘The Church of the Saviour on Spilled Blood’.

**Alexander III (1881–94)** – Alexander III was Nicholas II's father who ruled during a reactionary period in Russia's history. His unexpected death in 1894 left his son to take on the responsibilities of running the nation.



The Romanov coat of arms

**St Petersburg**  
the major city in Russia  
along with Moscow

**intelligentsia**  
the educated thinkers,  
writers and artists

**ideas**  
abstract concepts and  
beliefs that provide hope  
and solutions to problems

**Edict of Emancipation**  
issued in 1861, this  
provided greater freedom  
for the Russian serfs  
(peasants)

**mir**  
village governments that  
were formed under tsarism  
to provide cooperation and  
coordination in rural areas

**zemstvos**  
local councils that were  
made up of elected  
representatives of  
peasants and landowners

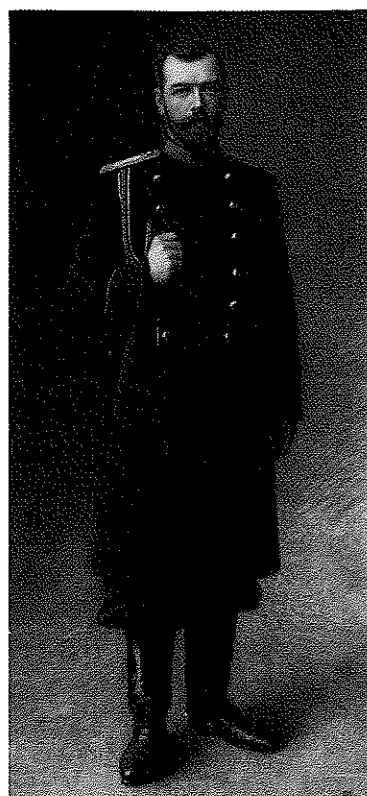
**assassination**  
murder of a public figure  
for political reasons

**autocratic**  
a political system whereby  
the ruler has complete  
political power, unlimited  
by a formal constitution or  
parliament

**constitution**  
the set of rules by which a  
country is governed

**abdication**  
the resignation of a  
monarch from their  
political role

## Leadership profile – Tsar Nicholas II



Emperor Nicholas II

**Buchanan**  
Sir George Buchanan was the British Ambassador in Russia from 1910 to 1918

democracy  
a liberal concept where citizens of a country have a say in how the country is to be governed and by whom

**Promotion** – became Tsar at the age of 26 when his father Alexander III died unexpectedly of kidney failure in 1894. Sir George Buchanan, the British Ambassador to Russia from 1910, wrote that: 'The Emperor Nicholas has not inherited his father's commanding personality nor the strong character and prompt decision making which are so essential to an autocratic ruler.' Nicholas even wrote to his brother-in-law in 1894 that: 'I am not prepared to be a Tsar. I never wanted to become one. I know nothing of the business of ruling.'

**Married** – to Princess Alexandra, the German grand-daughter of Queen Victoria. Although the Tsarina was sometimes shy, she was very determined that autocratic power would not be shared.

**Style of leadership** – believed totally in the autocracy of the tsarist system and argued that a **democracy** and elections would result in political collapse. In his opening manifesto of 1894, Nicholas declared: 'I shall adhere as unswervingly as my father to the principle of autocracy.'

**Character strengths** – a devoted family man who preferred his private world to public affairs. Genuinely wanted to bring happiness to his country.

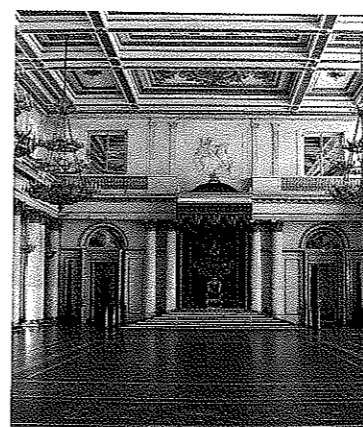
**Character weaknesses** – knew very little about the reality of life in Russia. He relied on advisers as he never went on tours to visit factories or villages. His sister, Duchess Olga, stated that: 'He was wholly ignorant about governmental matters. Nicky



Main staircase in the Winter Palace

had been trained as a soldier. He should have been taught statesmanship and he was not.'

**Attitude to violence** – his belief in autocracy resulted in a willingness to use violence to suppress opposition to his regime. Alexander Kerensky, the leader of Russia in 1917, stated that: 'His mentality and circumstances kept him wholly out of touch with his people. From his youth he had been trained to believe that his welfare and the welfare of Russia were one and the same thing, so that "disloyal" workmen, peasants and students who were shot down, executed or exiled seemed to him mere monsters who must be destroyed for the sake of the country.'



