

# 1

## What were the challenges facing the tsarist regime at the end of the nineteenth century?

### CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter introduces tsarist Russia – the country, society and government – at the end of the nineteenth century. Russia under the tsars was an autocracy. This was epitomised by the reign of Alexander III (1881–94). However, if Russia wanted to remain a major power in the world, it had to modernise. This created serious challenges for the tsars who wanted to manage change within the existing political and administrative framework. These challenges came from different groups in Russian society and, in particular, from a growing political opposition who believed Russia should be governed in a different way.

- A** The Russian Empire and its people (pp. 4–7)
- B** How was Russia governed under the tsars? (pp. 8–11)
- C** Nicholas II – a new hope? (pp. 12–14)
- D** Modernisation (pp. 14–17)
- E** Other challenges facing tsarist Russia (pp. 18–27)

## ■ 1A Russia and its people at the end of the nineteenth century

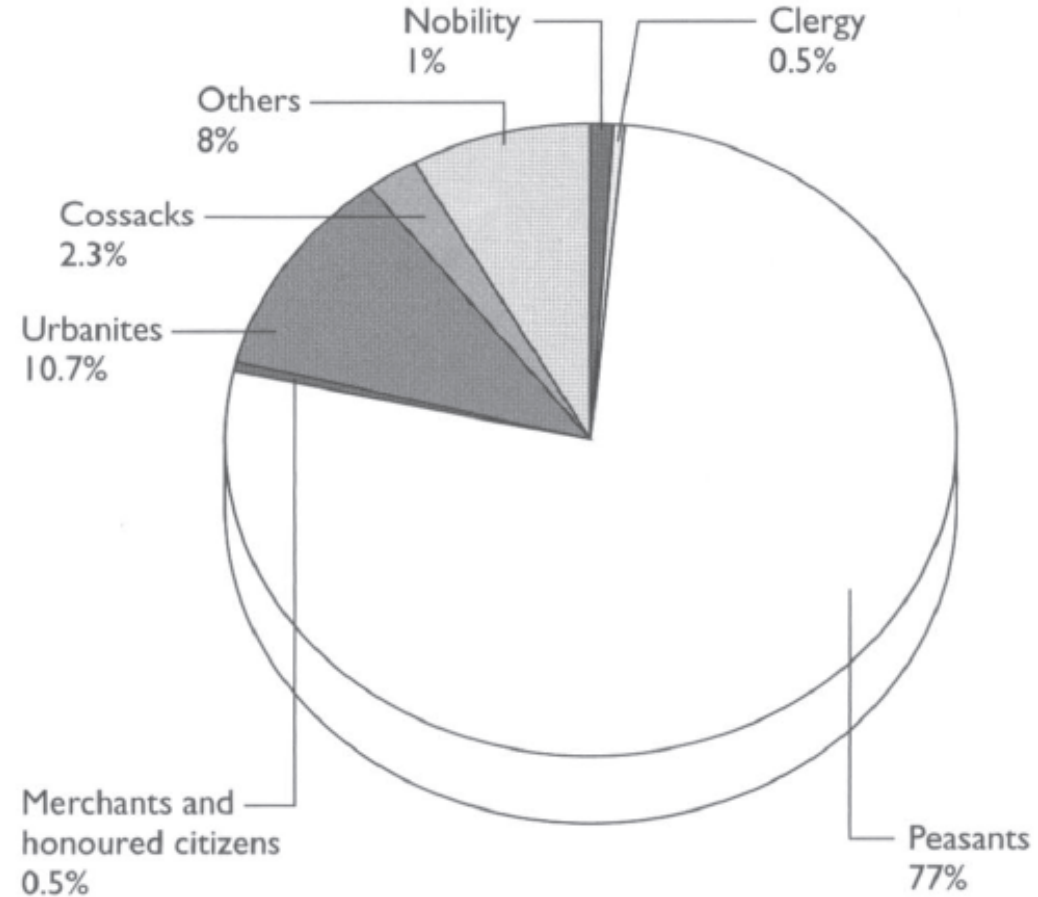




### ■ Learning trouble spot

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 'merchants and honoured citizens' category comes nearest, only 0.5 per cent of the population. The 'urbanites' category comprised tradesmen, shopkeepers, white collar workers and artisans. Similarly, there is no category for industrial workers. About 7 per cent of peasants lived in the towns but not all of these were factory workers. The 'others' category covers much of the population of Russian Central Asia. The Cossacks were categorised separately.

