

Preparation Work for A-Level History

You will be studying modern Britain, Tudor England and 19 and 20th Century Russia. Of all these periods saw enormous social, political, economic, and cultural change. The constant upheaval of both time periods means that the content you will cover will be very exciting, extremely dramatic, and at times tragic. Here are some suggested resources for you to explore to get a sense of the periods you will be studying:

1. Visit the BBC History Magazine website called 'History Extra'. Here there are plenty of articles to read and they are updated regularly. Don't just read articles about the A Level topics. Try to use this time to read about any period that interests you
2. The 'History Extra' podcast is also another way to listen to historians covering a wide range of periods of history. This is a great way to get an understanding of what current historians are thinking and writing about. It won't always be content relevant to your exams but it will give you an insight into current thinking in the subject
- 3.
4. Another very good podcast is Dan Snow's History Hit – a wide range of topics discussed. Many are not directly linked to your course but will allow to explore interesting history topics (free to subscribe to through podcasts)
- 5.
6. Similar to above is the BBC History Hour - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p016tmq1> - this is also available as a podcast series (free to subscribe)

Unlike your GCSE exam questions, questions on the A-Level course require fewer skills. You have **three** types of questions only. This means that you have far fewer skills to memorise than you did at GCSE. There is a suggested task for you to consider but remember you will have plenty of time in lessons to perfect these skills:.

British paper (component 2)

1. Source question – in this question you have to read primary sources from modern Britain and assess how valid they are. You need to judge this by using your knowledge of the period to support and challenge the claims in the source, look at the tone and language and also use provenance to assess how valid the source is. Below are some examples for you to try (the sources are from Nazi Germany which you have likely covered in your GCSE course)
2. Judgement Question – in this question you are given a statement. You then have to decide how far you agree with it. This is really similar to a question you would have done at GCSE.

How valuable is Source 1 to a historian studying the role of women in Nazi Germany?

Source 1: Joseph Goebbels, *The Womanhood* (1934)
Our displacement of women from public life occurs solely to restore their essential dignity to them... It is not because we did not respect women enough but because we respected them too much that we kept them out of the miasma of parliamentary democracy.

Summarise the source (include the argument / point of view of author)

Content

What do you know that supports what the source says?



Context: What were relevant events?

Tone: How does it communicate the information? How does that affect the value?

Provenance

Who made /wrote it? How does that affect the value?

Why did they make/write it? How does that affect the value?



When was it made/written? What going on then, before, after? How does this affect the value?

Where was it made/written? Why was this significant? How does this affect the value?

How valuable is Source 2 to a historian studying the experience of young people in Nazi Germany?

Source 2 [Adolf Hitler](#), speech at the [Nuremberg Rally](#) (10th September, 1935)

In our eyes the German boy of the future must be slender and supple, swift as greyhounds, tough as leather and hard as Krupp steel. We must bring up a new type of human being, men and girls who are disciplined and healthy to the core. We have undertaken to give the German people an education that begins already in youth and will never come to an end... Nobody will be able to say that he has a time in which he is left entirely alone to himself.

Summarise the source (include the argument / point of view of author)

Content

What do you know that supports what the source says?



Context: What were relevant events?

What do you know that challenges what the source says?

Provenance

Who made /wrote it? How does that affect the value?

Why did they make/write it? How does that affect the value?



When was it made/written? What going on then, before, after? How does this affect the value?

Where was it made/written? Why was this significant? How does this affect the value?

Russian history

We will be studying the years 1855 to 1964, a time of huge change and one that affected and continues to affect both Russia and the world today! In terms of preparation for studying one of the most exciting, brutal and fascinating countries in the world at the time of its greatest change, the suggestions and activities below so hopefully give a background in Russian history, the challenges its rulers and some of the key themes that we are going to study.