One of the Tsar's throne rooms

**Children** – four daughters, Tatiana, Olga, Maria and Anastasia, and one son, Alexis, whose haemophilia condition influenced the leadership and decisions of the Tsar and Tsarina.



Grand Duchesses: Maria, Tatiana, Anastasia and Olga



Tsarevich Alexis

**Tsar and tradition** – 'Nicholas surrounded himself with trappings of an earlier time. He insisted that official documents use archaic spelling, and he held costume balls where everyone

wore replicas of two-hundred-year-old outfits. He preferred to spend time in Moscow, with its traditional wooden architecture and winding streets, rather than among the massive stone palaces in the newer, more European St Petersburg.' (Ackerman & DuVall, *A Force More Powerful*, 2000, p. 17)

**Doomed from birth?** – Nicholas was well aware that his birthday on 6 May fell on Saint Job's day. Job was a man in the Bible who, although loved by God, was tested with a series of incredible personal disasters. Even at his coronation in 1896, 1000 spectators were disastrously killed in the surging crowd. Nicholas stated to Prime Minister Peter Stolypin in 1906 that: 'I have a deep certainty that I am doomed to terrible ordeals.'

**Kerensky**  
a member of the Provisional Government who later became its leader

**Stolypin**  
became Prime Minister in 1906 to control the new Dumas and restore the public faith in the Tsar

## How was tsarism implemented?

There were four main pillars that held up tsarist power.

### Focus!

- 1 What was Nicholas II's attitude to family?
- 2 What was Nicholas II's attitude to leadership?
- 3 How do the photos influence your understanding of the role of the Tsar?
- 4 What is your initial attitude to Nicholas II? Are you sympathetic or critical?

## 1 The government

The official government system was made up of three key bodies: the Imperial Council, who were the Tsar's personal advisers and answerable only to him; the Cabinet of Ministers, each of whom was given responsibility over a specific department; and the Senate, who transformed the Tsar's ideas into state laws. Rather than sharing the Tsar's powers, these three bodies simply implemented his will. As they were directly appointed by the Tsar, the system promoted hostile infighting rather than collective responsibility or accountability.

## 2 The bureaucracy

Every government requires a civil service to put official policies into practice. By 1900, this **bureaucracy** had been allowed to regress into a complex web of inefficiency and undeserved privilege. There were 14 levels of bureaucrats, each distinguished by unique uniforms, who relied on a varying scale of bribes in addition to their wages. Instead of fulfilling its desperately needed administrative function, the system merely created a noble upper class. The most crucial problem, however, stemmed from the arbitrary nature of autocracy, which was called *proizvol*. This caused significant issues because, in order to make decisions and address public grievances, the civil service, unable to develop policies officially, randomly interpreted how the Tsar's laws were to be applied.

## 3 The police

The police system was divided into two groups. The first was the Tsar's secret police – the *Okhrana* – who protected the interests of the state. They were involved in surveillance of suspected enemies of tsarism such as socialist agitators and anarchists. The second group maintained law and order among the people. On average there was only one policeman for every 3850 peasants. This meant that oppressive measures had to be introduced in order to keep the **masses** under control in times of significant unrest. To do this the Tsar used the **Cossacks**. Their savage fighting on horseback prompted the government to offer them land in return for their loyalty to the Tsar and service in his army.

## 4 The church

Orthodox Christianity had been the official religion of Russia since 989 AD and played a crucial role in legitimising the Tsar's autocratic powers. It was claimed that the authority of tsarism originated directly from God. The Russian National Anthem from 1833 to 1917 affirmed the link between God and the Tsar:

*God, save the Tsar!  
Mighty and strong reign for our glory;  
Reign for the dread of our enemies,  
O Tsar of the Orthodox Faith!  
God, save the Tsar!*

**bureaucracy**  
the system of officials and administrators that ensure that a country operates effectively

*Okhrana*  
the name given to the Tsar's secret police service to deal with opposition to the royal government

**masses**  
the general name given to the anonymous crowds of ordinary workers and peasants

**Cossacks**  
a fiercely independent people from the region on the Don River near the Black Sea

**Orthodox Church**  
the traditional Russian Orthodox Church that had both supported and benefited from the rule of the tsars

By 1900, half of the nation's primary schools were run by the church where children were trained to be loyal to the Tsar. The official book of religious teaching included the phrase: 'God commends us to love and obey from the innermost recesses of our heart every authority and particularly the Tsar.'