## The social structure of tsarist Russia



**SOURCE 1.3** A breakdown of Russia by class, based on the census of 1897

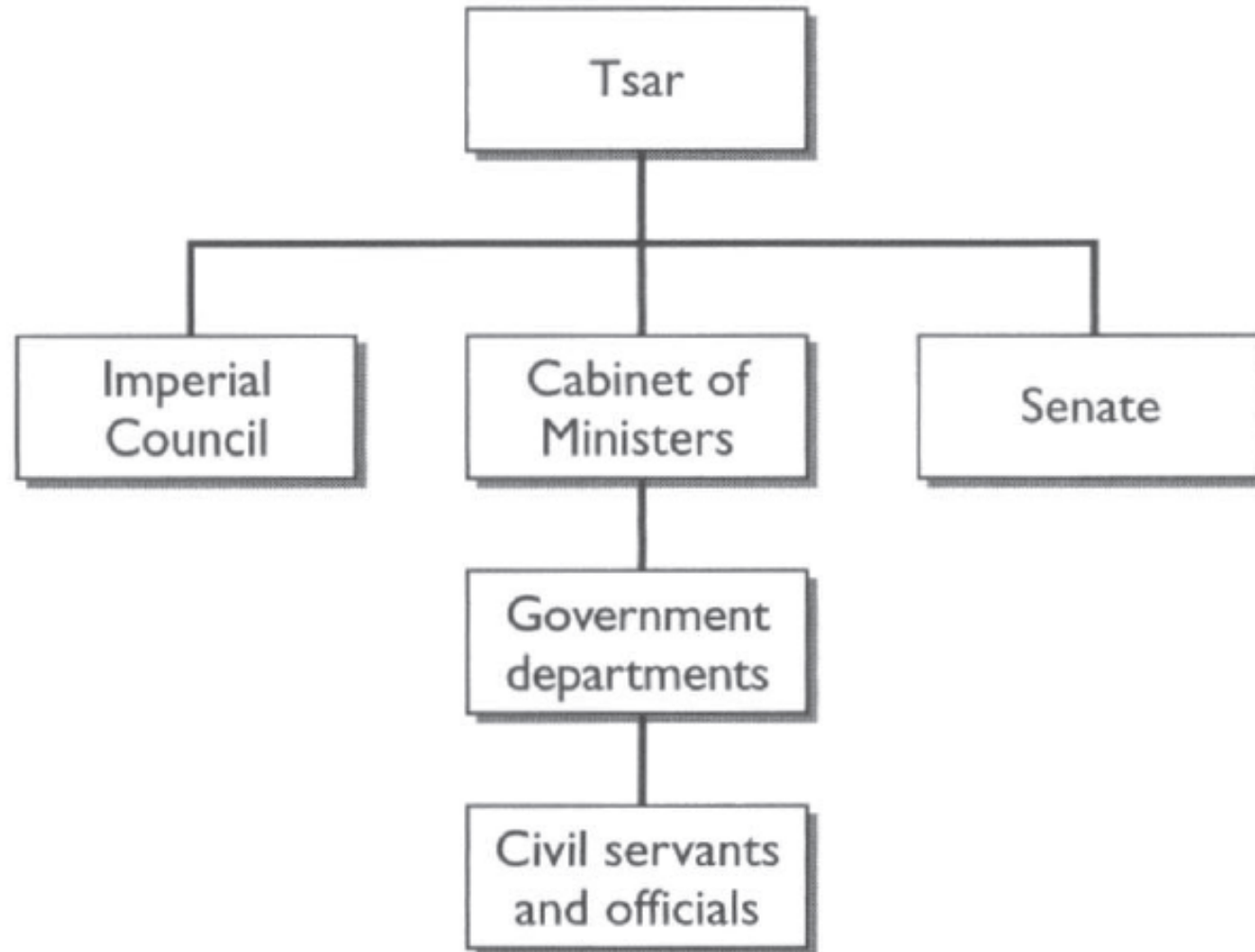


**SOURCE 1.7** A Social Democratic Party cartoon showing the social structure of the Russian state. The text reads, from top to bottom:

We rule you  
We govern you  
We fool you  
We shoot you  
We eat instead of you  
We work for you. We feed you.

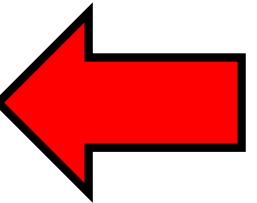
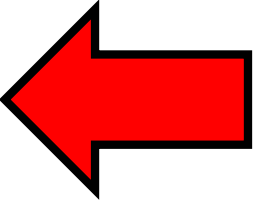
## ■ IC The structure of the tsarist state

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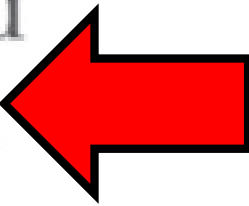
# I Autocracy

As far as the tsars were concerned they had been appointed by God to lead and guide their 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 autocrat could rule the country without constraints according to his own idea of duty and what was right. The tsars rejected any hint that their power rested on the consent of the people.



### **3 Orthodoxy**

The Russian Orthodox Church was an offshoot of the Christian Church, which, for historical reasons, had become independent of the Pope and Rome and saw itself as the upholder of the 'true' Christian faith. It supported the divine right of the tsar to rule and exhorted believers to obey the tsar as the agent of God. The Church believed there was a mystical bond between the god-like tsar and the people – he was the father and they were the children.





The tsarist regime hardened its stance towards opposition. The new Tsar Alexander III was determined to crush the revolutionary movement.

Some revolutionaries learnt that they had to be harder and tougher and be more disciplined if they were to avoid arrest and imprisonment.

