



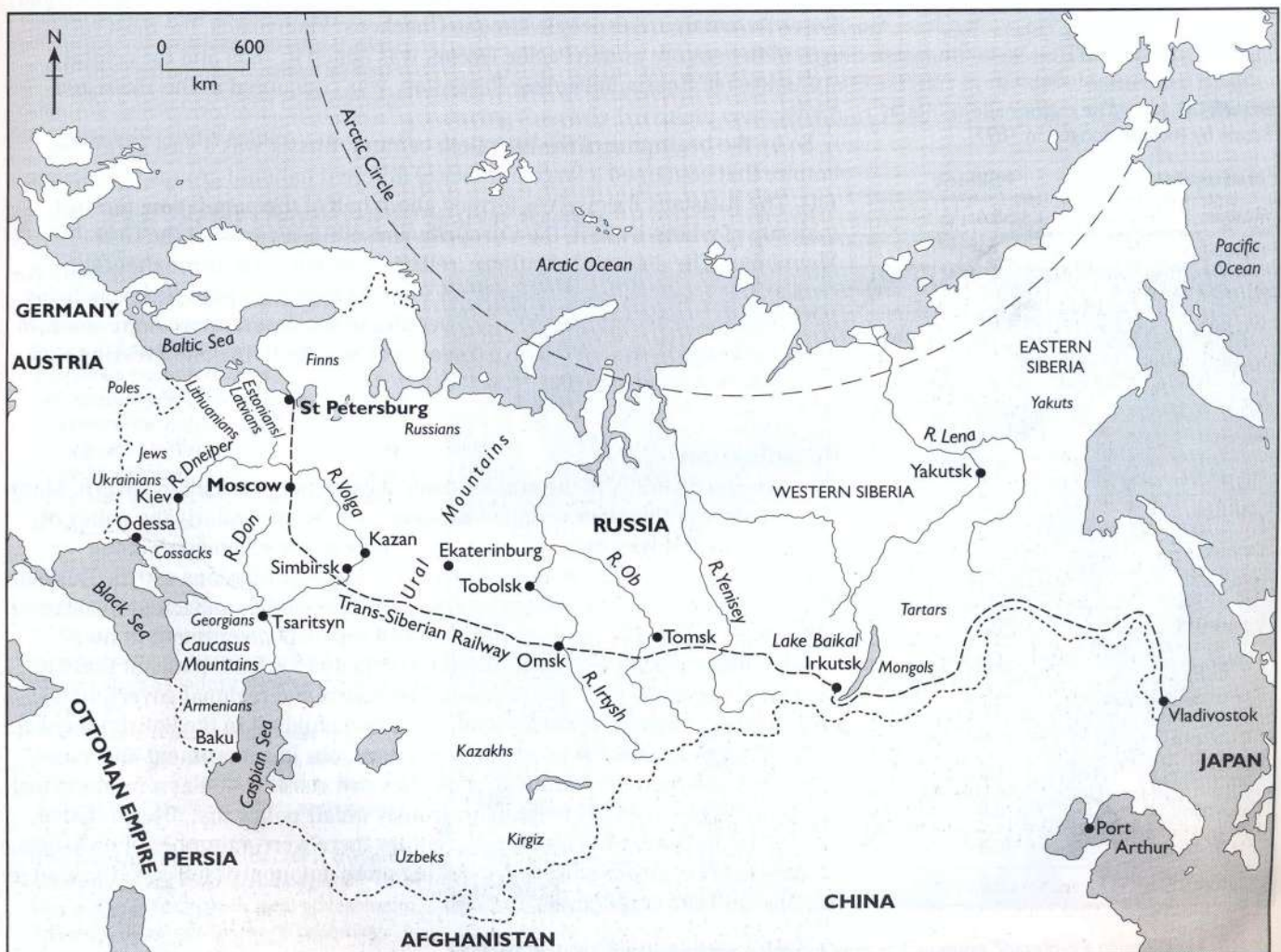
# What led to the downfall of the Tsar?

## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter provides a brief background history for those readers who may not have studied Russian history before or need to refresh their knowledge. Its aim is to provide a basic understanding of Russian society and government before the revolutions of 1917, and more particularly to introduce the key players who become important after the fall of tsarist Russia.

- A** Russia under the tsars before 1914 (p. 4)
- B** The social structure of tsarist Russia (pp. 5–6)
- C** How was Russia governed under the tsars? (pp. 7–8)
- D** Background history to the downfall of the last tsar (pp. 8–15)
- E** Who were the key players? (pp. 16–23)

## ■ 1A Russia and its people before 1914





**FOCUS ROUTE**

Make notes under the following headings: Size; Communications; National groups; Policy of Russification. Explain why Russia was a difficult country to govern before 1914.

**A Russia under the tsars before 1914**

One of the most startling features of tsarist Russia in 1900 was its size. It was a vast empire crossing two continents – Europe and Asia. From west to east it measured over 6400 km and from north to south over 3000 km. It covered about one-sixth of the world's total land mass. The USA could fit into it two and a half times and Britain nearly a hundred times. Large parts were (and still are) either uninhabited or sparsely populated. The northern part of Russia is frozen for most of the year.

Communications across this huge area were poor. There were few paved roads outside the big cities. Most of the roads were hard-packed earth which turned to mud in heavy rain and became impassable in winter. For longer journeys, rivers were used. Most of Russia's major cities had grown up along important river routes. The other main form of travel was the railway. Although there had been a great expansion of the railways at the turn of the century, Russia in the early twentieth century had only as much track as Britain. The most important route was the Trans-Siberian railway which crossed Russia from Moscow in the west to Vladivostok in the east. This journey took more than a week of continuous travel.

**The Russian people**

The Russian empire had been built up over centuries. The Russians who lived in the area around Moscow gradually extended their state (Muscovy) from the fifteenth century onwards by conquering the peoples around them. But large parts of the empire were added only in the nineteenth century. The Caucasus region was secured as late as 1864, bringing into the empire the Georgians and fierce mountain tribespeople like the Chechens. Vladivostok, the most eastern part of the empire on the Pacific Ocean, was added in 1859 and the central Asian area of Russia, including Turkestan, was conquered in the 1860s and 1870s.

So by the beginning of the twentieth century, Russia was a vast sprawling empire that contained a large number of different national groups (see Source 1.1). The Russians themselves formed about half of the population, the vast majority of whom lived in the European part of Russia west of the Ural Mountains. The diversity of culture, religion and language throughout the empire was astonishing, ranging from sophisticated European Russians living in St Petersburg, to nomadic Muslim peoples in the desert areas of the south, to the peoples who wandered the vast spaces of Siberia, living and dressing very much like native Americans.

**Russification**

The size and diversity of the empire made it extremely difficult to govern. Many of the national minorities resented Russian control, particularly the policy of russification that was imposed more rigorously in the second part of the nineteenth century. This policy involved making non-Russians use the Russian language instead of their own, wear Russian-style clothes and adopt Russian customs. Russian officials were put in to run regional government in non-Russian parts of the empire like Poland, Latvia and Finland. It meant that the Russian language was used in schools, law courts and regional governments; for instance, in Poland it was forbidden to teach children in the Polish language. Usually it was Russians who got the important jobs in government and state-sponsored industry. The national minorities saw russification as a fundamental attack on their way of life and a monstrously unfair policy that discriminated against them. During the nineteenth century there were a number of uprisings and protests from national groups seeking more autonomy (self-government) in their parts of the empire.

**SOURCE 1.1** The major nationalities in Russia by mother tongue in 1897

Nationality	Millions
Russian	55.6
Ukrainian	22.4
White Russian	5.8
Polish	7.9
Jewish	5.0
Kirgiz	4.0
Tartar	3.4
Finnish	3.1
German	1.8
Latvian	1.4
Bashkir	1.3
Lithuanian	1.2
Armenian	1.2
Romanian/Moldavian	1.1
Estonian	1.0
Murdrinian	1.0
Georgian	0.8
Turkmenian	0.3
Tadzhik	0.3



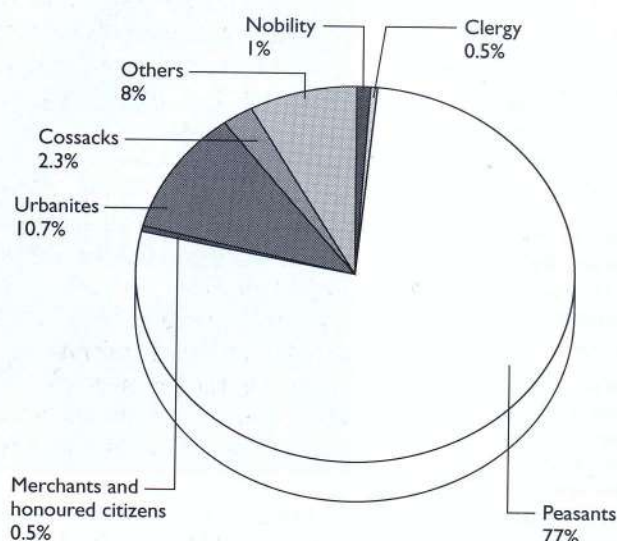
## B The social structure of tsarist Russia

### FOCUS ROUTE

Identify and note down features of Russian society that were likely to cause problems for the tsarist government in the first decade of the twentieth century.