Interesting programmes to watch:

Start with - Tsars and Revolutions – Documentary (covers Russia from its creation up to 1917: gives background context and a good foundation of the kind of country Russia was)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJC7ki1F-Q>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gSlVgtwAcRA&t=1338s>

Nicholas and Alexandra

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QpWyFcH-1tE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZQSiLOgFNcg>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KAulAAOQ_9k&t=31s

People's Century – Red Flag (gives a good overview of the period)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZDXZBnsKRQ&t=4s>

Stalin – Revolutionary https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ydUJ32_BWu8&t=1495s

Stalin – Despot - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovV1atsRw34>

Interesting articles for some useful background knowledge of Russian history

<https://www.historyextra.com/period/victorian/your-guide-to-karl-marx-who-was-he-what-was-the-communist-manifesto-and-why-is-he-important/>

<https://www.historyextra.com/period/20th-century/russias-revolutions-how-1917-shaped-a-century/>

<https://www.historyextra.com/period/first-world-war/books-interview-with-catherine-merridale-this-was-the-most-important-railway-journey-made-in-the-20th-century/>

<https://www.historyextra.com/period/20th-century/nicholas-ii-brought-the-russian-revolution-upon-his-own-head-an-interview-with-robert-service/>

<https://www.bl.uk/people/leon-trotsky>

<https://www.bl.uk/people/lenin>

<https://www.bl.uk/russian-revolution/articles/timeline-of-the-russian-revolution>

<https://www.historyextra.com/period/modern/ye-olde-travel-guide-moscow-1937/>

Online lectures

<https://www.gresham.ac.uk/lectures-and-events/the-february-revolution-in-russia>

<https://www.gresham.ac.uk/lectures-and-events/lenin-and-the-russian-revolution>

<https://www.gresham.ac.uk/lectures-and-events/the-fate-of-the-october-revolution-under-stalin>

If you prefer novels:

The Siege – Helen Dunmore (set in the siege of Leningrad in World War Two)

Just send me word – Orlando Figes (not novel but tale of love and survival in Stalin's Russia)

Tasks/activities

In addition to the content above it would be a good idea to consider the following tasks:

Construct a dictionary of key people in Russia 1917-1953

Use the internet to write a very brief summary of the facts and importance of each of the individuals listed below:

Tsar Nicholas II	Tsarina Alexandra	Rasputin	Prince Lvov	Alexander Kerensky
Paul Milyukov	Vladimir Lenin	Leon Trotsky	Alexandra Kollontai	Lev Kamenev
Joseph Stalin	Gregori Zinoviev	Felix Dzerzinsky	Mikhail Tukachevsky	Georgy Chicherin
Nikolai Bukharin	Alexei Rykov	Sergei Kirov	Maksim Litvinov	Genrikh Yagoda
Nikolai Yezhov	Lavrenti Beria	Vyacheslav Molotov	Georgy Zhukov	Andrei Zhdanov
Georgy Malenkov	Nikita Khrushchev	Boris Pasternak	Aleksei Stakhanov	Lavr Kornilov

Get a sense of what Russia was like to live in on the eve of the revolution by completing the 'Journey through Russia activity' below (the information needed is at the end of this document)

Journey through Russia

Today, Russia is the biggest country in the world. If you intend to visit Irkutsk, for example, the biggest city in far-eastern Russia, you face a five-hour flight eastwards from Moscow, passing through six time-zones. The Russian Empire of 1900, which is when this book starts, was even bigger — and there were no aeroplanes then! There were, however, railways, and in 1900 Russia was finishing the greatest railway-building scheme in the world: the Trans-Siberian Railway. 90,000 workers toiled for 12 years to complete the 6000 km long track from Vladivostok in the far east to Moscow in the west.

If you were a British visitor travelling across Russia from Omsk in Siberia to St Petersburg in 1900, what would the view from the window and your conversations with the passengers tell you?

What were main social groups in Russia in 1900?

What are the hopes and fears of the men and women in each group?

Does it seem likely that their hopes can be met and their fears put aside as Russia moves into the 20th Century? What obstacles might there be to achieving their hopes?

If you were the Tsar, why might a country like Russia be difficult to govern by 1900

Use the sources to build up an understanding of Russia's ruler on the eve of the Revolution of 1917 – to what extent was Nicholas fit to rule Russia?