Rather than being an independent voice, the **Orthodox Church** had been under state control since 1721. This relationship became more evident from the 1880s. Then, the social influence of the church was used to reinforce conservative values in order to stifle receptiveness to revolutionary ideas and movements.

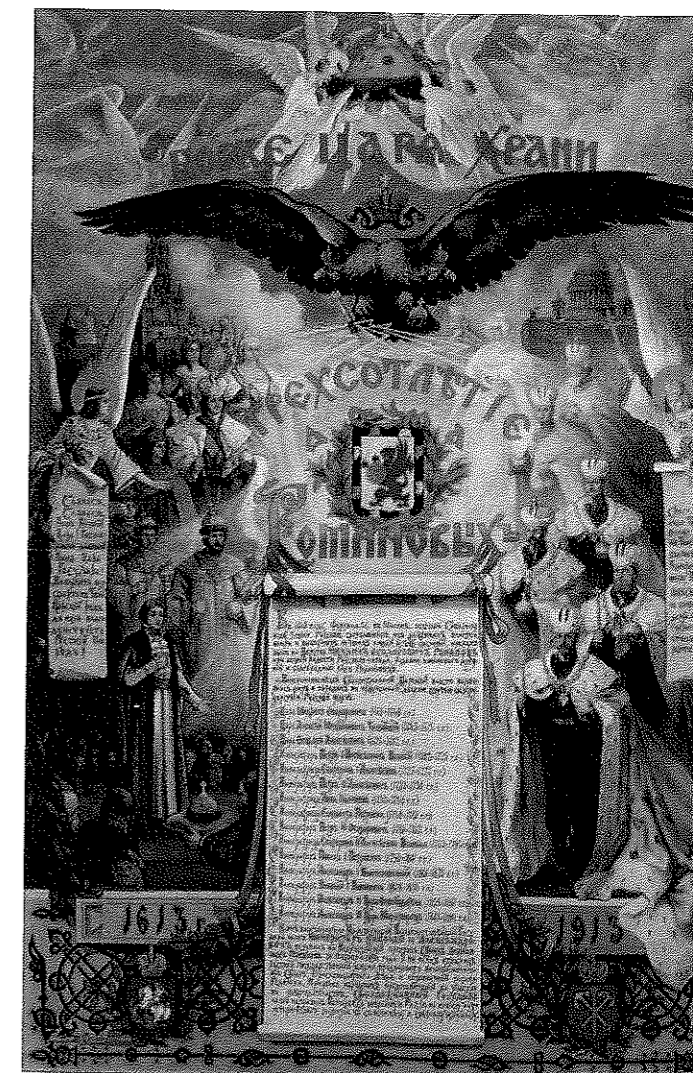
The Orthodox Church was widely criticised. The alluring spider image used in Deni's cartoon was used before 1914 as a depiction of the Jews feeding off the Russian people. After the 1917 Revolution, this same image was used to portray the evil nature of the privileged upper classes and **bourgeois** factory owners. This 1919 image shows the spider as being the manipulative Orthodox Church, symbolised by the cross and clerical robes and the recognisable onion domes of the Church of the Saviour on Spilled Blood in St Petersburg. The church is represented by an oversized priest with many barbed arms feeding off the harmless workers and peasants by greedily forcing them

**movements**  
popular outbreaks of mass actions by ordinary people

**bourgeois**  
wealthy upper class who were the enemies of Marx and Lenin



'Fly Catcher and Booty' by Victor Deni, 1919



'Tricentenary of the Romanovs' – see 'Practice examination questions' at the end of this book