### Learning trouble spot

It is difficult to determine the size of social classes in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century. The 1897 Census looks at 'social estates', not classes. There is no category for middle classes. The nearest to the Marxist definition of bourgeoisie is the merchants and honoured citizens, only 0.5 per cent of the population. The 'urbanites' category comprised small tradesmen, shopkeepers, white collar workers and artisans. Similarly, there is no category for industrial workers. About 7 per cent of peasants lived in towns but were not all factory workers. The 'others' category, referred to as 'settlers', covers much of the population of Russian Central Asia. The Cossacks were categorised as a separate ethnic group.



**SOURCE 1.2** A breakdown of Russia by class in 1900, based on the census of 1897

The most noticeable features of Russian society around 1900 were the high proportion of the population, almost 80 per cent, who were peasants and the small proportion in the professional and merchant classes. The absence of a significant middle class played an important part in the development of Russia during the early twentieth century. Chart 1B gives some idea of the character of these different groups.

## IB The social structure of tsarist Russia

### NOBILITY

- Made up just over one per cent of the population but owned 25 per cent of all the land. Some were extremely rich, with enormous country estates.
- Few spent much time on their estates. They lived for most of the year in St Petersburg or Moscow, doing the round of social events that constituted 'society'.
- Some had important jobs in government or in the army but were often there more because of their position in society than on merit.

### MIDDLE CLASSES

- Although small in number, there was a growing class of merchants, bankers and industrialists as industry and commerce developed.
- The lifestyle of the middle class was very good. They had large houses, and enjoyed a wide variety of food, as well as the cultural life (theatres, ballets and operas) of major cities.
- The professional class (doctors, lawyers, teachers) was growing and beginning to play a significant role in local government. Lawyers, in particular, were becoming active in politics.



**SOURCE 1.3** The ball of the coloured wigs at Countess Shavalova's palace, 1914



## ■ IB The social structure of tsarist Russia continued

### PEASANTS

- Life for most peasants was hard and unrelenting, slogging out their lives on small patches of land they owned and working on the estates of the nobility.
- Most were poor, illiterate and uneducated. Some peasants, however, were quite well off and some areas were more prosperous than others.
- Most peasants got by in good years, but in years of bad harvests there was widespread starvation, e.g. 400,000 died in 1891.
- Disease was widespread, with regular epidemics of typhus and diphtheria.
- Many lived in debt and squalor, prone to drunkenness and sexually transmitted diseases, especially syphilis.

### Land and agriculture

- Agricultural methods were inefficient and backward: most peasants practised subsistence farming, using the outdated strip system and few animals or tools, e.g. they still used wooden ploughs.
- There was not enough land to go around. The vast expansion of the peasant population in the second half of the nineteenth century led to overcrowding and competition for land.
- Before 1905, most peasants had serious debt problems because of land repayments to the government. Before 1861, the Russian peasants had been serfs, virtually owned by their masters, the nobility. In 1861, they had been emancipated (freed) and given plots of land from the estates of the nobility. But they had been forced to pay for their land by making yearly redemption payments to the government. Most could not afford the payments and went further and further into debt. The peasants felt betrayed by this. They believed that the land really belonged to the people who worked it – them! They wanted the rest of the big estates to be given to them. The government cancelled the land repayments in 1905.



**SOURCE I.4** Peasants in a village near Nizhny-Novgorod, c. 1891

### URBAN WORKERS

- Most workers were young and male. Although many were ex-peasants, by 1900 over a third were young men whose fathers had worked in factories, mines and railways.
- The 1897 Census showed that literacy among them (57.8%) was twice the national average. They could articulate their grievances and were receptive to revolutionary ideas.
- There were large numbers of women in textile factories in St Petersburg and Moscow.
- Wages were generally very low and working conditions very poor. There were a high number of deaths from accidents and work-related health problems.
- Living conditions were generally appalling: shared rooms in tenement blocks or in barrack-style buildings next to factories or mines. People had no privacy or private space: men, women and children often lived together in rooms divided only by curtains.

### Industry

- There was a low level of industry at the beginning of the century but it was growing fast. By 1914, Russia was the world's fourth-largest producer of coal, pig-iron and steel.
- Because of Russia's late industrial development, many of its factories used up-to-date methods of mass production, although there were also many small workshops with low levels of technology.
- By 1914, two-fifths of factory workers were in factories of over 1000 workers. This made it much easier to organise strike action.



**SOURCE I.5** Inside a workers' lodging house c. 1900



## C How was Russia governed under the tsars?

### FOCUS ROUTE

- 1 How did the tsars run Russia?
- 2 What was the role of the Orthodox Church in tsarist Russia?
- 3 In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, what sort of opposition to the tsars had developed and how did the tsars deal with it?

### WHO WERE THE COSSACKS?

The Cossacks were a fiercely independent people who came from the Don area of Russia. Once they had been conquered by the Russians they became loyal supporters of the tsar and could be trusted to act against other peoples in the empire, including the Russians. The Cossacks were famed for their horsemanship and formed the best cavalry units in the Russian army. They were feared because they could be brutal and ruthless. According to the 1897 Census, Cossacks made up 2.5% of the population.

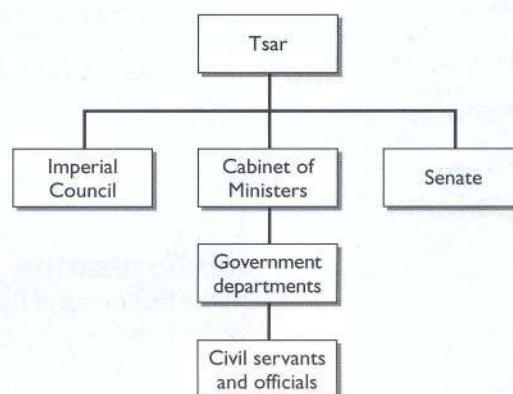
Tsarist Russia was an autocracy. The tsar was an autocrat, an absolute ruler, who had supreme power over his subjects. As far as the tsar was concerned, he had been appointed by God to lead and guide his people. Article 1 of the Fundamental Laws, 1832, makes it clear: 'The Emperor of all the Russias is an autocratic and unlimited monarch; God himself ordains that all must bow before his supreme power, not only out of fear but also out of conscience.'

The tsar had an imperial council to advise him and a cabinet of ministers who ran the various government departments. But they were responsible to him alone, not to a parliament or to a prime minister. They reported directly to the tsar and took instructions from him. This meant that the tsar was the pivot on which the system rested.

To run this enormous empire, there was a huge bureaucracy of civil servants and officials. It was a rigid hierarchy (orders were passed down from superiors to the lower ranks) marked by its inefficiency: it took ages to get things done. The lower ranks who had contact with the people were generally badly paid and there was a culture of corruption in which bribery was common. The bureaucracy was virtually impenetrable for ordinary citizens, who rarely found that their interests were served properly. The different regions of the empire were under the control of governors who had their own local bureaucracies.

Opposition was not tolerated. Political parties were illegal before 1905 and newspapers and books were censored. The government made use of an extensive secret police network, the Okhrana, to root out dissidents and people likely to cause trouble. Political critics who organised strikes and protests were often put in prison or sent to exile in Siberia. The large-scale protests, demonstrations and riots that often broke out in times of famine were suppressed by force. The much-feared Cossacks were used to deal with any trouble. Tsarist Russia was an oppressive and intolerant regime.

### ■ IC The structure of the tsarist state



### The Russian Orthodox Church

This regime was underpinned by the Russian Orthodox Church. It had, for various historical reasons, become independent of the Pope and Rome. It had developed its own traditions and customs, which included a heavy dose of mysticism and superstition. Holy men, or starets, were held in special regard. One who played an important role in the story of the Russian Revolution was Grigory Rasputin (see page 13). The Orthodox Church was closely aligned with the tsarist system. It supported the divine right of the tsar to rule and exhorted believers to obey the tsar as the agent of God. It was a deeply conservative organisation.



**CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY**

One where the monarch's political powers are limited as agreed in a constitution (the body or principles or precedents by which the State is acknowledged to be governed); most usually, power is held by an elected parliament of one or two houses.

**Opposition to the tsars**

There was considerable opposition to the tsars in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This opposition included revolutionary populist movements like the People's Will, which planned to bring down the government through terrorist acts: in 1881, members of this movement managed to assassinate Tsar Alexander II. Towards the end of the nineteenth century a new revolutionary party, the Social Democrats, grew up, centred around the ideas of Karl Marx. His 'scientific' theories of history and revolution were attractive to many Russians who were disillusioned with the populist movement.

The other main strand of opposition to the tsars were the liberals, who came mainly from the middle classes. They wanted political reform rather than revolution, and were looking for a parliamentary-style system that would reduce the tsar's power, and turn him into a CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCH like those in Britain. (You can read more about these movements on pages 16–18.)

**WHAT IS POPULISM?**

Populists put their trust in, and seek support from, ordinary people. From the 1860s to the 1880s the populists, or narodniks, largely well-to-do intellectuals, believed that the peasants in Russia could develop their own form of socialism. Life would be based around co-operation and sharing in peasant communes on a fairly small scale. This would mean that capitalism and its evils could be avoided altogether. They believed in 'going to the people' and spreading their socialist ideas to the peasantry by peaceful propaganda. Many populists, particularly students and young people, did 'go to the people' in the 1870s, only to be rejected. The peasants had nothing in common with middle-class youngsters and their strange ideas. When this move failed, some populists formed the People's Will, turning to terrorism to bring down the tsarist regime.

**D Background history to the downfall of the last tsar**

The last tsar of Russia was Nicholas II. Any ruler would have found the challenges facing tsarist Russia formidable, but Nicholas was ill-equipped to fulfil the role of an autocratic leader.

**Modernisation**

At the beginning of the twentieth century Russia was a very backward, agricultural country compared to highly industrialised countries like the USA, Germany, Britain and France. There was an urgent need to modernise and industrialise for two basic reasons:

- 1 To be a great power in the twentieth century – and the Tsar and ruling élite wanted their country to play a major role on the world stage – Russia had to industrialise. You could not be an important military power without a strong industrial base to provide weapons, ships, munitions and the other military equipment required for modern warfare.
- 2 Russia was poor. Agriculture was hopelessly inefficient, still using outdated traditional methods, such as strip farming, and making minimal use of machinery and modern farming methods. Partly as a result of this and partly because of the ballooning population (a 50 per cent increase between 1860 and 1899), hundreds of thousands of peasants starved in years when

**FOCUS ROUTE**

Make notes using the following questions as guidelines:

- 1 Why was modernisation needed?
- 2 Why was modernisation dangerous to the Tsar?
- 3 How did Witte try to build up industry?
- 4 How successful was Witte's economic policy?



the harvest was poor. With little to lose, there would often be peasant uprisings and revolts which made the tsarist regime unstable. It was essential to modernise agriculture and industrialise to increase the general wealth of the country and take the surplus labour off the overcrowded land and into the towns.

### The contradictions of modernisation

The dilemma for Nicholas II was that while modernisation was desirable in many respects, it also posed a serious threat to the tsarist regime.

- It would be difficult to maintain the institutions of tsarist autocracy in a modernised Russia. Most modern industrial countries had democracies and parliaments in which the middle class featured strongly and the power of monarchs was limited.
- Industrialisation created social tensions when millions moved from the countryside to the cities. A discontented working class living and working in poor conditions became volatile and led to instability. Packed together in the cities they would find it easier than the peasants to undertake concerted action.
- The need for a more educated workforce would make people more able to challenge the government.
- The growth of the middle classes would create pressure for political change and for more accountable and representative government.

So somehow the government had to steer a path between modernisation on the one hand and revolution on the other. It was very difficult to modernise within the framework of an autocracy.

### Tsar Nicholas II

Nicholas came to the throne in 1894 after his father, Alexander III, died unexpectedly. Nicholas was not prepared for this role and admitted that he did not want to become tsar. He was simply not up to the job. His many inadequacies have been well documented – his inability to make decisions; his unwillingness to engage in politics (even to read government reports); his lack of organisational skills ('Unfit to run a village post office', was the comment of an unknown cabinet minister); his weakness; his obstinacy. Yet this was the man who faced the enormous problems of modernising Russia and bringing it into the twentieth century. Moreover, he made clear throughout his reign that he had the God-given duty to uphold the autocracy and proved unwilling to make any moves towards constitutional government, which may have aided his survival and helped Russia solve its political problems. He believed that democracy, with its elections and parliaments, would bring about the collapse of the Russian empire. Above all, he was a family man, devoted to his wife and children. He had photographs of them everywhere, including in the lavatory. Although charming and kind to those around him, commanding respect and loyalty, he could be vicious and merciless. He was a Jew-hater and encouraged pogroms (attacks) on Jewish settlements by the Black Hundreds (right-wing paramilitary gangs). He praised regiments that put down disorders, and he oversaw the vicious repression that took place after the 1905 Revolution.





**CAPITAL EQUIPMENT**  
Machinery used to manufacture goods.

### Witte's economic policy

The problem for Russia, then, was how to build up its industries and generate more wealth. Sergei Witte, the Finance Minister from 1892 to 1903, thought he had the answer. Witte's plan was to make a huge investment in industry to create a spiral of upward industrial growth: the more industry grew, the more demand there would be for other industrial products, which would lead to further growth, and so on. He placed much of his faith in the development of the railways. Whilst these would improve communications between cities, they would also create demand for iron, steel, coal and other industries associated with railway building. During his time in office, the high level of state investment in the railways nearly doubled the kilometres of railway in operation.

However, developing the railways was not enough. The government needed to invest in industry on a huge scale to really get it going. This meant buying expensive machinery – CAPITAL EQUIPMENT – from countries like Germany to equip factories until Russia could manufacture its own. The big question was: where was the money for this going to come from? Witte had two sources available:

- 1 Foreign investment – he negotiated huge foreign loans, particularly from the French. The problem with foreign loans was that interest payments had to be made at regular intervals.
- 2 The peasants – he increased both the state taxes they paid and the taxes on everyday items that they used, such as salt, kerosene and alcohol. He used the surplus grain from harvests to sell abroad, to pay off the interest on foreign loans and to buy more capital equipment.

Witte's policy (see Chart 1D) was to squeeze resources out of the peasants to pay for industrialisation. He also kept urban workers' wages low so that all the money available went into industrial development. He hoped that industrial growth would lead to more wealth for everyone before the squeeze hurt too much. At first things went well. There was great expansion in the late 1890s and early 1900s. But in 1902 it all went wrong. There was an international slump and Russia could not sell the products of its industry. The home market was not strong enough because the peasants had been squeezed so hard they did not have money to spend on manufactured goods. Thousands of the new industrial workers lost their jobs. Strikes and protests broke out in most cities.

There were also problems in the countryside. Bad harvests in 1900 and 1902 pushed the peasants into starvation. They had already been squeezed by Witte's policies and now they were at breaking point. From 1902 to 1904, peasant uprisings erupted sporadically and there was widespread violence in which the homes of landowners were looted and burnt. The government's only response to this was to use force to suppress the disturbances.

### The 1905 Revolution

In 1904, in the midst of the economic depression, the Tsar decided to divert attention by starting a war with the Japanese. But the war exacerbated the economic and social plight of industrial workers and peasantry by creating shortages of goods and raising prices. Military catastrophe in the war, especially defeat by a small country regarded as inferior by the Russians, led to growing dissatisfaction with the government and pressure for reform. Tension built up towards the end of 1904. Then, at the beginning of 1905, revolution broke out in St Petersburg following the events of Bloody Sunday (22 January) when the Tsar's troops fired on a peaceful demonstration. By the end of January, 400,000 workers were out on strike. The strikes spread to other cities and into the countryside.