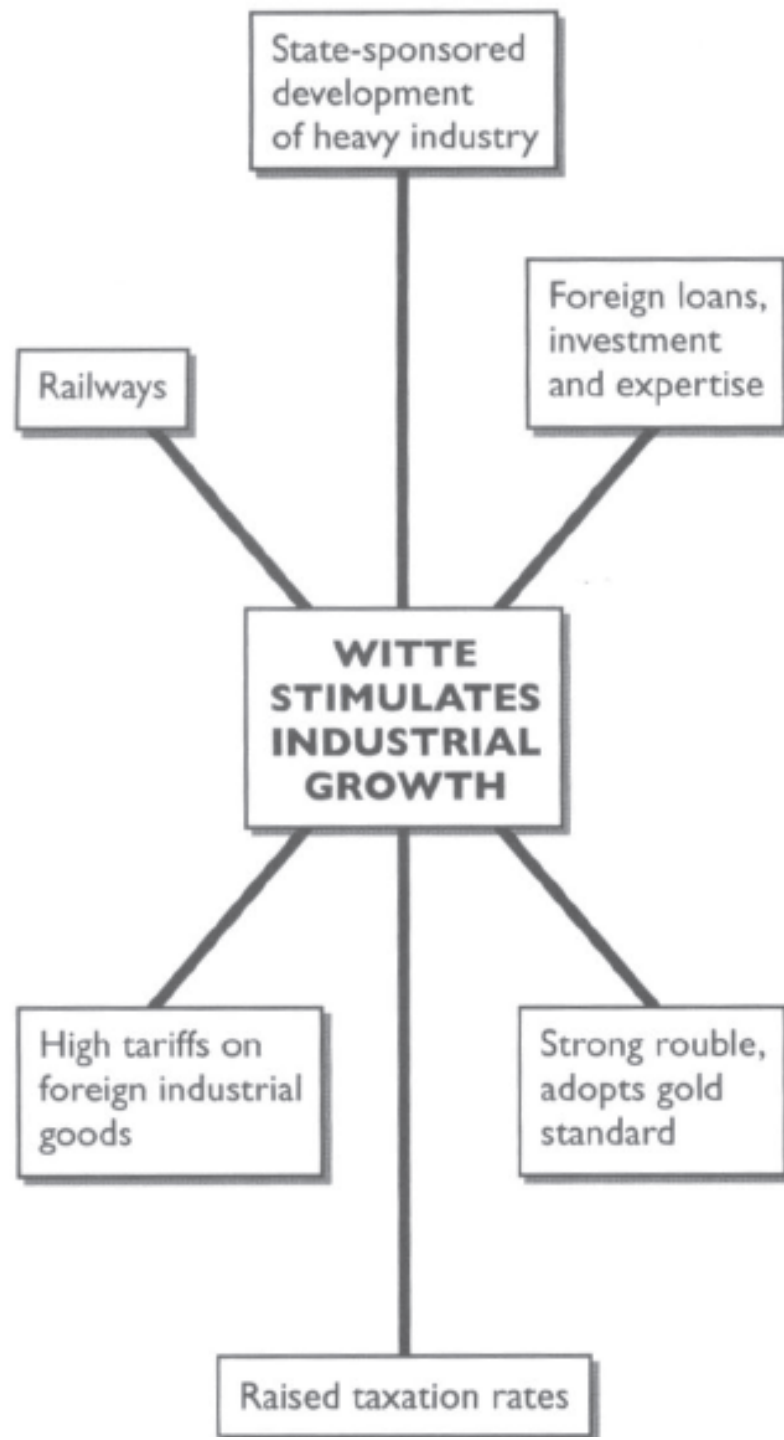
**WHAT WAS THE  
SIGNIFICANCE OF  
THE ASSASSINATION  
OF ALEXANDER II?**

The police were strengthened, new policing methods were introduced and there were a large number of arrests of people who criticised the government.

The success of the assassination gave the tsarist regime an appearance of vulnerability and it provided new martyrs for the revolutionary cause.

The social and political reforms that Alexander II had introduced were halted.





# **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.

- When millions moved from the countryside to the cities to work in factories there was bound to be an increase in social tensions and instability within society. The working classes, living and working in poor conditions, could become volatile and discontented. They would find it easier than the peasants to take concerted action because they were concentrated in large numbers in the cities.
  - A more educated workforce (and Witte favoured the spread of technical education) would create people who were more able to challenge the government.
  - The growth of the middle classes would create pressure for political change, for more accountable and representative government. Most modern industrial countries had democracies and parliaments in which the middle classes featured strongly and the power of monarchs was limited.
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## KEY POINTS FROM CHAPTER

What were the **challenges** facing the tsarist regime at the end of the nineteenth century?

1. Tsarist Russia was a **vast country with a diverse population**, making it a very difficult country to govern.
2. Russia was an **autocracy**, ruled by a tsar who was at the head of a large, unresponsive and inefficient bureaucracy.
3. The tsars used repressive measures and **secret police** to keep control.
4. Russia **needed to modernise and industrialise** if it was to **compete with the developed countries** of Western Europe and maintain its position as a major world power.
5. The task of modernising Russia was one that even the most able leader would have found difficult. **Nicholas II was not a good leader** for these circumstances he was not able, competent or decisive. He had little idea of the needs of his subjects. He **resisted change and tried to preserve** as much of the autocracy as he could.
6. Sergei Witte set in motion a process of modernisation but he was forced from office by conservative court influences and the **problems engendered by rapid industrialisation** and then recession.
7. Tsarist Russia faced challenges from different groups in Russia: the peasants, urban workers, national minorities and the **intelligentsia engaged in forming political opposition to the government**. All these groups had **different and specific demands** which the tsars were not able or willing to accommodate.



**CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Russia was unsettled and volatile. This instability was heightened by an economic depression, which started after 1900, and a war with Japan in 1904. Opposition to the Tsar was growing stronger, particularly from the liberal intelligentsia. At the beginning of 1905, when feelings were running high, the murder of protestors on 9 January, 'Bloody Sunday', led to an explosion of popular discontent. For over a year Russia was out of control and the survival of the tsarist regime was threatened. The Tsar survived mainly because the army remained loyal and he made concessions. There followed a period of brutal suppression that changed the relationship between the Tsar and his people.

