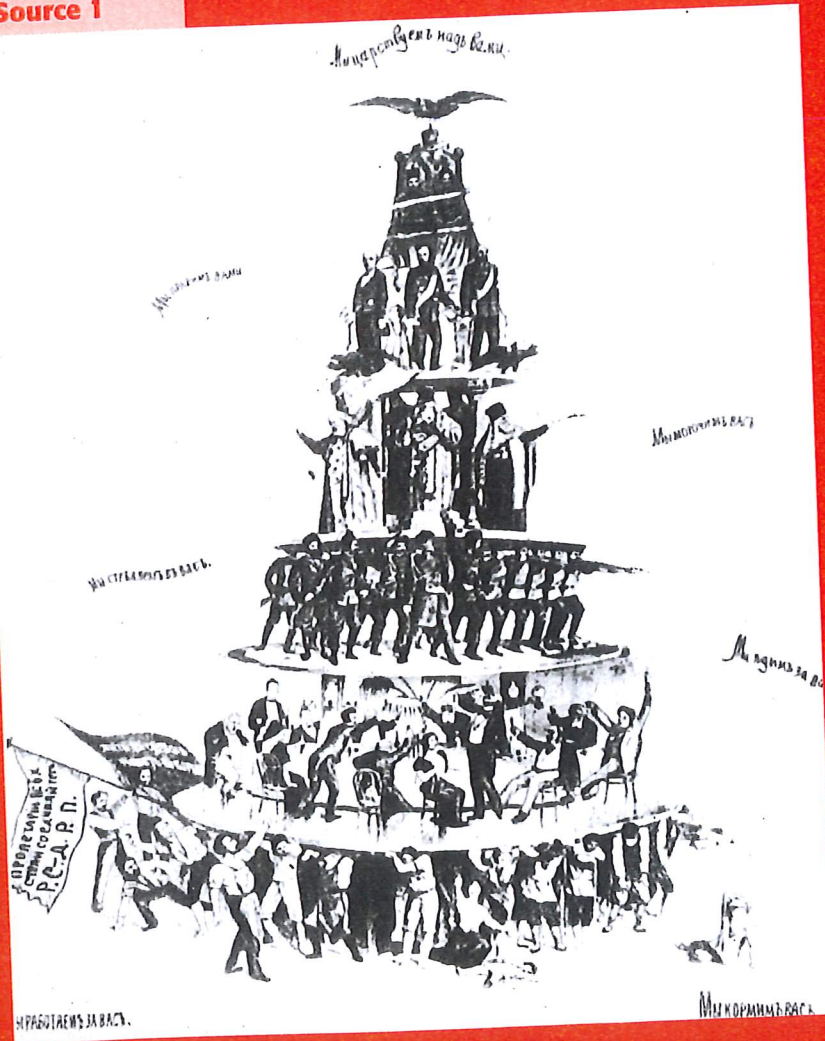


Chapter 3

Stemming the tide 1881–1905 The Russia of Alexander III and Nicholas II

Source 1



Source 2

To the Russian Tsar has been granted a special significance distinguishing him from other rulers of the world. He is not only the sovereign of his people, but he is ordained by God as the guardian and defender of the Orthodox Church, which...has abjured [given up] any activity save spiritual, leaving all cares concerning its earthly welfare... to the consecrated leader of the orthodox people

From an editorial in *Moscow News*, 1882

◀ A Marxist view of Russia in 1901. The layers in the illustration, from the top, say:
"The royal family"
"We rule you"
"We mislead you"
"We shoot you"
and the bottom layer says
"We work for you and feed you"

Think about

- ▶ What is the message of the cartoon (Source 1)?
- ▶ Which groups of people in Russia might have accepted this view in c.1900?
- ▶ How is the view of the monarchy and the Church different from that suggested in Source 2?

Note

The Procurator of the Holy Synod was in effect Minister for the Russian Orthodox Church, though he was not a priest. The Tsar was the head of the Church as he was head of state.

Think about

- ▶ Why did Pobedonostev think a constitution would be 'poison to the entire organization'?
- ▶ What does he claim is the people's view of a constitution?
- ▶ What does he think should be done with the growing opposition in Russia?

Introduction

The assassination of Alexander II unsurprisingly had a dramatic effect on the rest of his family. His son Alexander III moved the family home away from the Winter Palace in St Petersburg to the altogether more cramped and less magnificent palace at Gatchina, 30 km outside the capital. There he remained, receiving guests only on two days per week and surrounded by guards.