Tsar Nicholas II

Summing up a human being is an almost impossible task – try it on your friends! It's even harder when that person has been dead for nearly 100 years. So here is some evidence: stories, pictures, his own words and those of his contemporaries and subsequent historians about the last tsar of Russia, Nicholas II. Solving Russia's problems was going to need a strong and thoughtful leader, capable of taking advice, then making decisions and sticking to them: how suitable does Nicholas appear to have been for this task?

What is going to happen to me and to all of Russia? I am not prepared to be a Tsar. I never wanted to become one. I know nothing of the business of ruling. I have no idea how to talk to ministers.

(Nicholas' words on being told of the unexpected death of his father in 1894)

Through his education Nicholas had all the talents and charms of an English public schoolboy. He spoke English like an Oxford professor and French and German well. His manners were impeccable. But of the practical knowledge required to run a country the size of Russia – and a country in a pre-revolutionary situation – Nicholas possessed almost nothing ... When Pobedonostsev tried to instruct him in the workings of the state, he became 'actively absorbed in picking his nose'.

(Orlando Figes, British historian, 1996)

[Nicholas is] the father of his people, over whose needs he keeps an earnest and compassionate watch. [He devotes] special care and attention to the welfare and moral development [of the peasants, whose huts he frequently entered] to see how they live and partake of their milk and black bread ... Thousands of invisible threads centre in the Tsar's heart, and these threads stretch to the huts of the poor and the palaces of the rich. And that is the reason the Russian people always acclaim its Tsar with such fervent enthusiasm, whether in St Petersburg ... or in the towns and villages.

(Nicholas' official biographer, 1913)



△ In 1913 there were celebrations of 300 years of rule by Romanov tsars. These historic roots were very important to Nicholas and this picture shows him dressed as Tsar of Muscovy from 1613. Does this look like a picture of a twentieth-century ruler?

A few days after Nicholas' coronation in 1896 a fair was held just outside Moscow. A huge crowd gathered, expecting to receive traditional gifts of tankards and special biscuits and enjoy free beer and sausages. For some reason the crowd panicked and in the rush 1400 people were trampled to death and 600 injured. Nicholas continued with the celebrations, attending a ball given by the French Ambassador that evening and other events in the next few days. An enquiry revealed that Grand Duke Sergius, Nicholas' brother-in-law, was responsible for the organisation of the fair, but this was hushed up.



△ Nicholas, his wife, Alexandra, daughters and son around 1910.

He was certainly no dimmer than his look-alike cousin, George V, who was a model of a **constitutional king**. Nicholas was mild-mannered, with an excellent memory and sense of decorum, all of which would have made him ideal for the largely ceremonial tasks of a constitutional monarch. But Nicholas was Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias.

(The historian Orlando Figes discusses whether Nicholas was intelligent and compares him to the British King George V, 1910–36)

constitutional king

A monarch whose power is restricted by a democratic constitution, unlike Nicholas, whose powers were limitless

His apparently diplomatic handling of his advisers, whereby he seemed to take their views into account, obscured what was in fact the Tsar's dislike of argument or discord ... His government lacked co-ordination, coherence, consistency or a grand plan. One of the potential benefits of autocratic rule was a clear and well-directed policy, yet this was flagrantly lacking ...

(Sarah Badcock, in *Essays in honour of R B McKean*, 2005)

Nicholas did not have secretaries. He did all his own filing, licked and addressed his own envelopes. He did not have close personal advisers who could have helped him develop his own ideas.

Nicholas married one of his cousins, Princess Alexandra. She was the grand-daughter of Queen Victoria, born in Germany, but had lived in England from the age of six, when her mother died. She and Nicholas spoke to each other in English: 'hubby' and 'wifey' were their affectionate names for each other. Becoming Empress aged only 22, she took on the autocratic role surprisingly quickly. When Victoria wrote to her, advising her to work to earn her subjects' respect, she replied:

You are mistaken, my dear grandmama; Russia is not England. Here we do not need to earn the love of the people. The Russian people revere their Tsars as divine beings ... As far as St Petersburg society is concerned, that is something which one may wholly disregard. The opinions of those who make up this society ... have no significance whatsoever.