- A** What were the causes of the revolution of 1905? (pp. 28–32)
- B** The 1905 revolution (pp. 32–39)
- C** Why did the Tsar survive the 1905 revolution? (pp. 39–42)
- D** Interpreting 1905 (pp. 42–45)



# A

## What were the causes of the revolution of 1905?

### FOCUS ROUTE

- 1 Make notes on the following key factors that pushed Russia into revolution in 1905:
  - a) rapid social and economic change
  - b) economic depression
  - c) failure of government attempts to improve conditions for workers
  - d) Russo-Japanese War
  - e) increasing opposition from the liberal intelligentsia.
- 2 Collect evidence/information which tells you about:
  - a) whether 1905 was a popular revolution
  - b) the role of revolutionary parties
  - c) whether it deserves to be called a 'revolution'.



**SOURCE 2.2** A cartoon drawn during the Russo-Japanese war. The sailor is saying: 'Oh you funny Japs, always making mistakes. Thank you for the badly aimed shells which help me light my pipe!'

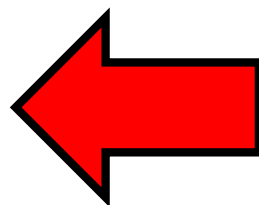
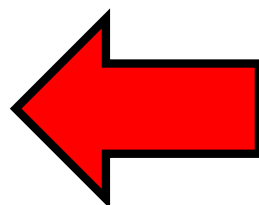


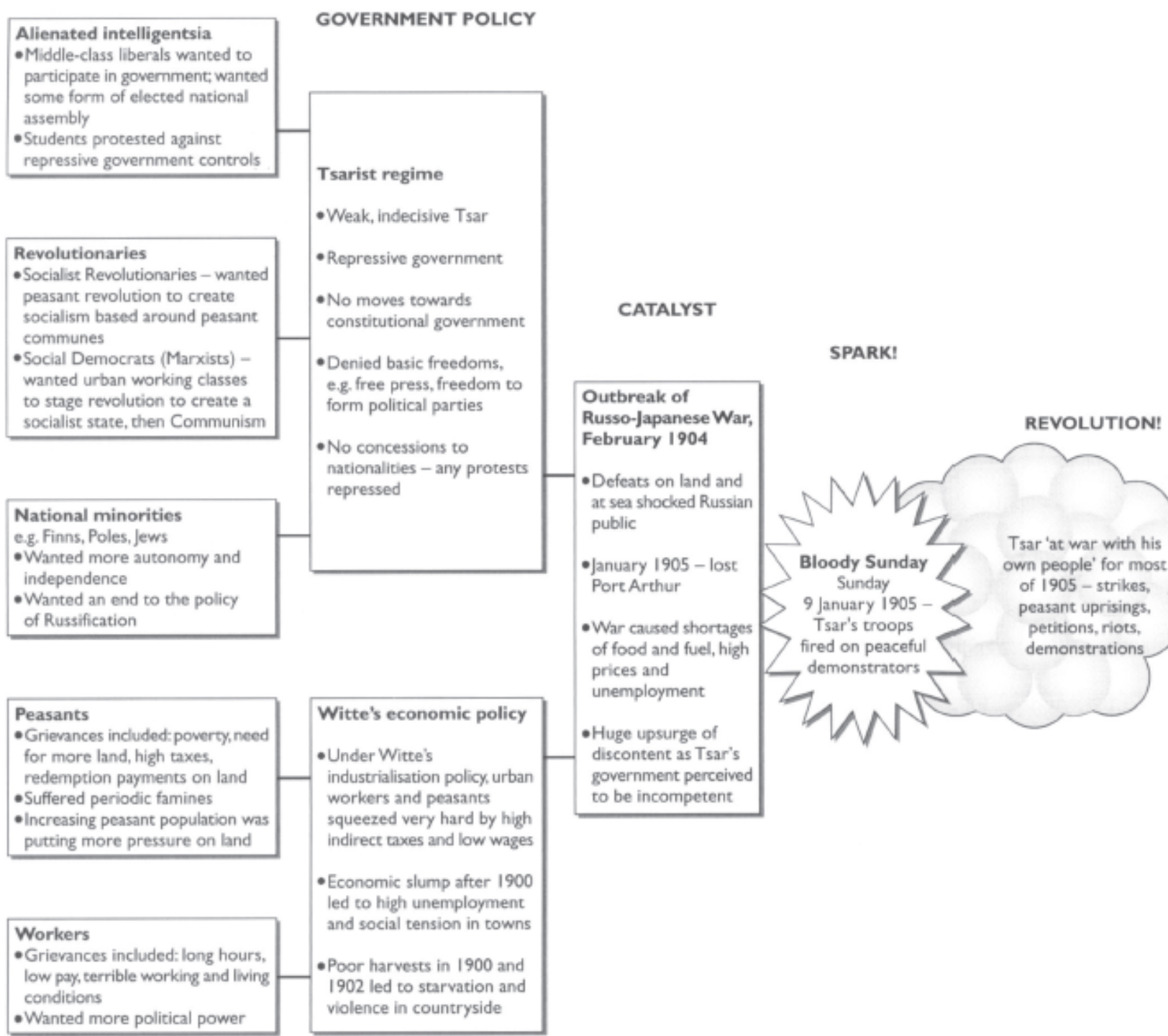
## The Russo-Japanese War 1904–5

By the end of 1903, the situation in Russia was volatile and potentially explosive. And then war was added to the mix.