The reign of Alexander III, and that of his son Nicholas II after him, is looked upon by most historians, until 1905 at least, as a time of repression that saw the undoing of many of the reforms carried out by his father. This was certainly a time of great economic and social change for the Russian people, but Sources 1 and 2 suggest that perhaps in other ways change was very limited indeed. In the West the social and economic changes of the industrial revolution had led to great pressures on political systems, as for example in Great Britain. Would the Russian autocracy be able to preserve its authority as Russia plunged into her own industrial revolution?

Key questions

- To what extent and why did Alexander III and Nicholas II until 1905 turn their back on the reforms of the 1860s?
- How successful were their attempts to assert imperial authority?
- How was Russia changing economically and socially?
- What kinds of opposition challenged imperial authority?
- Why did the Russian people revolt in 1905?

Turning back the clock?

The new Tsar

Alexander III was deeply suspicious of the direction in which his father had taken Russia. Even before his father's death he was receiving advice like this from the Procurator of the Holy Synod, K. P. Pobedonostev:

Source 3

All the officials and learned men here sicken my heart, as if I were in the company of half-wits or perverted baboons. I hear from all sides that trite, deceitful and accursed word: constitution... But I also meet and talk with some Russian men... Their hearts are seized with fear; above all else they fear that basic evil, a constitution. Among the common people everywhere the thought is spreading: better a Russian revolution and ugly turmoil than a constitution. The former could soon be suppressed, with order restored throughout the land; the latter is poison to the entire organization.

From a letter to the future Alexander III, 4 December 1879

The new Tsar's first task was to review a proposal which was to have been finally approved by his father on 4 March 1881. Alternatively called either 'an innocuous [harmless] scheme' or a 'constitution', the proposal would have appointed committees to discuss legislation and the administration of the country, a kind of consultative assembly. It would have involved *zemstva* leaders and other public figures; many saw it as the first step towards some kind of representative parliament.

However, three days earlier, on 1 March, Alexander II was assassinated, and his son announced to his Council of Ministers, 'I give you advance notice that the

3 Stemming the tide 1881–1905

question has not yet been decided.' There followed intense debate between liberals and conservatives in the State Council. At the end of April the battle was over. The reforms were abandoned.

This was the new Tsar's manifesto to his people, written at the end of April 1881:

Source 4

Acknowledging the will of Providence and the law of Imperial succession, We accepted this burden in a terrible hour of public grief and horror, before Almighty God, trusting that, foreordained as it was that We should assume power at such a dangerous and difficult time, he would not refrain from granting Us his assistance. We trust also that the fervent prayers of Our devoted people, known throughout the whole world for their love and devotion to their sovereigns, will draw God's blessing upon Us and the labour of government to which We have been appointed...Consecrating Ourselves to Our great service, We call upon all Our Faithful subjects to serve Us and the state in fidelity and truth, for the eradication of the vile sedition disgracing the Russian land, for the strengthening of faith and morality, for the proper upbringing of children, for the extermination of falsehood and theft, and for the introduction of truth and good order in the operations of the institutions given to Russia by her benefactor, Our beloved father.

The Manifesto of Alexander III, 1881

When Nicholas II succeeded to his father's throne in 1894 his manifesto contained similar sentiments, including the famous sentence:

Source 5

I shall adhere as unswervingly as my father to the principle of autocracy.

Undoing the reforms

Many of the other reforms that were Alexander II's legacy also were affected:

- All police were centralized under the control of the Ministry of the Interior. Special courts still dealt with serious political offences.
- Judges were given clear advice on sentences and verdicts.
- Elected Justices of the Peace were abolished. 'Land Captains', who had total authority in local court cases and administration, including tax collection, replaced them. These were drawn exclusively from the ranks of the gentry.
- Conditions in prisons were made severe, though violent attacks on the regime were reduced.
- Newspapers who had been warned three times had to submit their papers to the censor a day before publication.
- A committee of government ministers was set up with powers to close any publication deemed 'harmful,' and put a life ban on editors and publishers.
- Libraries and reading rooms faced restrictions on the books they were allowed to stock.
- Universities lost some of their ability to run their own affairs. The election of officers was replaced by a system of appointments. Students also found themselves subject to inspectors inquiring into their non-academic activities.

Activity

- 1 What clues are there in this manifesto to the Tsar's attitude to his future role?
- 2 How far would this manifesto satisfy the terrorists who killed his father?
- 3 Compare what the Tsar said with Sources 12 and 14.