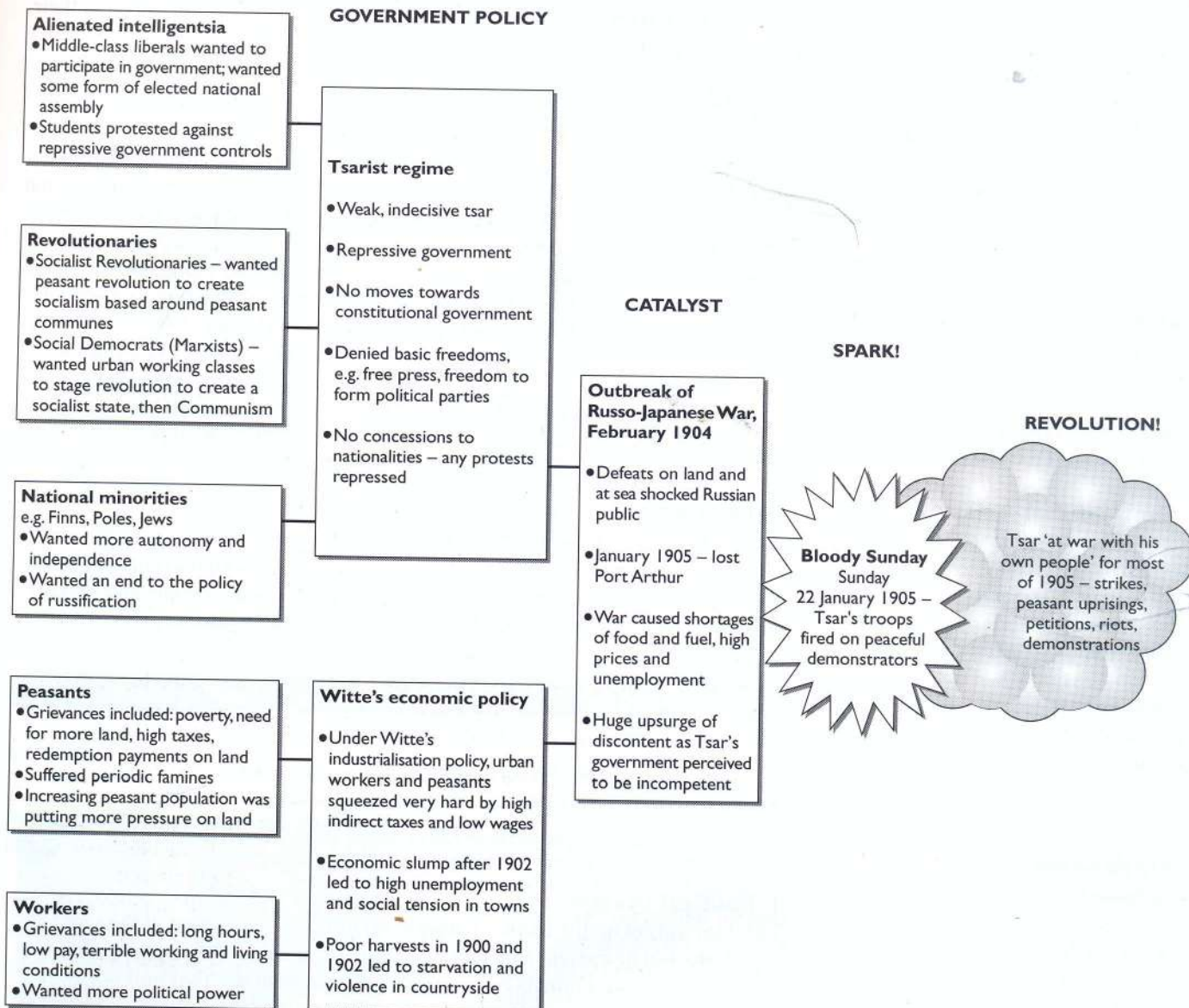
#### FOCUS ROUTE

- 1 What were the main long-term and short-term causes of the 1905 Revolution?
- 2 What acted as a catalyst for the Revolution? Why?
- 3 Why was the Tsar forced to make concessions during 1905?
- 4 What were the concessions?



## ■ ID Main causes of the 1905 Revolution

### LONG-TERM DISCONTENT



For most of 1905, the Tsar was 'at war with his own people' – an endless series of strikes, demonstrations, barricades, petitions and political meetings. All groups joined in the protests: workers, students, civil servants, teachers, doctors and even imperial ballet dancers went on strike. The liberals, who were the most powerful political opposition force at this time, demanded reforms in the light of the shameful way the Tsar and his government had handled the war and the economy. They demanded representative government and elections. In addition, the national minorities, such as the Finns and the Poles, demanded independence, while the Jews demanded equal civil rights.

In many towns and cities, the workers started to form new organisations, called soviets, to co-ordinate strikes. They were loose organisations – workers' councils – to which workers were sent to represent their factories. The most important was the St Petersburg Soviet, which soon became an influential and powerful body which threatened the government. A popular and important figure in the Soviet (see page 17) was Leon Trotsky (see page 23). In October, matters reached a head as a general strike spread throughout major cities in Russia, bringing the country to a standstill.



Faced with this opposition and a lack of control in town and countryside, the Tsar had a choice: to put down the uprisings and strike movement with bloodshed or to make concessions. He made concessions in the form of the October Manifesto which he issued on 30 October 1905. This promised:

- a duma or parliament that would be elected by the people and represent their views and interests
- civil rights – freedom of speech and conscience
- the right to form political parties
- an end to press censorship.

After this, the middle classes, worried by the growing unrest and violence, swung back to the side of the Tsar. The October Manifesto had given them what they wanted and they now wanted to see the restoration of law and order. By this time the Tsar also had at his disposal the soldiers returning from the Russo-Japanese War which had ended in September. He made sure that they received all their back pay and improved their conditions of service so that they stayed loyal. Nicholas now felt he was in a position to reassert control. He used force to crush the St Petersburg Soviet and the soviet movement in other cities; there was a particularly nasty struggle in Moscow where the soviet was suppressed violently. Then he turned his forces on the peasants and brought the countryside under control, although it took most of 1906 to do this.

## 1906–14

For almost a whole year in 1905, the Tsar had lost control of the country. Nicholas II now had the opportunity to make some fundamental changes to the way Russia was run, to try to improve the conditions of the people and make the political system more representative. How well did he do?

### FOCUS ROUTE

What developments between 1906 and 1914 were:

- a) likely to reduce the chance of revolution in the future?
- b) likely to increase the chances of further revolution?

Note down your answers to these questions.

### 1 Political change

The Tsar did set up the Duma (parliament) as he had promised in the manifesto, but he curtailed its power drastically. It could not pass laws or control finance, and ministers were still responsible to the Tsar and not to the Duma. The electoral system was weighted in favour of the well-off and against the working classes and peasants. The revolutionary parties decided to boycott the Duma when they could not get any changes made. After a rocky beginning, the Duma did do some useful work, but it was clear that the Tsar was not prepared to make the jump to constitutional government.

### 2 Economic and social change

#### a) The peasants

In the countryside, Stolypin, the chief minister, brought in land reforms to encourage higher production. He aimed to encourage the KULAKS to become efficient producers for the market. He allowed them to consolidate their land into one holding (previously the old strip system had been used) and to buy up the land of poorer, less efficient peasants. To some extent this worked and production did increase, leading to record harvests by 1913, although some historians maintain this was more to do with favourable weather conditions. Recent research suggests that peasants in some areas were more prosperous than previously thought. But the reforms had not gone far enough by 1914 to judge whether they were a permanent solution to Russia's agricultural problems, which were very complex. The reforms certainly had a serious

#### KULAK

Rich peasant who owned animals and hired labour.



downside: they produced a growing class of alienated poor peasants. Many drifted into the cities to work in the factories while others became disgruntled farm labourers.

#### b) The workers

Between 1906 and 1914 there was an industrial boom, with tremendous rates of growth in industries like coal, iron and oil. Huge modern factories grew up in the cities, employing large numbers of workers. Entrepreneurs and business people were very prosperous. However workers did not, on the whole, benefit from the increasing prosperity (although in some areas they did quite well). Average wages did not rise much above their pitiful 1903 levels. Conditions at home and in the workplace were just as dreadful as they had always been. As a result, there was a growing number of strikes before the First World War. Workers remained disillusioned with their economic and political progress.

### The downfall of the Tsar

The causes of the revolution in February 1917 are complex. We can identify two broad lines of thought amongst historians. The first suggests that Russia was beginning to make the changes required, that agriculture and industry were making real progress, and that there was some political progress which suggested the Tsar would make some concessions to parliamentary government in the not-so-distant future. Historians who take this line see the First World War as the main reason for the downfall of Tsar Nicholas II.

Other historians accept that progress had been made on the industrial front, but stress that the benefits had not filtered down to the working class who remained discontented and strike-prone in 1914. They maintain that the case for the success of the agricultural reforms has not been proven and point to the continued alienation and antagonism of the peasantry, who wanted more land. They claim that little real progress had been made in the political sphere and that the Tsar remained an entrenched autocrat, reluctant to give up any of his powers. The historians who take this line believe that the regime was unable to adapt to changing conditions and would have fallen even without the impact of the First World War. However, they agree that the war acted as a catalyst for the revolution and accelerated events.