anti-Semitic  
hostile to the Jews

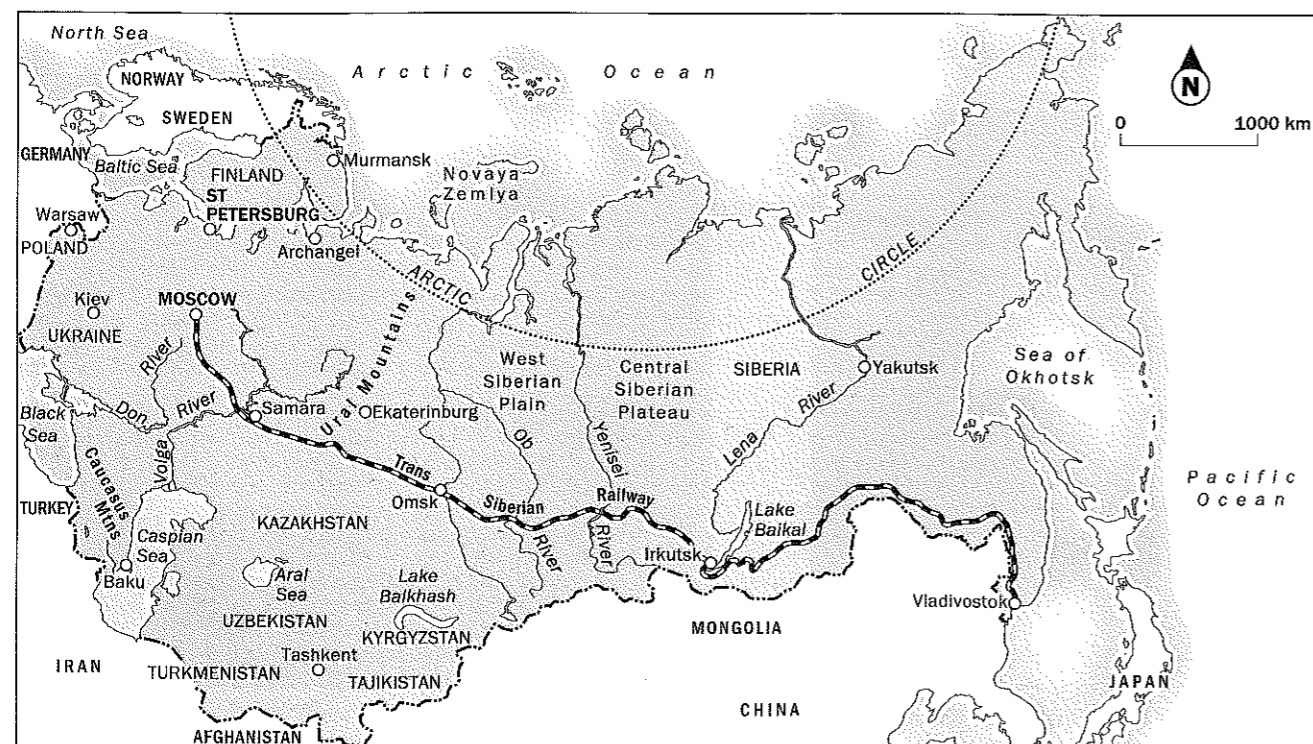
through the entrance to his web. The destructive nature of the church is further symbolised by windswept barren trees and rising clouds. This cartoon perhaps also includes an **anti-Semitic** element as the robes and hat of the priest are very similar to those worn by Russian Jews.

This second image was produced on the 300th anniversary of the Romanov Dynasty in 1913, and provides a rich resource of how tsarism saw itself. The central title says 'Tricentenary of the Romanovs' and the main symbol is the double-headed eagle of power. On the right there is a line of robed rulers and on the left the influence of the Orthodox Church. Angels on each side and at the top represent God's ordination of the tsarist system.

### Difficulty of ruling Russia

Nicholas II's official title was 123 words long, reflecting the complexity and diversity of the Empire he ruled. Russia is a vast country that crosses two continents, 11 time zones and five vegetation zones. The sun sets in the west at the same time as rising in the east. St Petersburg is closer to New York than to Vladivostok in Russia's east. The city of Yakutsk today has extreme temperatures, reaching minus 60 degrees Celsius in winter and 40 plus degrees Celsius in summer. Winter lasts for more than half the year. As a direct result of the vast size of the country, the ruling elite and upper classes established themselves in the European side of Russia where the major cities of **Moscow** and St Petersburg were located.

**Moscow**  
along with Petrograd (St  
Petersburg), Moscow was  
the major city in Russia



Russia is a vast and geographically diverse country

Russian explorers were very active in the 1800s. But Russia ended its involvement in the North American region when it sold Alaska to the United States for US\$7.2 million. Many Americans were angered at this 'foolish' purchase for decades until major gold deposits were discovered in Alaska in 1896.

The name 'Russia' probably came from a warrior tribe called the 'Russes'. They inhabited the region west of the Ural Mountains in the 1200s and were related to the Vikings and Normans.

### Why did the social structure promote privilege?

The official census of 1897 quantified the Russian population as the largest in Europe with 122.9 million people. Two key categories emerged: 60 different nationalities (from Great Russians to nomadic Asian tribesmen) and five general social classes (from the royal family to the landless peasants). This was compounded by the fact that the Russian population was growing at a phenomenal rate and, by 1910, had increased to 161 million.