The war with Japan arose out of Russia's expansionist policy in the Far East. Russia wanted to exploit the area because it was rich in resources and markets. It also wanted control of the ice-free port of Port Arthur in Manchuria. It came into conflict with Japan over Korea, which the Japanese had already marked out for themselves for economic expansion. When Japan proposed a compromise whereby Russia would be ceded predominance in Manchuria if it agreed that Japan could control Korea, the Russians treated the Japanese with disdain. Not long afterwards, Japan launched a surprise attack on Russian ships at Port Arthur on 26 January 1904, and the war was on.

It has been claimed that the Tsar and his Minister of Internal Affairs, Plehve, had sought the war as a convenient way of diverting attention from the problems at home – a successful war would rally the people behind the Tsar. However, recent evidence suggests that the Tsar and his chief ministers did not want a war. It is more likely that they saw Japan as a third-rate power that could be bullied easily and it was this that led to their high-handed manner in refusing to negotiate a settlement.







### January, February

- 9 January – Bloody Sunday: a wave of strikes soon spread to other cities and towns.
- Censorship collapsed and newspapers became increasingly hostile towards the government.
- 4 February – The assassination of the Tsar's uncle, the Grand Duke Sergei, shocked the government. The Tsar invited petitions containing suggestions for reform. Thousands poured in over the following months from all sectors of society.
- Workers started forming factory committees to represent them. Their demands were mainly economic rather than political.
- Right-wing groups and hooligans known as the Black Hundreds, supporting the Tsar, attacked people deemed to be anti-government.

### March, April, May

- The police were becoming increasingly ineffective. Citizens formed militias or vigilante groups to protect themselves from roving bands of criminals.
- 10 March – The Russian army was defeated at Mukden.
- April – At the Second Zemstvo Congress there was a growing demand for civil freedoms and a legislative assembly elected by universal adult suffrage.
- May – The Union of Unions was formed – a non-party organisation that acted as an umbrella group for a range of trade and professional organisations. All sections of society were united against the government – liberals, workers, students, lawyers and professional groups – to force reform.
- 14 May – The Russian Baltic fleet was wiped out at Tsushima.

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### June, July, August

- In the countryside, peasant disturbances started rising significantly in June and July (there had not been much activity in the spring). They fell in August at harvest time. Incidents included: peasants seizing land, grain and animals; burning landlord's houses; illegal cutting of timber; and refusal to pay rents and taxes. Their general demands were land, the end of redemption payments and a reduction in rents. There was no co-ordinated peasant movement. It was largely spontaneous and a response, in part, to economic distress, including food shortages in the summer of 1905.
- 14 June – The mutiny of the Battleship *Potemkin*.
- 31 July – The All-Russian Peasants Union met secretly near Moscow – the voice of the peasants was taking shape demanding the handover of land and a constitutional assembly.
- 27 August – Universities and institutes were given autonomy to control education within their institution and

run their own affairs. They became focal points for political meetings.

- 29 August – The Treaty of Portsmouth was signed between Russia and Japan. This released Russian troops who could be returned to European Russia to re-establish control.

### September, October

- Labour unrest reached a new level of intensity in the autumn, putting a lot of pressure on the government. In September, a strike in Moscow called by railway workers caused chaos since Moscow was a railway hub. The strike spread to other areas of Russia as other railway workers joined it. This then turned into a general strike attracting support from industrial and utility workers, shop assistants, bank employees and staff from government offices – up to two million from almost every area of employment. The strike caused real hardship in cities and towns: food and medical supplies ran short and unburied bodies piled up.
- All opposition groups – workers, students, liberals and revolutionaries – united in demanding radical change. The middle classes, even some industrialists, supported the strikers and gave money. The regime did not dare use violence as the strike was supported by so many different social groups.

- 12–18 October – The Kadet Party (liberal) was formed.
- 13 October – The St Petersburg Soviet was formed. The urban workers had emerged as an organised and dynamic force confronting the autocracy.
- 17 October – The Tsar was persuaded that concessions were necessary and agreed to the October Manifesto, granting civil liberties and an elected assembly. Liberals and the middle classes felt they had achieved their main aims.
- There was a short period of freedom in which opposition groups and anti-government newspapers flourished. Political meetings and celebrations were held in the streets. New political parties were formed.
- At the end of October there was an explosion of violence. Much of this was initiated by supporters of the Tsar angry that the liberals and left had won the Manifesto. There was fighting between right and left on the streets. It seems that the police, and possibly elements in the government, were involved in organising violent revenge attacks.

### November, December

- Throughout November tension was building as the soviets, particularly the St Petersburg Soviet, became more militant. It had an armed militia of over 6000.
- 3 December – Leaders of the St Petersburg Soviet were arrested.
- Armed uprisings were common, particularly in Moscow, where the Bolsheviks took the lead. The army moved into cities and towns to re-establish control.