#### Grigory Rasputin

Grigory Yefimovich, born into a Siberian peasant family, gained a reputation as a holy man, or 'starets', and the name Rasputin. It was rumoured that he belonged to the Klysty, a sect that found religious fulfilment and ecstasy through the senses and, in particular, sexual acts. Men and women flogged themselves and, it is said, engaged in sexual orgies as a way of achieving a religious experience. In 1905, Rasputin was introduced into polite society in St Petersburg and became known to the royal family as a holy man. He seemed to have an ability to control the haemophilia which afflicted the Tsar's son, Alexis. Rasputin appeared to be able to stop the bleeding associated with this disease. It is not known how, though he may have had some skill with herbal remedies. However, this convinced the Tsarina that he had been sent by God to save her son and this brought him an elevated position at the Russian court. Women from higher social circles flocked to him to ask for advice and healing or to carry petitions to the Tsar to advance their husbands' careers. There were rumours that Rasputin solicited sexual favours for this help and stories of orgies emerged. However, secret police reports and subsequent investigations seemed to show that his sexual activity – and he was very active – was restricted mainly to actresses and prostitutes rather than society women. His influence at court and his growing reputation for degeneracy caused Nicholas political problems. The Tsar censored newspaper reports about Rasputin heavily, which meant some papers appeared with huge white spaces where they had been removed. He fell out with the Duma over this and Rasputin's influential position at court. But the Tsar, largely because of the urgings of the Tsarina, continued to support Rasputin despite the political damage he was doing the royal family.



## The impact of the First World War

The vast majority of historians acknowledge that the First World War played a major role in bringing down the regime in February 1917. The key ways in which it did this are outlined in Chart 1E.

### ■ IE How the First World War contributed to the Tsar's downfall

#### Military failures

- Heavy defeats and the huge numbers of Russians killed in 1914 and 1915 led to disillusionment and anger about the way the Tsar and the government were conducting the war. Losing a war is always bad for a government.



- In September 1915, the Tsar went to the Front to take personal charge; from then on he was held personally responsible for defeats.

#### Difficult living conditions

The war caused acute distress in large cities, especially Petrograd and Moscow. Disruption of supplies meant that food, goods and raw materials were in short supply; hundreds of factories closed and thousands were put out of work; prices rocketed and inflation was rampant; lack of fuel meant that people were cold as well as hungry. Urban workers became very hostile towards the tsarist government. In the countryside, the peasants became increasingly angry about the conscription of all the young men, who seldom returned from the Front.



#### Role of the Tsarina and Rasputin

- The Tsar made the mistake of leaving his wife, the Tsarina Alexandra, and the monk Rasputin in charge of the government while he was at the Front. They made a terrible mess of running the country, dismissing able ministers in favour of friends or toadies who performed poorly. Ministers were changed frequently. As a result, the situation in the cities deteriorated rapidly with food and fuel in very short supply.



- The Tsarina and Rasputin became totally discredited. The odium and ridicule they generated (cartoons were circulated showing them in bed together) also tainted the Tsar, who was blamed for putting them in charge. The higher echelons of society and army generals became disenchanted with the Tsar's leadership and support for him haemorrhaged away. By the beginning of 1917, few were prepared to defend him.

#### Failure to make political reforms

During the war the Tsar had the chance to make some concessions to political reform that might have saved him. Russia could have slipped into a constitutional monarchy and the pressure would have been taken off him personally. The Duma was fully behind the Tsar in fighting the war. A group called the 'Progressive Bloc' emerged who suggested that the Tsar establish a 'government of public confidence', which really meant letting them run the country. However, the Tsar rejected their approach. He had opted to retain autocracy and was to pay the price for it.





The winter of 1916 was particularly harsh. Rasputin was murdered by Prince Yusupov who hoped to save the Tsar by getting rid of the monk and the damage he was doing to the royal family. A secret police report at the end of 1916 said that the workers in Petrograd were on the verge of despair, with the cost of living having risen by 300 per cent, food virtually unobtainable and long queues outside most shops. The secret police reported a rising death rate due to inadequate diet, insanitary and cold lodgings and 'a mass of industrial workers quite ready to let themselves go to the wildest excesses of a hunger strike'.

As the new year, 1917, began, things seemed to be getting worse and a serious mood of discontent was taking hold of the population in the cities. The story of the February Revolution and the final fall of the Tsar is taken up in Chapter 2.

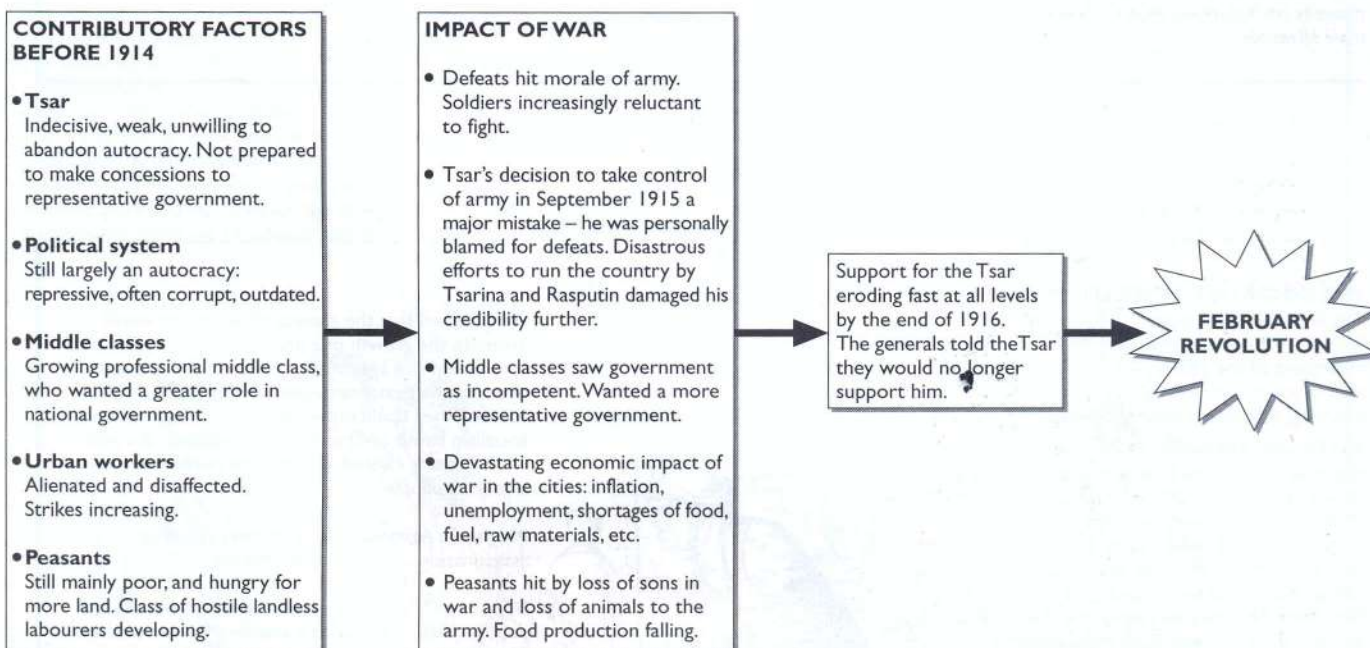
#### TALKING POINT

- 1 Do you think it is likely that a revolution would have taken place in 1917 if there had not been a war?
- 2 Why are wars accelerators of change?

#### FOCUS ROUTE

Make a list of the ways in which the First World War weakened the Tsar's position.

### ■ IF The causes and build-up to the February Revolution





## E Who were the key players?

Before we go on with the story of 1917, we need to be clear on who the main players were after February 1917.

### ■ IG Key players after February 1917

#### THE LIBERALS

**Liberal parties: Kadets, Octobrists and Progressive Bloc**

The liberals had been the major political opposition up to, during and after the 1905 Revolution (political parties were not legal in Russia until 1906). They had been active in the *zemstva* – town and district councils that had been established in the 1860s and 1870s – where the professional middle classes had developed skills of local government. *Zemstva*, described as 'the seedbeds of liberalism', gave them the taste for more participation in government.

Before 1905 they had called for a national *zemstvo* elected by universal suffrage. In the 1905 Revolution, the Tsar had been forced to make concessions in the form of the Duma (parliament) and civil rights.

The main liberal party was the Kadets (Constitutional Democrats), established in 1905. Along with the Octobrists (more conservative liberals who wanted to stick to the agreement in the October Manifesto), they had played an important part in the Duma before the First World War.