The most significant problem, however, was not the size of the Russian population but its social structure of privilege. There are two important concepts: 'utility' means value or usefulness to society; 'merit' means personal skills and abilities. But Russian society was based on privilege by birth, not on utility or merit.

### Ruling class

The ruling class was the name given to the Tsar and the rest of the royal family, together with the members of government. The ruling class made up only a tiny fraction of the population, just 0.5 per cent.

### Upper class

'Gentry' or 'nobility' are alternative terms for the privileged class, which made up 12.0 per cent of the population, and included hereditary landowning nobles, wealthy merchants, church leaders, leaders in the bureaucracy and the higher ranks within the army. This class was unified by their total protection from the harsh reality of Russian life; their incomes disproportionately high when compared to their low workload.



An upper-class lunch on the balcony of a country estate

## Commercial and professional middle class

This middle class is a difficult one to categorise because of its lack of unity or common function. It began developing towards the end of the 1800s, along with the growth of heavy industries in the major cities and light industries in the towns. It was made up of professions like small-scale manufacturers, factory managers, technical specialists, clerks and white-collar workers. This class also included the educated thinkers, writers and artists sometimes referred to as the intelligentsia.

## Industrial working class

This growing industrial working class was called the **proletariat** by Marxist revolutionary theory. The lives of the families that made up this class are discussed later in this chapter, with the impact of Sergei Witte's industrial reforms.

**proletariat**  
the name Karl Marx gave to industrial workers

**Witte**  
the influential Finance Minister and later Prime Minister who rapidly increased Russian industry and completed the Trans-Siberian Railway



Arduous work

**agrarian**  
a nation whose economy is based primarily on producing foodstuffs in the countryside

**feudal**  
the medieval social system whereby the privileged nobles controlled the hard-working peasants

**famine**  
a desperate situation where food is scarce, resulting in severe malnutrition and often death

## Peasants

Despite the estimated 90 million peasants, the agrarian economy was still underdeveloped. The most suitable land for growing crops and grazing livestock was in European Russia. The majority of the remaining land was located too far north in freezing climates. Because there was not enough productive land to go round, rather than benefiting the system, the huge peasant population created overcrowding and poor conditions. What land peasant families did have was divided equally among all members. The cold climate also meant that in most areas the growing season was only between four to six months as opposed to the eight to nine months in warmer Western Europe. The climate also influenced the system of farming narrow strips of land and this resulted in the ongoing use of outdated equipment and techniques. Such a **feudal** agrarian system meant that the amount of food produced rarely met with the nation's demands and was especially scarce in times of **famine**. Added to this was the conservative nature of

the rural peasantry, whose high **illiteracy** rate meant that many were resistant to change. The ruling classes were content with the backward nature of the 'dark masses', fearing that educating them might be socially or politically dangerous.

**illiteracy**  
the inability to read or write

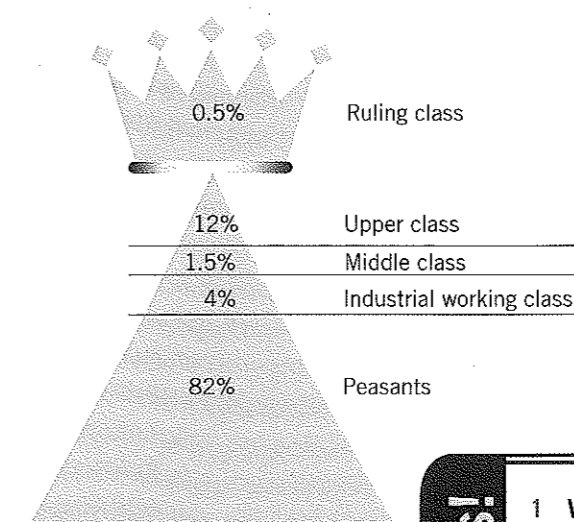
The poor condition of the peasantry was worsened by another severe famine which began in 1891. Despite public appeals, relief agencies and sponsored soup kitchens, over 350 000 peasants died from starvation and disease during this famine. Semenov, a literate and radical peasant, suggested that grievances about social inequality intensified during the famine period:

“The scenes of starvation were deeply distressing, and it was all the more disturbing to see that amidst all this suffering and death there were sprawling huge estates, beautiful and well-furnished manors, and that the grand old life of the squires, with its jolly hunts and balls, its banquets and its concerts, carried on as usual.”

CITED IN OXLEY, *Russia: From Tsars to Commissars*, P. 46

If a peasant had an insulting nickname, like 'smelly' or 'ugly', for enough years, it would be written down and formalised as their surname. It could not be changed without the Tsar's official consent.