## Why was the Tsar able to survive the 1905 revolution?

1. The crucial factor was that the **army remained loyal**, despite a rash of mutinies. Once it had received pay and changes to conditions of service, it supported the Tsar and could be employed in putting down the revolution in the cities and later revolts in the countryside.
2. The various groups opposing the Tsar – the workers, the peasants, the liberal middle classes, students and wider public in the cities and the national independence movements – did not combine to provide a co-ordinated and elective opposition. They had **different aims and purposes** and did not act together to bring him down.
3. The October Manifesto split the liberals and socialists. The liberals wanted political reform and movement towards a constitutional democracy; the socialists wanted a social revolution. Many liberals felt they **had got what they wanted out of the Manifesto** and urged that the Tsar be supported.
4. The **middle classes** feared the continuation of violence and disorder. They wanted the revolution to stop and a return to authority and control.
5. The government used **brutal, repressive measures**, especially punitive expeditions, to bring the populace into line and beat them into submission. These methods were effective in re-establishing government control across the Empire.
6. By the end of 1905, the government was in deep financial trouble. The cost of the war and falling tax revenues were driving the government to the brink of financial collapse. However, **Witte secured a huge loan**, largely from French bankers, in April 1906. This loan stabilised the economy and gave the government money to pay for its functions for a year. It **paid for the troops** who were needed to put down uprisings and restore order.



# 3

## Could tsarism have survived? 1906–1917

### CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The Tsar had survived the 1905 revolution with the institutions of tsarism largely intact but the underlying issues and problems associated with reform and modernisation remained. Peter Stolypin seemed to offer the best chance of achieving reform after 1905 but he was assassinated in 1911. Stolypin's major reforms were in agriculture but it is not clear how successful these were. Industry continued to grow but growth was uneven and unbalanced. Little was done to improve life for workers and there was considerable industrial unrest in the years leading up to 1914. The impact of the First World War was devastating and Russia slid towards revolution in 1917. The Tsar himself contributed to this by a series of misjudged actions and policies.

- A** Could Stolypin be the saviour of the Tsar? (pp. 46–48)
- B** The constitutional experiment (pp. 48–52)
- C** How far had the economy improved by 1914? (pp. 52–55)
- D** How revolutionary was Russia in 1914? (pp. 55–58)
- E** The impact of the First World War (pp. 59–64)
- F** How popular was the February Revolution? (pp. 65–69)
- G** Could tsarism have survived? (pp. 70–72)



## **Political Development after 1905**

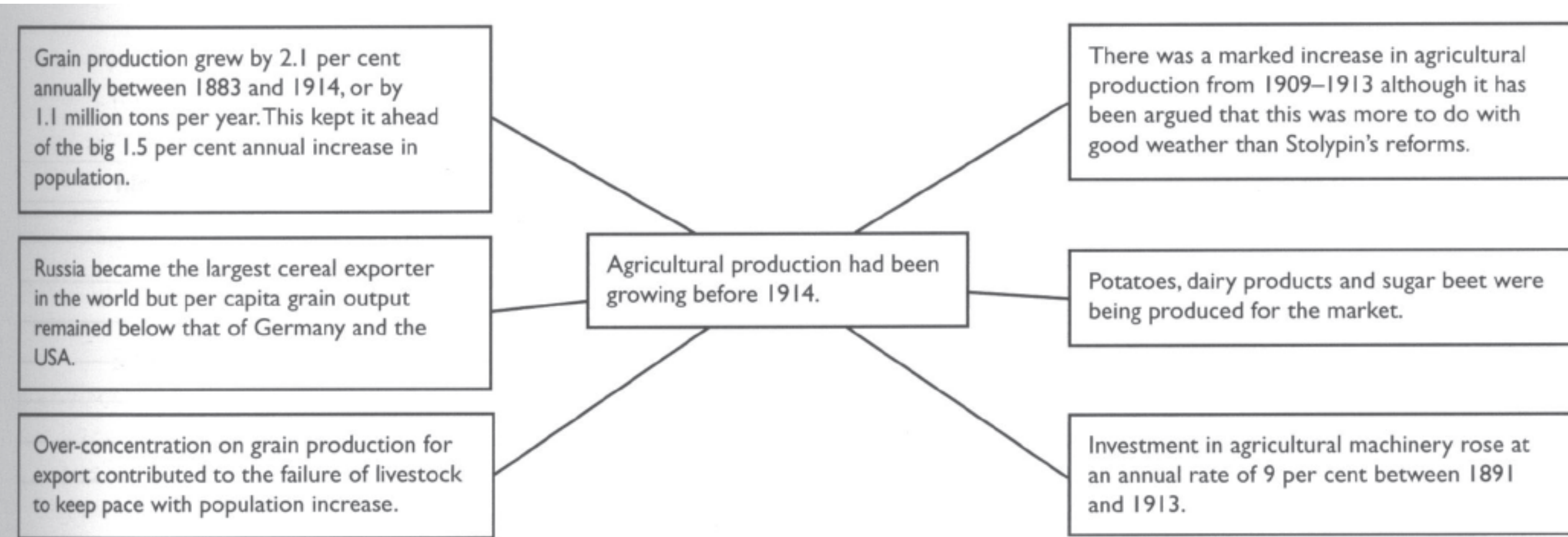
### **Did Nicholas II subscribed to his promise?**

Nicholas had shown that he was never really willing to work with or listen to the Duma. He looked for excuses to close down sessions. He was only concerned with preserving the autocracy, largely because he believed it was a better way of running Russia. He did not accept that democratic government could be effective and did not understand that, by passing some of his responsibilities to an elected assembly, he could avoid the criticism and hostility directed at him from various sections of Russian society. Not all the blame should be attached to the Tsar. The Kadets demands in the First Duma were very radical and they were not prepared to compromise or be patient. As a result, the Duma degenerated into quarrels and a bitter struggle between the Tsar and his supporters on the Right, and the liberals and other parties on the Left. This did not allow for any relationship of trust and co-operation to develop.