More progressive liberals had formed the 'Progressive Bloc' in the Duma in the war years, pushing the Tsar towards constitutional monarchy, but he had rejected their advances.



The idea of 'liberalism' was not very Russian and it was regarded as an alien Western creed by most Russians. The Kadets did not identify themselves as a liberal party with its middle-class connotations. In Russian they called themselves the 'Party of Popular Freedom' and saw themselves as a national, not a class, party.

**Main beliefs:** Parliamentary democracy, civil rights, free elections in which all men could vote.

**Methods:** Non-violent political channels: the *zemstva*, the Duma, articles in the press, meetings, etc.

**Support:** They did not have a large popular base, with few active supporters outside Moscow, Petrograd and a few other large cities, although the Kadets did try to establish local provincial party bases. The Kadets were mainly supported by the middle-class intelligentsia, such as academics, lawyers, doctors and progressive landlords. Octobrists tended to find support amongst industrialists, businessmen and larger landowners.

#### THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTIONARIES

The Socialist Revolutionary (SR) Party had been formed in 1901, emerging from the ruins of the populist movement of the 1870s, most particularly the People's Will (a populist movement hit hard by the backlash following the assassination of Alexander II in 1881).

The Socialist Revolutionary Party was a loose organisation accommodating groups with a wide variety of views and did not hold its first congress until 1906. It was never well co-ordinated or centrally controlled. It had initially taken part in the Duma but later boycotted it. Peasants were represented in the Duma by the Trudoviki labour group, of which Alexander Kerensky was a member. This was a loosely knit group whose main policy line involved redistributing land to the peasants.

**Main beliefs:** SRs placed their main hope for revolution in the peasants, who would provide the main support for a popular rising in which the tsarist government would be overthrown and replaced by a democratic republic. Land would be taken from landlords and divided up amongst the peasants.

Unlike the old populists, the SRs accepted the development of capitalism as a fact. The leading exponent of their views was Victor Chernov.



He accepted that the growth of capitalism would promote the growth of a proletariat (working class) who would rise against their masters. But he saw no need for the peasants to pass through capitalism; he believed they could move straight to a form of rural socialism based on the peasant commune (the *mir*) which already existed. He saw SRs as representing 'all labouring people'.

**Methods:** Agitation and terrorism, including assassination of government officials.

**Support:** Peasants provided the party with a large popular base but industrial workers formed perhaps 50 per cent of the membership by 1905. This is probably because many urban workers were ex-peasants recently arrived in the cities, who recognised the party and supported its aims of land and liberty. Most had regular contact with their villages.

The SRs also attracted intellectuals who wanted to make contact with the mass of the population. SRs often bemoaned their lack of strength in villages because most SR committees were run by students and intellectuals in towns and communication was difficult. Most peasants could not read the leaflets they published. Nevertheless, they were the party the peasants recognised as representing them.



Draw up your own chart to show the following information about the key players:

- who they were
- their main aims
- their main beliefs
- their main areas of support.

### THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS

In the 1880s, it seemed to some Russian intellectuals that there was no hope of a revolutionary movement developing amongst the peasantry. Instead they turned to the latest theories of a German philosopher, Karl Marx (see page 19). The 'scientific' nature of Marxism appealed to them; it was an optimistic theory in which there was progress through the development of industry and the working class to the ultimate triumph of socialism.

Marxist reading circles developed and societies and groups were formed. They believed in action and soon became involved in organising strikes in factories. The working class, not the peasants, were the key to the revolution.

In 1898, Marxists formed the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party but it split into two factions at the Second Party Congress in 1903 – the Bolsheviks (Majoritarians) and the Mensheviks (Minoritarians).



This split was largely caused by the abrasive personality of Vladimir Ulyanov, or Lenin, who was determined to see his notion of the revolutionary party triumph. During the congress the votes taken on various issues showed the two groups were roughly equal. But in a particular series of votes, Lenin's faction came out on top (mainly because some delegates had walked out of the conference) and he jumped on the idea of calling his group the majority party (Bolsheviks), which gave them a stronger image. In fact, until 1917 they always had fewer members than the Mensheviks, for reasons that will become clear below.

It is worth noting that the Bolsheviks played a relatively unimportant role in the 1905 Revolution and events leading up to February 1917.

**Main beliefs:** Both factions accepted the main tenets of Marxism (see page 19), but they split over the role of the party.

#### Bolsheviks

Lenin believed that a revolutionary party should:

- be made up of a small number of highly disciplined professional revolutionaries
- operate under centralised leadership
- have a system of small cells (three people) to make it less easy for the police to infiltrate them.

It was the job of the party to bring socialist consciousness to the workers and lead them through the revolution. Critics warned that a centralised party like this would lead to dictatorship.

#### Mensheviks

They believed that the party should:

- be broadly based and take in all those who wished to join
- be more democratic, allowing its members to have a say in policy-making
- encourage trade unions to help the working class improve their conditions.

It took the Marxist line that there would be a long period of bourgeois democratic government during which the workers would develop a class and revolutionary consciousness until they were ready to take over in a socialist revolution.



**Support:** Their support came mainly from the working class. The Bolsheviks tended to attract younger, more militant peasant workers who liked the discipline, firm leadership and simple slogans. The Mensheviks tended to attract different types of workers and members of the intelligentsia, also a broader range of people – more non-Russians, especially Jews and Georgians.



**ACTIVITY**

- 1 Sources 1.6–1.9 contain the views and ideas associated with the various parties.
  - a) Identify the party.
  - b) Explain what points about the party the writer of each source is making.
- 2 Source 1.10 has a very different message. What warning does it contain for which party?

**SOURCE 1.6**

*And thus I confirm that:*

- 1 *no revolutionary movement can be firm without a solid and authoritative organisation of leaders;*
- 2 *that the wider the masses spontaneously drawn into the struggle, acting as a basis of the movement and participating in it, all the more urgent is the necessity of such an organisation ...*
- 3 *that such an organisation should consist primarily of people who are professional revolutionaries*
- 4 *that in an autocracy, the more we restrict the membership of such an organisation to those who are professional revolutionaries and who received professional training in the art of struggle against the political parties, the harder it will be to 'draw out' such an organisation.*

**SOURCE 1.7****Fundamental civil rights**

- 1 *All Russian citizens, irrespective of sex, religion or nationality, are equal before the law ...*
- 2 *Each citizen shall have freedom of conscience and religious belief ...*
- 3 *Each individual is free to express himself orally, in writing and in published works ... censorship will be abolished ...*

**The state structure**

- 14 *Popular representatives shall be elected by universal, direct, equal and secret ballot ... No resolution, regulation, edict or similar act can become law without the approval of the representatives ... Ministers are responsible to the assembly of popular representatives.*

**SOURCE 1.8**

*A great peasant upheaval must come, such as would enable the peasantry to confiscate all land not already held by the communes. The land would be socialised and made available to the peasant toiler in accordance with his needs. The peasants might either become members of a co-operative or till the soil as small 'proprietors' ...*

*The combat organisation ought first to disorganise the enemy; second, terrorism would serve as a means of propaganda and agitation, a form of open struggle taking place before the eyes of the whole people, undermining the prestige of government authority.*

**SOURCE 1.9**

*A man can be sincerely devoted to a cause but quite unsuited for a strongly centralised militant organisation consisting of professional revolutionaries. For this reason the party of the proletariat must not limit itself to the narrow framework of a conspiratorial organisation because then hundreds, and even thousands, of proletarians would be left outside the party. We can only be glad if every striker, every demonstrator ... can describe himself as a party member.*

**SOURCE 1.10 L. Trotsky, Our Political Tasks, 1904**

*In the internal politics of the party these methods lead, as we shall yet see, to this: the party organisation is substituted for the party, the central committee is substituted for the party organisation, and finally a 'dictator' is substituted for the central committee.*

**FOCUS ROUTE**

Start to compile a separate file on Lenin. Here you can note down details of his career before 1917.



### ■ Learning trouble spot

#### Photographs

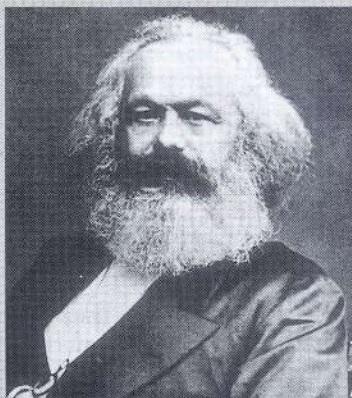
Throughout this book you will examine many photographs which will yield a great deal of valuable information. Photographs can capture some people or moments in history in a way that words cannot. They also give a lot of supplementary information about the way people lived, dressed etc. However, photographs have to be treated with care when using them as historical evidence; they can be unreliable and misleading. Many of the Soviet photographs you meet in this book are propaganda photographs, designed for consumption in the USSR or abroad. Here are some points you need to look for:

- when the photograph was taken – a photograph captures a moment in time but things may have looked very different just before or just after
- who took it – often difficult to establish
- the reason why it was taken
- the purpose for which it is being used
- whether the photograph was posed or staged – many personal or family photographs are posed to make the people look as they wish others to see them; in Soviet Russia many photographs were elaborately staged so that they could be used for propaganda purposes
- whether it is likely to have been faked or altered in some way.

