

20TH CENTURY RUSSIAN HISTORY

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Bloody Sunday 1905, Black Hundreds, Collapse of the Romanov Dynasty

Introduction

The Great Reforms led to the creation of diverse opposition movements in the second half of Alexander II's reign, including populism, pan-Slavism, socialism, terrorism, and conservative reaction.

The populists, *narodniki*, were intellectuals who placed their faith in the Russian people—the peasants. Influenced by the ideas of French and British utopian socialists, Russian populists led a movement for the people in the mid-1870s.

During the 1890's, in response to widespread anger over the famine of 1891-1892, the revolutionary movement revived along two lines.

One was an updated version of populism that in 1901 took the form of a new political party, the Socialist Revolutionaries who clung to the old vision of a peasant revolution and resorted to political assassination through their fearless "combat section."

The second trend was Marxism. Marxism itself grew out of the thinking of the German philosopher and revolutionary socialist Karl Marx, whose ideas were based on his study of the evolution of capitalism in western Europe.

Defeat in the Russo-Japanese War and problems at home brought the tensions to the breaking point. In light of the government's wartime failure, liberals, moderates, and even members of the nobility realized that there was a need for political change. In defiance of government prohibitions, they organized a series of public meetings to demand reform.

Starting in 1901, the Russian secret police had been organizing workers into unions that it secretly controlled, in order to divert them from political activity that might threaten the regime. The project was abandoned in 1903 after several of these unions joined in the strikes in the southern part of the country. It was revived in St. Petersburg in 1904 by the Orthodox priest, Father Georgy Gapon. In January 22 1905 Gapon marched with a large crowd of workers and their families to the Winter Palace to present a petition to the tsar asking him to enact measures to improve their lives. The crowd, numbering about 200,000, carried banners, pictures of the tsar, and religious icons. Gapon himself carried the petition on behalf of his followers that he expected to hand directly to the tsar. But the tsar was not in the palace; and the crowd was met by armed troops who opened fire, killing hundreds of men, women, and children and turning that date into *Bloody Sunday*.

Bloody Sunday was followed by a series of strikes, protests, riots, and other forms of defiance and rebellion that are collectively known as the Revolution of 1905.

On October 26, 1905, there was a general strike in St. Petersburg, and the city's workers organized what they called the St. Petersburg Soviet of Workers' Deputies. Led primarily by Mensheviks, the Soviet included workers' representatives from all across the city; it also had members of the radical intelligentsia, the most notable being the young Social Democratic Leon Trotsky.

The Duma was established in response to the 1905 revolution and the results of Bloody Sunday. The freedoms granted in the October Manifesto were soon cancelled.

Smaller uprisings continued to appear elsewhere, but they were ruthlessly eliminated at a considerable cost in lives during 1906. In addition to the army and police, the government enlisted the services of reactionary gangs called *Black Hundreds*. While supporting national representation and the need to improve the life of peasants and workers, they also upheld absolutism and anti-Semitism.

Russia had a genuine parliament (Duma), but the country continued to experience revolutionary and counterrevolutionary violence.

Based on gross production Russia was a major industrial power, but based on per capita production it was outclassed not only by major industrial powers such as Great Britain and Germany, but even by semi-industrialized countries such as Spain and Italy. Meanwhile, as industrial production grew, so did the number of strikes by exploited factory workers. The Stolypin reforms produced a class of well-to-do peasants, but many other peasants sank deeper into poverty.

By early 1917 Russia's major cities, including Moscow and St. Petersburg, suffered severe shortages of food and fuel due to the war. The country also suffered from desertions, strikes and demonstrations, and outbreaks of cholera and typhus.

A large demonstration of women in the capital in February 1917 protesting high bread prices led to a general strike, and within a week, on March 2, 1917 Nicholas II had abdicated in favor of his brother Michael Alexandrovich. On March 3 Michael refused the throne. This brought the Romanov dynasty to an end, and the Romanov dynasty was replaced by a Provisional Government.

The Royal family was placed under house arrest in their palace at Tsarskoye Selo from March to August 1917. In August they were sent to Tobolsk in Siberia. After the Bolsheviks seized power in November 1917, they were transferred to Ekaterinberg, where on July 27, 1918, the entire family was shot by order of the local soviet.

Reading

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Questions

How did the Age of Enlightenment affect Russian intellectuals?

What was the social impact of revolutionary ideas in Russia?

Which thinkers and philosophies in the 19th century played an important role among the Russian revolutionaries?

Which political movements that evolved in the early 19th century affected Russian society and culture?

What are the outcomes of the Petrine reforms for Russia? Did they really modernize Russia? Why did Russia need to be westernized?

How did the Russian people react to the westernization of Russia?

Did the successors of Peter the Great follow his reforms?

Is it possible to say that the Petrine reforms laid the groundwork for the revolutionary movements in Russia?