



The Russian Revolution

Income Inequality



Over 90% of Russia's people were poor rural peasants.

Peasants were given small amounts of land in 1861 with the requirement that they pay the government for the land. As such, most farmers were in absolute poverty.

In contrast, a small number of upper-class people held most of the wealth and power. This aristocracy had large town houses and country estates.



"Very often the peasants do not have [a proper] allotment of land. They cannot feed themselves, clothe themselves, heat their homes, keep their tools and livestock, secure seed for sowing and lastly pay their taxes."

Police report on country conditions 1905

Discontented Workers



Industrialization began much later in Russia than in Western Europe.

When industrialization began, most of the huge iron foundries, textile factories, and engineering firms were owned by the government or foreigners and were located only in big cities.



Working conditions in the new industrial towns were hard and pay was very low.

Strikes and demonstrations were illegal but they often took place, resulting in strikers being shot.

Tzar Nicholas II



Russia was ruled by absolute monarch Tzar Nicholas II [ruled from 1894 – 1917].

Russia's defeat in the 1905 Russo-Japanese War caused strikes in major Russian cities. To keep the peace, Nicholas offered to call a Duma with free elections.



When the Duma met, it criticized Nicholas II and demanded changes.

Nicholas dismissed the Duma and called for new elections (which he controlled).

As long as the Tzar had control of the army, his power could not be broken.

Military Failures in WWI



In the first few months of World War I, Russia fought fiercely in Germany and Austria-Hungary until being turned back at the Battle of Tannenberg in 1914.

In 1915, Tzar Nicholas II assumed personal command of the Russian armed forces. A poor commander, his string of serious defeats caused the Russian army to lose confidence in the Tzar. Thousands of Russian soldiers suffered from lowering morale and deserted. Without the support of the army, the Tzar's position became increasingly precarious.



Rasputin



While Tzar Nicholas II was commanding Russian forces during WWI, he left the day-to-day running of Russia in the control of his wife, Tzarina Alexandra.



Alexandra came increasingly under the influence of Gregory Rasputin, a 'holy man.' Rasputin used this power to control of the Russian government, which aroused envy and undermined the prestige of the royal family. He was murdered in 1916, but his association with the royal family turned many against them.

Communists



(Stalin), Lenin, Trotsky

The so-called Social Democrats were members of the Russian middle-class who opposed the rule of Tzar Nicholas. They later became known as Communists.

The Communists believed in the ideas of political philosopher Karl Marx, who claimed that the capitalist system was unfair because the factory owners (bourgeois) made profits from the toils of the workers (proletariat). Marx predicted that the proletariat would violently overthrow the bourgeois and take control of the country.

The Russian Communists were divided into two groups. The Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, believed that the small party of Bolsheviks should seize power and control Russia on behalf of the people. The Mensheviks, led by Trotsky, wanted a broad base of popular support from all the citizens of Russia.

The 1917 February Revolution



Armed workers and soldiers escorting captured policemen. Petrograd, 1917

Food riots, poor working conditions, and the continued failure of Russia in WWI sparked a spontaneous uprising against the Tzar in February of 1917. Nicholas sent the Russian army to stop the rebels, but the troops refused to shoot at the demonstrators and joined forces with them instead.

In March 1917, without the support of the army, the Tzar was forced to abdicate and a Provisional Government was set up.