# Economic Development after 1905

## How did Stolypin's policies affect the peasants and workers?

- What can you infer from the diagram about agricultural development?



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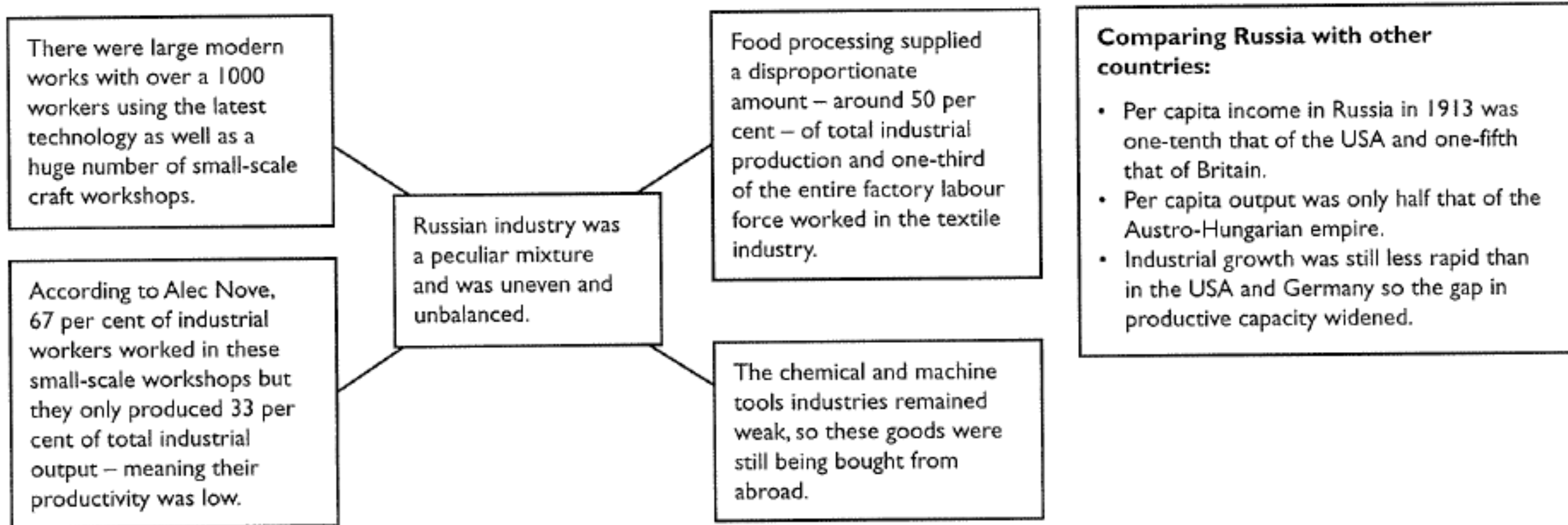
**SOURCE 3.3** Number of peasant households becoming independent 1907–1914 (out of an estimated total of 10–12 million households)

1907	48,271
1908	508,334
1909	579,409
1910	342,245
1911	145,567
1912	122,314
1913	134,554
1914	97,877

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# Economic Development after 1905

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**SOURCE 3.7** Strikes 1908–1914

Year	Total strikes	Strikes regarded as political
1908	892	464
1909	340	50
1910	222	8
1911	466	24
1912	2032	1300
1913	2404	1034
1914 (Jan–July)	3534	2401

Year	No. of strikers
1911	105,110
1912	725,491
1913	861,289
1914 (Jan–July)	1,448,684

# Economic Development after 1905

## How did Stolypin's policies affect the peasants and workers?

### SUMMARY OF MODERNISATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (1906-1917)

1. Peter Stolypin attempted to **preserve the autocracy** by bringing in reforms but he was attacked by left- and right-wing politicians, indicating the difficulty of modernising Russia within the framework of an autocracy.
2. Stolypin's reforms in agriculture attempted to create more productive independent peasants who would support the regime but the reforms had only limited success. Agricultural production grew, but despite some innovation, farming methods were still largely antiquated, using the strip system, and organised by rural communes. **Some peasants prospered while others remained impoverished.** A rootless and **discontented class of landless peasants was growing**, with many moving to the towns and cities.
3. Industrial production grew steadily over the period but **Russian industry was uneven and unbalanced.**
4. The **working classes were becoming more radical** after the [Lena Goldfields Massacre in 1912](#). Militancy and strikes increased in 1912-14.

# Political Reaction towards the Tsar after 1905

## How influential were the political parties by 1914?

### THE LIBERALS

The liberal movement had grown significantly after the local government reforms of Alexander II in 1864, which had set up town and district councils called zemstva (singular zemstvo). These gave local areas a small degree of autonomy to run their own affairs, manage schools and hospitals, build and maintain roads, etc. These councils had proved to be very effective and created a class of people who became skilled in local politics. This included liberal leaning members of the Russian nobility as well as representatives of the middle classes, many of whom worked for the zemstva, including Chekhov (the playwright) who was employed as a doctor. They gained a taste for greater participation in government. The zemstva have been called 'the seedbeds of liberalism'.

The idea of 'liberalism' prevalent in Western Europe was not very Russian and it took a different form in Russia. What Russian liberals agreed on was that reform rather than violence was the way to change the tsarist system and limit the tsar's powers. Many others wanted an extension of freedoms and rights (see right). Before 1905, there was no liberal party to



speak of. Liberalism took on a more organised form at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1903, the Union of Liberation was formed demanding economic and political reform. The Liberals were the major opposition to tsarism before 1905 and indeed up to the 1917 revolution.