Facts and figures

A government report revealed that in 1880 the tax arrears were over 4 million roubles in Smolensk province alone.

Think about

- ▶ Why did Alexander III want to give financial help to the gentry?

- Peasant representation in the *zemstva* was reduced, and the peasant representatives were appointed and no longer elected. Provincial governors were given 'supervision over the correctness and legality of *zemstvo* institutions' by a new statute in 1890.
- Lower-class children were effectively banned from secondary education

Despite these policies, the State did not turn its back on reform altogether. The introduction of Land Captains can be seen as a reforming measure, a desperate effort to bring about efficient local government. Tax collections had become even more corrupt than before, and arrears were constantly rising. The taxes paid to the *zemstva* were always most in arrears. Absenteeism at all levels from the new assemblies was also a chronic problem.

Three other important steps were taken by Alexander III's government to improve the quality of rural life. In 1886 the poll tax, paid only by peasants, was abolished. In 1883 the Peasants' Land Bank was created to help peasants to buy land from the landlords. This was so successful that peasants had purchased one-third of all landlord estates by 1904. Since the gentry were also selling land to townspeople, this gave concern to the government who saw the gentry's social and political position under threat. Accordingly the State set up the Nobles' Land Bank offering loans at cheaper rates than to the peasants. It held mortgages on a third of all gentry land in 1904, and many noble accounts were in arrears.

One thing in rural life did not change – the backward methods of most agriculture. Plots for most peasants were becoming smaller as the land was redistributed as the rural population increased. The *mir* was still an obstacle to the introduction of new methods, requiring the agreement of the entire village to introduce change. Russian crop yields were far below those of Western Europe.

The 1891 famine

This was the first real test of the reforms to local government. Famine hit 17 of Russia's 39 provinces. There had been an early winter followed by a long hot and dry summer, which ruined almost all the crops. Food shortages were normal in many years, but this was an altogether more drastic situation. According to Professor Hutchinson, this was 'the defining event of the decade.' It was made worse by the inevitable outbreak of cholera and typhus the following year.

The government was partly responsible for the severity of the famine, or so many believed. In an effort to raise much needed revenue, the government had heavily taxed consumer goods. To afford what they needed, the peasants were forced to sell more and more grain, leaving them with no reserves of seed-corn for them to use in a bad year.

Source 6

We ourselves will not eat but we shall export.

This was the slogan people attributed to the Minister of Finance, Ivan Vyshnegradskii. Perhaps this explains why the government was slow to act, despite reports reaching it of hardship since the spring of 1891. Censors prevented newspapers carrying reports of the famine. The government postponed a ban on grain exports until the situation was acute in August 1891.

Think about

- ▶ What does Source 6 tell us of government priorities?
- ▶ How do you think it was received by the general public?

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The result was that many blamed the government for the famine. It was not until November that the government gave way and appealed to the public to engage in voluntary assistance schemes. The young heir to the throne, Nicholas, was put in charge of the Special Committee on Famine Relief. Alexander III announced two State lotteries to raise money to buy in emergency supplies for the peasants.

The public appeal saw an astonishing response from the intelligentsia. The *zemstva* led the way. Prince Lvov, the future Prime Minister of Russia's first republican government, organized famine relief in his own province of Tula. Tolstoy, Russia's most famous writer, organized soup canteens and the playwright Chekhov went back to being a doctor in Moscow to organize treatment for the cholera victims.

Source 7

Never, neither in Russia, nor any other state, has the concern of the central government for helping the population ruined by crop failure been so great and achieved so much as at the present time.

From a Report of the Committee of Ministers, 25 Feb 1892

However, the peasant S. Semenov wrote this about the famine:

Source 8

With every day the need and the misery of the peasants grew. The scenes of starvation were deeply distressing, and it was all the more disturbing to see that amidst all this suffering and death there were sprawling huge estates, beautiful and well-furnished manors, and that the grand old life of the squires, with its jolly hunts and balls, its banquets and its concerts, carried on as usual.

Despite all their efforts, over 350,000 died either from starvation or disease. It did, however, demonstrate that, in a crisis, all sections of the community had been able to work together: *zemstvo* leaders, Land Captains, peasant elders, local gentry and the national government.