## Summary of social structure



**Focus!**

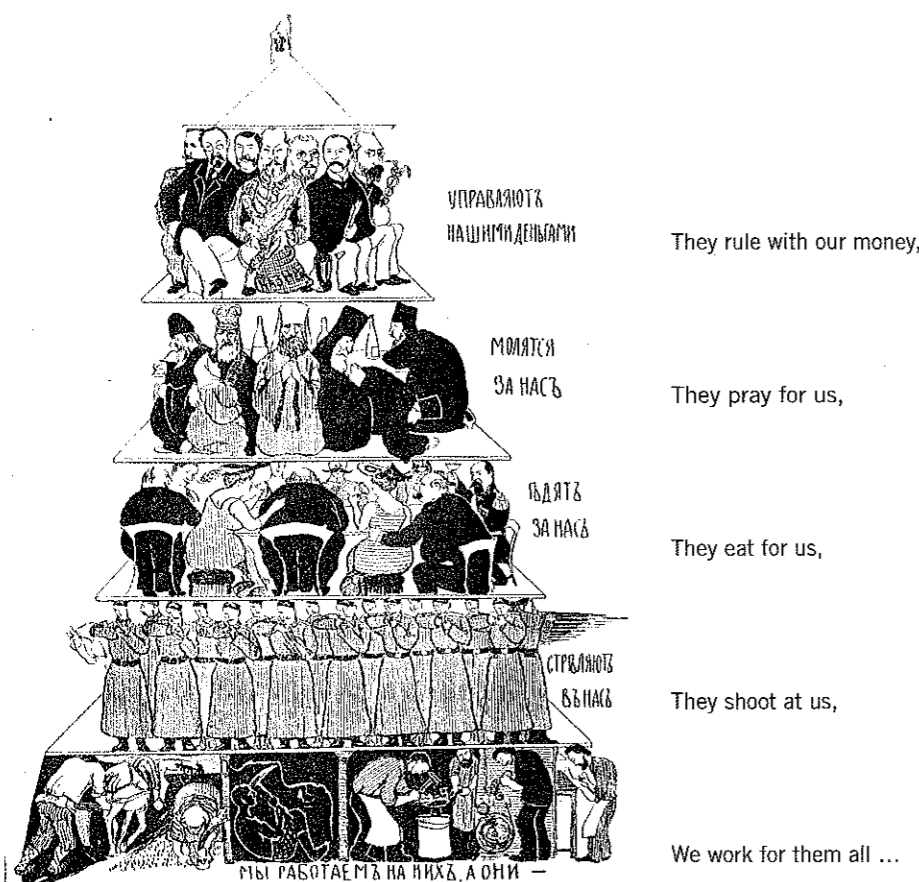
- 1 What percentage are the 'non-productive' educated classes (ruling, upper, commercial)?
- 2 What percentage are the 'productive working classes' (industrial and peasants)?
- 3 Is this division into 'productive' and 'non-productive' the best way to classify the classes? What might be some better alternatives?

## ANALYSIS ACTIVITY 1 Visual analysis

These activities will encourage you to think about what you have just read and/or to explore a valuable issue.

This section presents a graphic for analysis. A helpful model for understanding images is to reflect upon three areas:

- **Content** – What do I see in this image and what is it symbolising? Which classes or groups are included and which excluded from the image?
- **Context** – What was happening at the time this image was produced that may have led to its creation?
- **Function** – What is the message of this image? Which side does it take? For example, is it for or against the Tsar? Is it for or against the revolution?



This sarcastic socialist cartoon was produced in 1900 highlighting the divisions between the classes and the inequality of the social structure, with the Tsar at the top and the workers at the bottom. There is also an alternative cartoon which is drawn in the shape of a wedding cake, mockingly symbolising the fragmentation of privilege within Russian society instead of the unity and harmony of marriage.

- 1 Identify the class or group represented in each layer of the cartoon. What are they doing?
- 2 What is this cartoon criticising about the social structure?

## What attempts were made to reform Russia's economic backwardness?

Analysis of the proportions of the population in each social class provides an insight into the lack of economic progression. Making up only 1.5 and 4.0 per cent respectively of the total population, the **urban** commercial class and their industrial worker employees operated on a remarkably small scale in comparison to the 82 per cent of agricultural 'peasant' workers. The immense size of Russia was compounded by its poor transport networks and low available capital for attracting foreign investors. In every way, Russia was a backward and antiquated agricultural society in comparison to the aggressive growth experienced by enterprising industrial countries like Germany, Britain and the United States. Three crucial periods of reforms under Nicholas II were attempted to address this: Witte in industry (see below); Dumas in politics (see Chapter 5); Stolypin in agriculture (see Chapter 5).