This last remark made her extremely unpopular at court, of course, and she was rarely seen in public. That did not mean she stayed out of politics. In private she bossed Nicholas about, ordering him to switch policies and ministers as her whims took her. 'Be more autocratic than Peter the Great, and sterner than Ivan the Terrible,' she told him.



◁ A tragedy in their family life increased Nicholas and Alexandra's closeness and mutual dependency. The pressure is always on a royal consort to produce a son to carry on the succession. After giving birth to four daughters, a son, Alexei, was born in 1904. Unfortunately he suffered from haemophilia. This is a blood condition in which the slightest knock can cause internal bleeding, perhaps fatally. Alexei was unable to lead a normal life and was guarded, and often carried, by a sailor, Derevenko, as you can see here. Haemophilia is hereditary, carried through Alexandra's genes, as she knew. She came to believe only a miracle could cure him, and turned to religion.

Build your knowledge of Russia in the twentieth century

<http://www.orlandofiges.info/> - superb for overview of Russia in 20th century by one of the leading experts in the field, some things such as online seminars etc are only available for you pay but loads of free material on there that gives you an excellent grounding for the period

To what extent is film a useful source of evidence for historical events? – Case study: A long-lost princess or a con artist?

Read the plot synopsis of the film 'Anastasia'



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anastasia_\(1997_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anastasia_(1997_film))

To what extent is the plot faithful to real events - use the internet to research this

These sites may be a useful start:

Russia's lost princesses:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VHQWpcpJVM0&t=40s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7yIc3Nw3Rw&t=35s>

<https://www.britannica.com/story/did-duchess-anastasia-survive-her-familys-execution>

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/magazine/2018/07-08/romanov-dynasty-assassination-russia-history/>

<https://blogs.bl.uk/european/2017/07/victims-and-pretenders-the-murder-of-the-romanovs.html>

A journey through Russia – information for activity

Setting out

It's a three-day journey, so there's plenty of time to watch Russia go past. At first it just seems empty, especially on the first day. There are enormous pine forests, through which the train chugs for what seems like hours. There are woods of tall silver birches, and long open stretches of grassy plain. For a couple of hours, you pass through a range of mountains, with bare rocky peaks and steep forested slopes. These are the Urals, seen by some as the eastern boundary of Europe. But mainly the land is almost, but not quite, flat, rolling gently away into the distance. Most of Russia's great rivers run north-south, so every so often the train rattles across huge bridges. If they look a bit familiar it is because some were designed, and even made, in sections, in Britain.

The peasants

Where are the Russians? A country is its people, not just its geography. Gradually, increasingly as you travel west from the Urals, you see signs of human activity. It is June, and when the train goes past a field, you can see that the hay harvest is in full swing. Dozens of men, women and children are working in the fields, the men in long shirts, belted at the waist, the women in long dresses and colourful headscarves.

You decide to get some lunch from the grumpy attendant at the end of our carriage. As you collect your smoked fish, bread and little glass of tea, you get talking with another passenger. He tells you that, indeed, these really are the

Russian people - the peasants, 82 per cent of the population, living in hundreds of thousands of little villages all over the country. He points out that their apparent shabbiness is because they make nearly all of their own clothes, including shoes, from the things they grow and weave themselves. They also make all their own houses, furniture, plates, spoons, cups and ornaments, of wood. They eat only what they produce themselves, too. Any surplus, of grain, or cheese, or eggs, they take to market to exchange for the three things they need and cannot produce for themselves: salt, to preserve food, metal for tools, and vodka. Apart from these, the village is self-sufficient: they even treat their own illnesses themselves, with traditional herbal remedies prepared by the village-healer - the znakharka. They have lots of village traditions and rituals, some of them still believe in quite pagan superstitions.

The community of the mir, the village, is everything. Women use sickles to cut the winter wheat, or rye, while the men use scythes to cut the spring-sown crops. The women tie the grain into sheaves while the men start the ploughing. While the men sow seed for next year's crop' women carry the grain to the barns to be threshed.