**Main beliefs:** civil rights and freedom of the individual, the rule of law, free elections, parliamentary democracy and limitation of the tsar's powers, and self-determination for the national minorities. Some believed that the concept of the zemstvo should be extended to regional and perhaps national level.

**Methods:** reform rather than violent action, political channels through zemstva, articles in newspapers, meetings and reform banquets.

**Support:** they did not have a large popular base and had few active supporters outside Moscow, Petrograd and a few other large cities. Their main support came from the middle class intelligentsia: lawyers, doctors, professors, teachers, engineers and other professional groups. They also had support amongst progressive landowners, industrialists and businessmen.



# Political Reaction towards the Tsar after 1905

## How influential were the political parties by 1914?

### REVOLUTIONARIES

#### Populism and The People's Will

In the later part of the nineteenth century, the main revolutionary movement was Populism. Populists put their trust in and sought 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 avoid capitalism and the evils of industrialisation. However, it was not really clear how this would be achieved and did not amount to a coherent programme. They believed in 'going to the people' and spreading their socialist ideals to the peasantry by peaceful propaganda. Many populists, particularly students and young people, did

'go to the people' in the 1870s, moving out to the countryside to live with peasants and convince them of their revolutionary potential. But the peasants had nothing in common with these middle class youngsters with their strange ideas and rejected them.

After the failure to get a response from the people, in 1879 some Populists formed The People's Will. Peaceful propaganda gave way to violent action – they turned to terrorism to bring down the tsarist regime. Their most spectacular success was the assassination of Alexander II (see page 4). This prompted a fierce reaction from the tsarist regime and led to a period of repression. The People's Will and Populism in general helped create a revolutionary tradition and more directly gave birth to the Socialist Revolutionary Party.

# Political Reaction towards the Tsar after 1905

## How influential were the political parties by 1914?

### THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTIONARIES (SRs)

The Socialist Revolutionary Party, formed in 1901, 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. There was a split between moderates and radicals (who supported extreme terrorism) that persisted into the 1917 revolution.

**Main beliefs:** SRs placed their central hope for revolution with 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 populists, the SRs accepted that the development of capitalism was 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 that already existed. He saw SRs as representing 'all labouring people'.

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

**Support:** Peasants provided a large popular base but by 1905 industrial workers formed perhaps 50 per cent of the membership. This is probably because many workers were recently arrived ex-peasants who recognised the SR Party and supported its aims of land and liberty. Most had regular contact with their villages. It also attracted intellectuals who wanted to make contact with the mass of the population. The 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 the SRs produced. Nevertheless they were the party the peasants recognised as representing them, especially its pledge to return the land 'to those who worked it'.

# Political Reaction towards the Tsar after 1905

## How influential were the political parties by 1914?

### THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS (SDs)

In 1898, Marxists formed the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. The leading light was George Plekhanov who had translated Karl Marx's work into Russian. However, some people found him a little too intellectual and not revolutionary enough. There were serious disputes about the direction of the party. Some wanted to encourage trade unions to improve the conditions of the workers. Others wanted the focus to be on revolutionary tactics and the preparation of the working class for revolution.

At the Second Party Congress in 1903, the SDs split into two factions – the Bolsheviks (Majoritarians)



and the Mensheviks (Minoritarians). This was largely caused by the abrasive personality of Vladimir Ulyanov or Lenin (see page 26) who was determined to see his idea 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 apparent below.

**Main beliefs:** Both factions accepted the main tenets of Marxism but they were 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 (made up of three people) so that it would be more difficult for the police to infiltrate.

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.

Mensheviks 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.



# External Events: World War One and the Impact on Russia 1914 – 1917

## Was Russia ready for another war in 1914?

### ■ 3C 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 August 1915, the Tsar assumed command of the army and 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.



# External Events: World War One and the Impact on Russia 1914 – 1917

## Was Russia ready for another war in 1914?

### 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.



# External Events: World War One and the Impact on Russia 1914 – 1917

## Was Russia ready for another war in 1914?

**SOURCE 3.11** Wounded Russians during the First World War at a temporary field hospital in a Russian church





# SUMMARY OF EVENTS LEADING TO THE 1917 FEBRUARY REVOLUTION

1. The **revolutionary parties were not in a strong position** in 1914 although support for the Bolsheviks had revived after 1912.
2. The **First World War had a devastating** impact on Russia with millions killed and wounded. Incompetent administration and the collapse of the distribution system resulted in a lack of supplies, weapons and medical services at the Front and shortages of food and fuel in major cities, especially Petrograd. Confidence in the government plummeted.
3. The professional classes and businessmen set up non-governmental organisations to improve supplies of war materials, which seemed to offer an alternative form of government.
4. The **Tsar made several bad mistakes**. He went to the Front, taking personal responsibility for the war. He would not work with the Progressive Bloc in the Duma or co-operate with the non-governmental organisations. He left the Tsarina and Rasputin in charge of government.
5. The **Tsarina and Rasputin created instability** by changing ministers continually and became a focus for criticism and antagonism towards the regime. The ruling élite lost confidence in the Tsar
6. By the beginning of 1917 there was little support left for the Tsar and his government. A **spontaneous eruption of discontent in February 1917** saw him swept from power when **the army and its generals deserted him**.