**urban**  
meaning city

### Witte's industrial reforms

<b>Position</b>	Minister of Finance, 1893–1903
<b>Aims</b>	To modernise industry in order to improve Russia's military strength by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• attracting foreign capital to invest in Russian industry</li> <li>• expanding the railway system to improve exports and trade</li> </ul>
<b>Methods</b>	Sought advice from experts in modernised countries
<b>Opposition to reforms</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Russian industrial practices and equipment were backward</li> <li>• suspicion from royal court and elements of government who were resistant to change</li> <li>• military often disrupted building of railways</li> </ul>
<b>Key achievements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stabilised Russian economy</li> <li>• increased industrial production</li> <li>• built Trans-Siberian Railway from Moscow in the west to Vladivostok in the far east</li> </ul>
<b>Negative social impact of industrialisation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• poor working conditions</li> <li>• severe overcrowding</li> <li>• imposition of heavy taxes with high interest rates</li> </ul>



Sergei Witte

Trans-Siberian Railway completed by Witte and opened in 1905, this railway travelled across the length of Russia from Moscow to Vladivostok and therefore had major benefits for trade, the transport of goods and troop movements

**Historian perspectives***Favourable perspective:*

- dramatic improvement to Russian industry
- attracted large investments from foreign countries, from 98 million roubles in 1880 to 911 million roubles in 1900.

*Critical perspective:*

- made Russia too dependent on foreign investment
- only focused on industrialisation to the detriment of Russia's agricultural needs
- improvements a result of worldwide industrial boom, not just Witte's reforms

Many historians still doubt the 'success' of Witte's reforms.

rouble

Russian currency

industrialisation

the process of making a country more modern through the development of machines and factories

**Career outcome**

Tsar Nicholas replaced Witte in 1906 in favour of Peter Stolypin

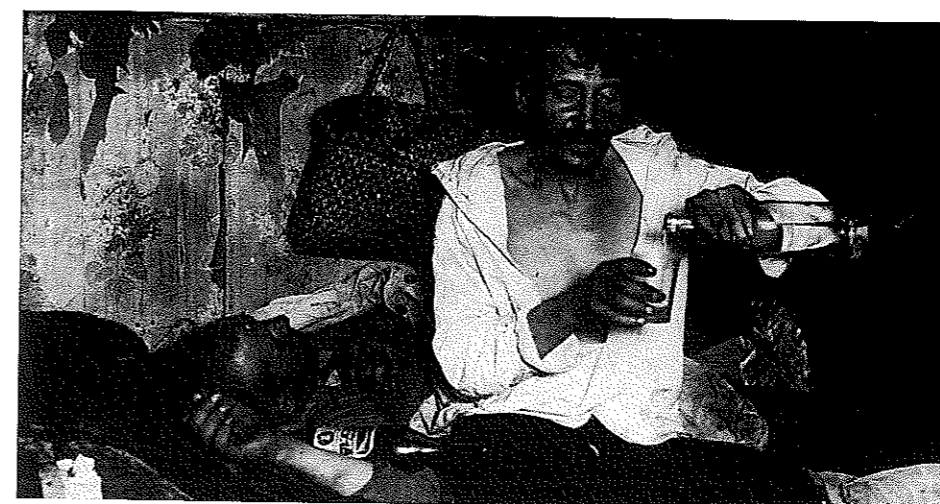
**Results of industrialisation****Population growth in cities, 1881–1910**

	St Petersburg	Moscow
1890	1 033 600	1 038 600
1900	1 439 600	1 345 000
1910	1 905 600	1 617 700

**Social discontent**

Many problems arose due to the readily available labour force. Working conditions were poor, with low wages, irregular and insecure employment, long 12-hour days and, by 1914, an average of 60 hours per week. There were inadequate rest breaks and unsafe equipment, women and children working underground, and the threat of arbitrary fines from factory managers for random 'crimes' like singing or uncleanness. Additionally, insufficient housing and low wages meant that families were forced to live in severely overcrowded conditions. A 1904 survey revealed an average of 16 people per apartment with six people per room. The development of a permanent and skilled industrial labour force was hampered by workers returning to their peasant villages every summer to help with harvest and haymaking.