By far the most important things in the mir are the land, the crops and the animals. The peasants elect their own officials to organise the farming: when to plough, when to sow, when the harvest should start, and deal with any disputes. As you pass one village, your new friend points out just such a meeting: a group of elderly male peasants arguing round a table.

'Are they happy?' you ask.

'Probably happy enough,' he replies, 'but that doesn't stop them grumbling most of the time.'

He explains that the population of Russia has been rising fast. It was only 48 million in 1800, now it is 125 million. Everyone in the mir believes that they have to look after each other, so the land is divided up and sub-divided, with the result that each family has less and less to live off. They are all hungry for more land, and look angrily at the big estates of the nobles. In fact, until 1861 the peasants themselves were owned by the nobles, as serfs or slaves. Now they own their own land, but have huge debts to pay for it.

This sounds more like 1300 than 1900, but you can see his sympathy for the peasants, even though he obviously isn't one himself, and tell him so. 'I love the Russian peasants, and they make me weep,' he confesses. 'I have travelled in Britain and studied your farming methods. Do you know that your British farmers produce four times as much from the same amount of land as these peasants we glimpse out of the window? And they won't change their ways.' He explains that they still divide up the land into strips, so that each person gets a share of good and bad soil. A full third of the land lies unused (fallow) every year, to restore its fertility.

A vague memory of lessons on English medieval peasants surfaces in your mind.

He goes on: 'They're not interested in better seed, new machines, new breeds of livestock, fertilisers. It is the older peasants who make the decisions, and they will always resist anything which is different from the way they have always done things. Back in 1892 the crops in many areas failed, there was a famine and lots of people starved to death.'

The Nobility

Just then a quite extraordinary sight appears. It is like an English stately home, here in the Russian countryside. Your companion explains that it must be the country estate of a wealthy noble. Although they make up only 1 per cent of the population, the top Russian nobility own 25 per cent of the land. The family who own this one probably have a palace in St Petersburg as well. These are the people who run Russia•. they attend Tsar Nicholas II at court, hold all the important jobs in the government and the civil service. Their sons fill the top officer ranks in the smartest regiments in the army.

'Remember that we have nothing like your parliament,' says your new friend. 'The government of Russia is the Tsar, and the tiny group of aristocrats he chooses to carry out his orders. Of course, not all the nobility live like that, nor wield so much power. There's a much larger group of nobles who are not so well off, and live in the countryside like gentleman farmers. In fact, some of them really know what they're doing. They've taken advantage of the coming of railways to modernise their farms to grow wheat and cotton and sell them for good prices.'

'You always bring it back to agriculture,' you comment.

'Well although we are industrialising fast now, Russia is still way behind your country and Germany. And I must confess that agriculture is my business. I am an adviser on agriculture to a zemstvo just a bit further up the line.'

'What is a zemstvo?'

'They are elected local councils, a bit like your county and rural district councils.'

'So you do have democracy locally?'

'In a way. When Nicholas II's grandfather, Tsar Alexander II, introduced zemstva in 1864, he arranged the system of voting to favour the nobility. They fill 70 per cent of the seats in the provincial zemstvo and 40 per cent in the local zemstvo. At least it's more democratic than at the national level where there's no power-sharing at all. And we are getting things done. We are building schools and employing teachers. Our doctors are bringing modern medicine to the peasants. Then I do my best to persuade the peasants to adopt more modern agricultural ideas. It's an uphill struggle, though. The Tsar and his advisers are suspicious of people like me because they hate any change. In 1890 the Tsar's father, Alexander III, cut back the powers of the zemstva, giving his own provincial governors the power to overrule us. " He leans towards you and whispers: 'His son, our Tsar Nicholas II, is no better. He thinks he can stop the clock and rule Russia as if he was the medieval Tsar of Muscovy. But change will come - there are 100 million peasants in this country, and no one really understands what makes them tick. If they decide to move, they will be brutal and unstoppable. Or we can try to turn these medieval peasants into successful modern farmers, with a vested interest in peaceful progress, like I and my friends in the zemstvo are trying to do.'

'Why are you whispering?'