Quite often you do not have all this information available but, you have to make a judgement based on awareness of the problems photographs present.

#### Karl Marx (1818–83)

Marx was a German philosopher who spent the last years of his life in London. He wrote the *Communist Manifesto* which encouraged workers to unite to seize power by revolution. He also wrote *Das Kapital* which explained his view of history. His views became known as 'Marxism' and influenced the thinking of socialists throughout Europe in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.



#### Marxism

Marxism was attractive because it seemed to offer a 'scientific' view of history, similar to the evolutionary theories of Charles Darwin. According to Marx, history was evolving in a series of stages towards a perfect state – Communism. Each stage was characterised by the struggle between different classes. This was a struggle over who owned the 'means of production' (resources used to produce food, goods, and so on) and so controlled society. In each stage, Marx identified a ruling class of 'haves' who owned the

means of production and exploited an oppressed class of 'have-nots' who sweated for them for little reward. He saw change as being brought about by a revolutionary class who would develop and contest power with the existing ruling class. Economic change and development (economic forces) would bring this new class to the fore and eventually allow it to overthrow the ruling class in a revolution (see Chart 1H on pages 20–21).

Marx was a determinist: he thought that there were certain forces (economic forces, e.g. changes in technology) driving history which would lead to the changes he predicted. However, he did give individuals a role in history. He believed that they could affect the course of events, though not the general pattern: 'Men make their own history but do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves but under circumstances directly encountered, given or transmitted from the past.'

He gave middle-class revolutionaries an important role in that they saw what the true nature of history was and could help to bring it about.

Marx did not think his theories were the final word and he did not think all countries would go through the pattern described; he thought it applied particularly to countries in Western Europe. He expected that experience would lead to changes in his theories; he even had a name for this – *praxis*.



## ■ 1H The route to Communism

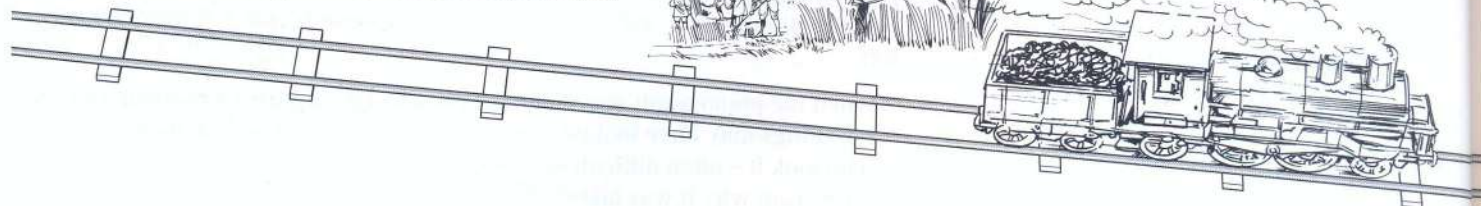
### FEUDALISM

**Government:** Absolute monarchy

**Means of production:** Land; land ownership gives power.

**Social organisation:** Aristocracy is the dominant group controlling the mass of the population – peasants – who work on their estates. Peasants are virtually owned by their lords and masters.

**Revolutionary change:** The revolutionary class is the middle class (merchants, traders, manufacturers). As this group gets wealthier, it begins to break down the rules of feudal society which hinder its development, e.g. wants an economy based on money and labourers free to work in towns.



### COMMUNISM

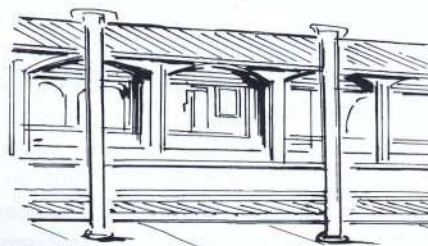
**Government:** There is no state, just people who are interested in managing the day-to-day business of keeping society going.

**Social organisation:** Everybody is equal. There is an abundance of goods produced by machinery rather than by workers' labour, so everyone has much more leisure time. People work on the principle, 'From each, according to their ability, to each according to their needs' – they take out what they need from a central pool and contribute to society in whatever way they can. (Marx's view of Communist society is not very clear.)



### THE TRANSITION TO COMMUNISM

The need for government declines because there are no competing classes.

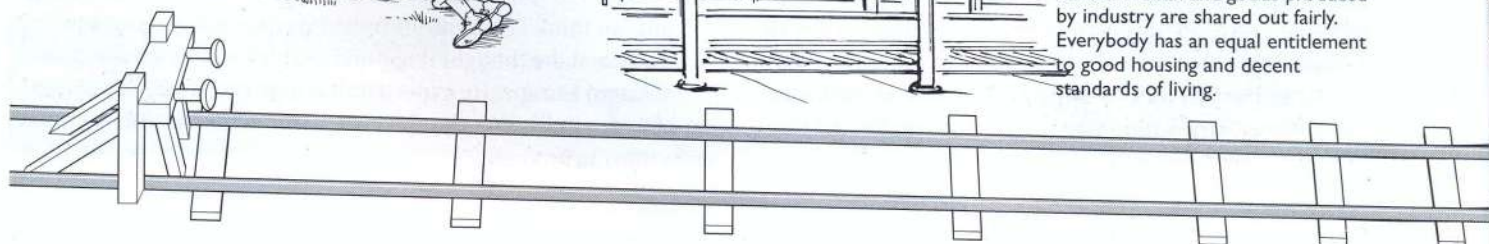


### SOCIALISM

**Government:** Workers control the state. At first, government is exercised through the **dictatorship of the proletariat**, a period of strict control necessary to deal with counter-revolution (old capitalist enemies trying to recover power) and to root out non-socialist attitudes.

**Means of production:** Factories, machines, etc., as in the capitalist period but not owned by individuals. They are owned collectively by everybody.

**Social organisation:** Everybody is equal, the class system is brought to an end. Wealth and goods produced by industry are shared out fairly. Everybody has an equal entitlement to good housing and decent standards of living.





**BOURGEOIS (MIDDLE-CLASS) REVOLUTION**

The growth of trade and industry sees the middle classes becoming larger and more powerful. Eventually, they want to reshape society and government to suit their interests, e.g. they want to have a say in how the country is run and do not want landed aristocrats determining national policy. The middle classes take power from the monarch and aristocracy. The bourgeois revolution can be violent, as in France in 1789, or more peaceful and gradual, as in Britain during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

**LENIN'S CHANGES TO MARXIST THEORY (MARXISM-LENINISM)**

- 1 Revolution would be accomplished by a small group of highly professional, dedicated revolutionaries. They were needed to develop the revolutionary consciousness of workers and focus their actions.
- 2 Lenin believed that the revolution would occur during a period of conflict between capitalist powers. He accepted Trotsky's 'weakest link' theory – revolution would start in an underdeveloped country (just like Russia) where the struggle and conflict between proletariat and bourgeoisie was very great, then spread to more advanced industrial countries.
- 3 He did not think that the middle classes in Russia were strong enough to carry through a bourgeois-democratic revolution. He believed that the working class could develop a revolutionary government of its own in alliance with poor peasants who had a history of mass action in Russia – the bourgeois and socialist revolution could be rolled into one.

**CAPITALISM**

**Government:** Parliamentary democracy with civil rights, elections, freedom of the press, etc., but largely run by the middle classes.

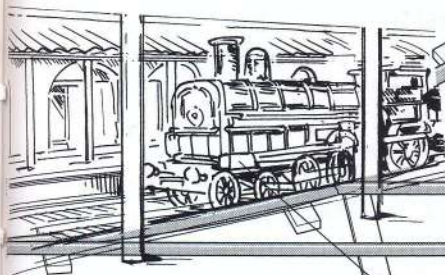
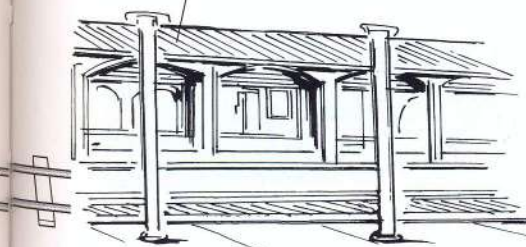
**Means of production:** Industrial premises, factories, capital goods like machinery, banks owned by **capitalists**. Land becomes less important as industry and trade create greater share of national wealth.