harvest  
the collection of mature grain for eating, storage or market



An overcrowded workers' flat in St Petersburg in the 1890s

**THE STORY SO FAR...**

*This section summarises key issues and events discussed in the chapter.*

- 1 Russia's political system was based on autocracy where the Tsar's powers were not shared or limited.
- 2 The Tsar's autocratic powers were believed to have been granted by God. They were implemented through an intertwined system of government and bureaucracy, enforced by strict police oppression and legitimised by the Orthodox Church.
- 3 Tsar Nicholas II was a reluctant leader who began his rule at the turn of the century, continuing the Romanov Dynasty begun in 1613 by Michael Romanov.
- 4 The social system featured the privilege of the upper classes and the exploitation of the urban industrial workers and rural peasants.
- 5 Sergei Witte, Minister for Finance from 1893 to 1903, initiated progressive reforms that rapidly increased industrial growth, but significantly heightened social discontent in the overcrowded cities.

## CHAPTER REVIEW

### Developing clear definitions

In this activity you will review your understanding of the key issues analysed in the chapter. By writing a brief explanation after reading each chapter, you will gradually build up a glossary of comprehensive notes for revision.

Write explanations defining each of the following.

Key concepts	Key leaders
Autocracy	Tsar Nicholas II
Implementing tsarism	Sergei Witte
Social structure	
Economic backwardness	

### Practising paragraph answers

This activity encourages you to learn the material presented and begin developing your own opinions. Answer precisely using four to five key points.

- 1 What was tsarism?
- 2 How was tsarism implemented?
- 3 Why did the social structure promote privilege?
- 4 What attempts were made to reform Russia's economic backwardness?

### Essay questions

Historical events are often quite complex, and this is reflected in the essay questions used in this text and in the examinations. Provocative words and controversial ideas are used, giving you the opportunity to agree or disagree with different parts of the statement. This section enables you to practise the skills of relevantly answering the question, forming your own arguments supported by persuasive evidence, and constructing logical, flowing answers.

Using evidence is the essential skill involved in writing strong history essays. Providing evidence is different from providing lots of facts. Facts become evidence when they are supporting an argument rather than just filling up a sentence. The challenge is that you cannot provide evidence without having an argument. Powerful introductions are crucial in history essays because they need to include your main arguments and how you plan to prove them. The formula is:

strong essay = argument + evidence

- 1 'Nicholas II was a weak leader but the main problem was that the entire system of autocracy and very nature of the social structure was fundamentally flawed.' Provide evidence for your own evaluation of the character of Tsar Nicholas II, the wider tsarist political system and social structure of privilege.
- 2 'The economy in Russia was too backward to reform. The total failure of Witte's reforms proves this.' Provide evidence for your own evaluation of the nature of Russian agriculture and industry.

### Reading more deeply

This section provides an extra reading list for students and teachers who want to explore topics in greater depth. A specific chapter has been briefly summarised so that you can decide how helpful the text might be. The ratings are based on how easy the author's words and ideas are to understand. These readings also cover a variety of historians so that you can directly analyse different perspectives of the revolution.

#### 1 EASY

**www.alexanderpalace.com**

This is a thorough website on the Tsar's life of privilege. It contains a vast range of primary sources such as photographs, virtual tours of the rooms in his palaces and *Okhrana* documents, and is continually updated.

#### 2 MODERATE

**Massie, R 1967, *Nicholas & Alexandra: The Tragic, Compelling Story of the Last Tsar and his Family*, Indigo. Chapter 6 'The new Tsar', pp. 59–70**

Massie is an American historian whose primary argument was that Nicholas's unexpected appointment as Tsar in 1894 negatively characterised his entire rule. Massie supports this by analysing several features of Nicholas's reign: his determination to continue his father's principles, manipulative influences of his uncles, use of money, solitary work habits, appeals for disarmament, support for Russia's flourishing creative culture, growth of his young family, and the antagonistic relationship between the ruling classes and his wife, Alexandra.

#### 3 CHALLENGING

**Christian, D 1986, *Power and Privilege*, Pitman. 'Introduction', pp. 1–7 (Also recommended is the section called 'Economic growth from the 1890s', pp. 83–95.)**

Christian's purpose for writing his book was not to convey a chronological narrative of Russian history but to ask questions in order to encourage a rethinking of the revolution. His introduction addresses the nature of power and how this is maintained within society by the cohesion, unity and organisation of the ruling classes. A short but essential read due to the clarity with which Christian explores some powerful concepts. Reading the preface or introduction of history books is a brief way to see the historian's point of view, as it is there that he or she often explains why the book was written, how it was written, and its main conclusions.