'What I've just said is dangerous talk. The Tsar's secret police, called the Okhrana, are everywhere. That man down the carriage is pretending to read his newspaper, but I'm sure he's trying to listen to what we're saying. Fortunately we're nearly at my station, so I'll get my things together and say goodbye!'

You shake hands and wave goodbye, and new passengers take their seats on the train.

The Church

Sitting opposite you now is a Russian Orthodox priest, a tall man, dressed in long black robes, with a big crucifix round his neck, a huge black beard and long hair tucked into his high black hat. You had noticed that by far the most prominent building in all the villages and small towns you've passed through was the church, often with a bell-tower topped with an onion-shaped dome.

You comment on this to the priest, who glowers at you, but tells you confidently in broken English that Russians are very religious people.

'The Russian Orthodox Church owes nothing to anyone outside this Holy Land of Russia. Our Church is the Russian people at prayer. The singing in our churches is a high point of Russian culture and our icons a supreme achievement of Russian art. Every peasant, however poor, has an icon corner in their hut. Every peasant loves his village priest and willingly

You're not sure this can be true, but instead you ask him: 'What do you teach your people?'

'I teach them that it is their religious duty to obey those in authority as they obey God, because it is God who has chosen them. Most of all they must obey the Tsar, who was anointed to lead the Church and the people. We educate the children too, in 41,000 local schools. Would you like to hear what I teach the children through our catechism? I ask the questions and they must learn the answers. I ask the question "How should we show our respect for the Tsar?" And they must reply: "We should feel complete loyalty to the Tsar and be prepared to lay down our lives for him. We should without objection fulfil his commands and be obedient to the authorities appointed by him. We should pray for his health and salvation and also for that of all the Ruling Family." Anyone who wants to change this is guilty before God. That is why the Church is in charge of censorship of all books and newspapers.'

You've done some reading up before your trip, and know that not all the people in the Russian Empire are Russians. 'So is everyone a member of the Russian Orthodox Church?' you ask him.

Now he frowns even more. He tells you that on the edges of the Russian Empire there are other faiths. There are Roman Catholics in Poland and even Protestants in the Baltic provinces, and Muslims in the south-east. 'But we are converting more each year to our faith. Soon everyone in Holy Russia will belong to our true Church.'

You seem to have offended him and he now clams up, turning to read his book until he gets off without another word at the next stop.

Middle classes

A small crowd of people get on next. A man sits quietly opposite you, but your attention is taken by a big group, who seem to be all one large family. The men wear cotton turbans on their heads, like peasants do in Turkey, and the women's heads are covered too, with scarves. Their dresses are brightly coloured and they are chattering noisily in a language which is certainly not Russian.

'They are Uzbeks,' says your new neighbour, 'from Tashkent, way down in the south, on the borders of Afghanistan.'
'Are they Russian?'

'They found themselves subjects of the Tsar about 40 years ago when Imperial forces took over their land,' he replies. 'Remember that barely half the people in this empire are Russians. They even have different words: 'Russki' for ethnic Russians and 'Russiski' for non-Russian citizens of the Russian Empire. I am proud to say that I am Polish, but we have been ruled by the Tsars for getting on for 100 years now, since 1815.'

Your new companion is a salesman for a Polish furniture company. He tells you that he sells mainly to middle class people wanting to bring their homes up to date. His trip has not been very successful.

'In Moscow and St Petersburg I can find customers. Bankers and owners of factories who have got money and know what's going on in the rest of the world more and more of them each year. But out here: nothing much. You know the great Russian writer Gogol? He described the towns as "little dots in an overpowering landscape".'

'What percentage of British people live in towns and cities?' he asks you.
'About 75 per cent by now.'

'Do you know the figure for Russia? Fifteen per cent! Look at these grubby little towns,' he says as the train rattles over a bridge and you both look down on a small town. 'This is the only town for 40 kilometres in any direction. It's probably got a couple of small factories, a sawmill, a private school, one hotel, some dusty old-fashioned shops and a weekly newspaper. The further east you go, the worse it gets. There'll be a tiny group of educated middle class people: a few lawyers, doctors, teachers, the newspaper editor, forever going the rounds of the same social events. They'll grumble about the backwardness of Russia, the power of the Tsar and the aristocracy, and the ignorance of the peasants,

He says this lack of a large, well-informed middle class is bad for his business, but then the conversation moves on.