**Social organisation:** Middle classes or **bourgeoisie** are the dominant or ruling class although the aristocracy may still hold on to some positions of power and prestige. The mass of the population move from being peasants to being industrial workers – the **proletariat**, who are forced to work long hours in poor conditions for little reward.

**Revolutionary change:** As capitalism grows so does the proletariat, since more workers are needed to work in factories and commercial premises. Great wealth and material goods are produced, but these are not shared out fairly. A small bourgeoisie gets increasingly wealthy while the proletariat remains poor. Gradually, the proletariat develops a class consciousness and realises that it is being oppressed as a class.

**SOCIALIST REVOLUTION**

The proletariat moves from class consciousness to a revolutionary consciousness aided by revolutionary leaders (often from the middle classes). They now form the great bulk of the population whilst the bourgeoisie are a tiny minority. They rise up and seize power, ousting their class enemies – the bourgeoisie. The socialist revolution starts in a highly industrialised country.





## Lenin

Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, later known as Lenin, was born in Simbirsk in 1870 into a privileged professional family. His father was a Chief Inspector of Schools, his mother the daughter of a doctor and a landowner. They were a family of mixed ethnic origin (Jewish, Swedish, German and Tartar) and Lenin may not have had much Russian blood in his ancestry. According to Robert Service in *Lenin, A Biography* (2000), new archival evidence about Lenin's early life suggests he was a raucous, self-centred little boy who gave his brothers and sisters a hard time. He had tantrums and would beat his head on the floor. However, he was a gifted school pupil, doing exceptionally well in exams.

Service suggests that the Ulyanovs were a self-made, upwardly mobile family, anxious to succeed. However, the involvement of Lenin's elder brother in a plot to assassinate Tsar Alexander III saw the family ostracised: people refused to speak to them. Service thinks that Lenin may have learned to hate at this time. Certainly he was deeply affected by his brother's execution and seemed, by some accounts, to have become harder and more disciplined.

Lenin went on to university at Kazan where he studied law and soon became involved in student revolt. This led to his expulsion but he was eventually allowed to sit his exams and, for a short time, practised as a lawyer. He was becoming more interested in revolutionary ideas and, after flirting with populism, was drawn to the scientific logic of Marxism.

In 1895, he moved to St Petersburg and joined Marxist discussion groups where he met his future wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya. He became involved in propaganda for a strike movement in 1895 and was arrested. He spent the next four years first in prison and then in exile in Siberia, where he married Krupskaya, a kind of revolutionary working relationship, and enjoyed with her possibly the happiest years of his life, writing, walking and hunting.

After his release from exile in 1900, Lenin moved to London with Krupskaya. He founded a newspaper, *Iskra* ['The Spark'], with his friend Martov (Julius Tserdbaum). He wanted to establish it as the leading underground revolutionary paper which would drive forward the revolutionary movement. In 1902, he published his pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?* which contained his radical ideas about the nature of a revolutionary party (see below). He wanted to put forward his ideas at the Second Congress of the Social Democratic Party which met in 1903 (first in Brussels and then in London). His abrasive personality helped to cause the split in the party into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. He lost control of *Iskra* to the Mensheviks.

The Bolsheviks played a relatively minor role in the 1905 Revolution and Lenin returned to St Petersburg only in October. But when the revolution failed, he left for exile abroad once more. The years from 1906 to 1917 were frustrating. There were arguments and splits in the Bolshevik Party and membership collapsed. Lenin seemed destined to remain a bit player in history.



SOURCE 1.11 Lenin with his wife Krupskaya

### Political theorist

Lenin is regarded as an important political theorist. The body of his work, including adaptations of Marxist theory, has been called Marxism-Leninism. But he really saw his writings as plans for action. His principal writings include:

- *What Is To Be Done?* (1902) – here he argued for his idea of a revolutionary party:
  - it was to be highly centralised; a clear line of policy would be laid down by the central committee of the party
  - there would be a network of agents who would be 'regular permanent troops'
  - it would be a small, conspiratorial party made up of professional, dedicated revolutionaries
  - it would act as the vanguard of the working class who would not attain a revolutionary consciousness without clear guidance from the revolutionary élite.
 Lenin encouraged the individual revolutionary to be hard with himself and others to achieve his aims; there was no room for sentiment.
- *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916) – here he claimed that capitalism was a bankrupt system and would collapse in a series of wars between capitalist countries over resources and territory. This would lead to civil war and class conflict within countries, which would facilitate the socialist revolution. This could start in a relatively undeveloped country – the weakest link in the capitalist chain – and then spread to other industrialised countries. Russia seemed to be this weakest link.
- *The State and Revolution* (1917) – this book discussed what the state would be like after revolution and dismissed the need for constitutional government. Existing state structures should be taken over and smashed by revolutionaries. The transformation of the economy and society would be relatively easy – the spontaneous will of the people would support revolution and they would play a large part in managing their own affairs in industry and agriculture.



## REVOLUTIONARY NAMES

Many of the revolutionaries adopted pseudonyms or aliases to protect their families and confuse the tsar's secret police so that they would have trouble tracking down their associates.

Vladimir Ulyanov's pseudonym 'Lenin' was probably derived from the River Lena in Siberia and was first used in 1901. The name Trotsky was taken from a prison guard during Trotsky's escape from Siberia in 1902. Other well-known pseudonyms are Stalin meaning 'Man of Steel' which Joseph Dzhugashvili was supposed to have acquired whilst in prison camps; Martov (Julius Tsederbaum) leader of the Mensheviks; and Parvus (Alexander Helphand).

## Trotsky

Lev Bronstein was born in 1879 in the Ukraine, the son of a well-to-do Jewish farmer. He had a flair for writing and for foreign languages. He, too, was dissatisfied with the society he lived in, particularly its treatment of Jews. He was drawn to Marxism in his teens and had joined a Marxist discussion group by the age of sixteen. He fell in love with the leader of the group, Alexandra Sokolovska, and they were soon involved in inciting strikes. They were both arrested in 1900, got married in prison and were exiled together to Siberia. Aided by his wife, he escaped dramatically in 1902 by using a false passport signed with the name of a prison warder - Leon Trotsky.



Arriving in Paris he met a young Russian art student, Natalia Sedova. He was to live with her for the rest of his life and have two sons by her. He soon made the journey to London, where he got on well with Lenin and his wife Krupskaya, who were busy writing and editing the Social Democratic journal, *Iskra*. They admired his writing skills, giving Trotsky the nickname 'The Pen'. But at the 1903 Social Democratic conference he would not side with Lenin. He prophesied that Lenin's concept of a revolutionary party would lead inevitably to dictatorship. He remained in the Social Democratic Party somewhere between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks but not in either camp.

He first made his mark in the 1905 Revolution, where his oratorical talents led to his becoming deputy chairman of the St Petersburg Soviet. His subsequent arrest and escape established his credibility in revolutionary circles. His analysis of the situation in Russia moved closer to Lenin's when, with 'Parvus' (Alexander Helphand), he developed the theory of the weakest link (see page 20) concerning the weakness of the Russian bourgeoisie and how revolution might begin. He was in the USA when the revolution broke and arrived back to find the Mensheviks collaborating with the Provisional Government. This horrified him as much as it did Lenin and it was not long before he threw in his lot with the Bolshevik Party. Like Lenin, he was anxious for a workers' government to be put in place at the earliest possible opportunity.

## KEY POINTS FROM CHAPTER 1

### What led up to the downfall of the Tsar?

- 1 Tsarist Russia was a huge country with a diverse population, making it a very difficult country to govern.
- 2 In 1900, an overwhelming majority of the population were peasants.
- 3 Russia was an autocracy, ruled by a tsar who was at the head of a vast, unresponsive and inefficient bureaucracy.
- 4 The tsars used repressive measures to keep control but despite this a number of opposition parties developed.
- 5 The last tsar, Nicholas II, was an ineffective and weak leader, unable to cope with the pressures of modernising Russia whilst trying to retain autocratic institutions.
- 6 The task of modernising Russia was one that even the most able leader would have found difficult.
- 7 Nicholas received a warning in 1905 when revolution broke out all over Russia. He survived the 1905 Revolution by making concessions but was unwilling to make the move to a more democratic, representative form of government.
- 8 The First World War put the Tsar and his regime under tremendous pressure and in February 1917 it collapsed.