'It's bad for political progress in Russia too. In Britain, your middle classes put pressure on the old system to change and they have had the vote since 1832. Most of your members of parliament are from the middle classes. It's they who have set about improving public health building hospitals and schools. You have debates in parliament and plenty of educated people to buy newspapers and join in. Most of your working class have the vote now, I hear, and there is even talk of women voting. Even to suggest such things in Russia can get you into big trouble. No wonder the little middle class groups in the little towns feel isolated and helpless.'

Industrial workers

As your train gets nearer to Moscow, huge factories begin to fill the view and next to them some tall, gloomy buildings like the photograph below. They look rather like army barracks. Your companion puts you right: 'Those are where the workers from that big ironworks live. You'll have heard about our "Great Spurt"?'

'Yes, the growth rate of your economy is 8 per cent isn't it? Very impressive: highest in Europe!'

'Only because we started from such a low base: 40 per cent of our industries didn't exist ten years ago. But if you start late you can learn from other countries, like you British and the Germans, how to grow fast and make big profits.'

'How do you do that?' you ask.

'Build your factories as large as possible, and get as much out of the workers for as little as possible.'

'And who gets the profits?'

'Lots of our industries are owned by foreign investors, so a lot of the profits don't stay in Russia. Sergei Witte, he's been our Finance Minister since 1894, wanted to industrialise fast. This needed lots of investment, of course. He put up taxes, but also pulled in money from foreign investors, mainly from France, Germany and Britain.'

'So what's it like to work there?'

'Terrible! Our industrial workers are the most wretched people in Russia. They work long hours, for very low pay. Their employers don't care about safety and hideous injuries are common. There's no compensation for accidents, so if you're injured and can't work, that's just your bad luck. The foremen bully the workers they're even allowed to beat them. And do you know what really hurts? They call them tyi (you), but this is the word the masters used to their serfs, instead of vyi, which is what free people call each other. And then, at the end of the long day, they go back to those blocks we were looking at. They've got no proper lighting, or ventilation, no one has their own room, just a bit curtained off from the rest, so it's dirty and noisy. The problem is that many of them are still really peasants. Less than half of our three million workers have actually moved to live in the cities for good. The rest go back to their villages for the harvest and other big events, so they're only lodging in those living blocks.'

'Doesn't the Tsar care about this situation?'

'The Tsar lives in his own world. He likes to think that — all that Russians are happy, ignorant peasants, devoted to their "Little Father" - just like in the Middle Ages. It suits him for Russia not to be properly industrialised, for the peasants to just work for a few months in the factories. He thinks they don't need trade unions with their "Little Father" to look after them! I'll tell you this, my friend - it can't last. Full-time industrial workers may be only 5 per cent of the population but they're increasing fast. They're not stupid - they talk, they get themselves organised. There are strikes more every year. More and more of them are leaving the village completely - the permanent population of our cities has doubled in size since 1860. Many of these industrial workers are getting educated. If anything is going to change Russia, it'll come from the factories and the cities. We in the Social Democratic Workers Party...'

Then he stopped, fearing that he'd said too much. You assure him his views are safe with you, but he's relieved that you've nearly reached the Yaroslavsky Station, in Moscow, the terminus of the Trans-Siberian Railway where everyone gets off.

You are going on the overnight train to St Petersburg, so enjoy a ten minute walk across Kalanchyovskaya Square to the Petersburg Station and your sleeping berth for the overnight journey. Next morning in St Petersburg, feeling stiff from your days stuck on the train, you decide to leave your luggage and go for a stroll. The station leads straight out on to the Nevsky Prospekt, the most important street in St Petersburg. It all seems much more familiar than anything you've seen in the last few days: European goods in the busy and well-stocked shops, horse-drawn cabs, restaurants and cafés, trams, fashionably-dressed men and women, who could just as easily be walking down Piccadilly, or only the lettering on the shop fronts, the voices you can hear and some of the clothing tell you that you are still in Russia.