Economic growth

Industrial growth at the end of the nineteenth century

The economy, already growing as we have seen under Alexander II, developed dramatically, with an average growth rate of 8 per cent per annum at the end of the century. This was the highest growth rate of any of the world's major economies. Russia became the world's fourth largest industrial economy. The person given most credit for Russia's continued and more rapid growth is Count Witte, who became Minister of Finance in 1893. Short of capital inside Russia, he turned to Western Europe for investment. He was dramatically successful, increasing foreign investment from 98 million roubles in 1880 to 911 million roubles in 1900. The result was an increase in annual production.

Think about

- ▶ You might like to look at the famines of 1920–1922 and 1933–1934. In what ways were the causes similar?
- ▶ How did the governments respond to the crises?
- ▶ Who coped with the crises best?

Think about

- ▶ Why was the famine such a public relations disaster for the government?
- ▶ What conclusions do you think those involved in dealing with the famine drew?

(Figures in millions of tons)

	Coal	Pig iron	Oil
1880	3.2	0.42	0.5
1890	5.9	0.89	3.9
1900	16.1	2.66	10.2
1910	26.8	2.99	9.4

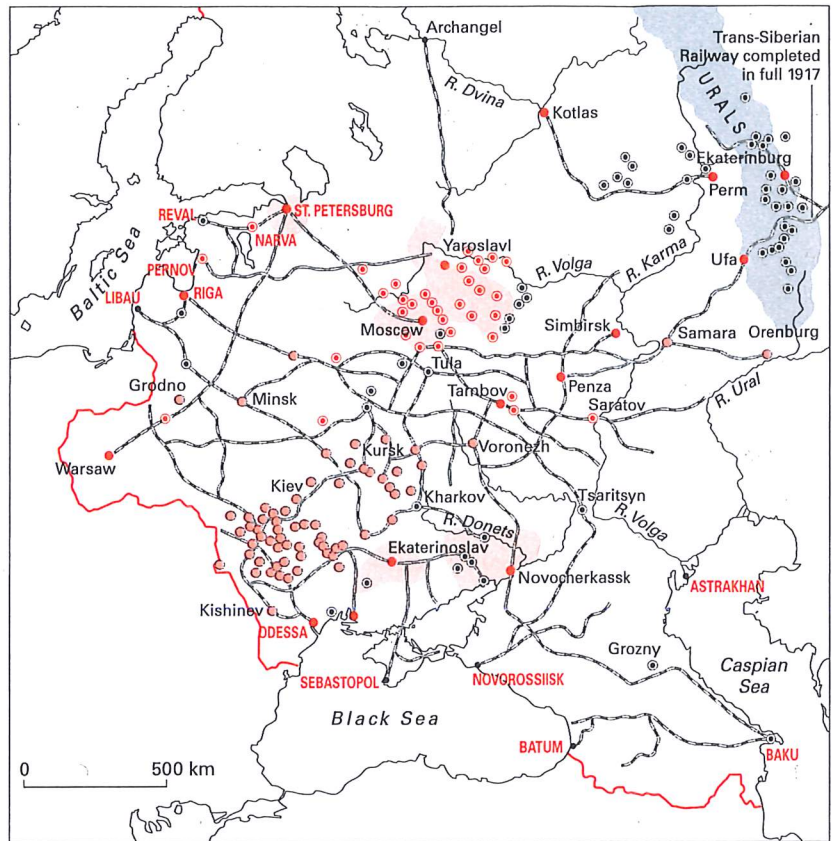


Principal exports in 1914:
Cereals, timber, petroleum, eggs, flax, butter, sugar

Principal imports in 1914:
Raw cotton, machinery and metal goods, tea, coal, iron, lead, copper

Source 9

▶ Economic growth in Imperial Russia before the First World War.



Railways

Many of the 'westernizers' saw the railway as an important way to modernize the country. It would unite the country, open up trade with Europe, China and the USA, develop Siberia's mineral resources and also be a stimulus to the growth of Russian industry. The figures below (in kilometres) show the considerable progress that was made.

	1840	1860	1880	1900
Russia	27	1,626	22,865	53,234
France	496	9,167	23,089	38,109
Great Britain	2,390	14,603	25,060	30,079
Germany	469	11,089	33,838	51,678

The centrepiece of Russia's railway expansion was the Trans-Siberian Railway, linking Russia and the Far East. Huge sums of government money were invested in the enterprise. The vast distances involved meant that European standards of safety and construction had to be abandoned, and trains could only travel slowly around its sharp curves and up its steep inclines. It was hoped that the line would quickly pay for itself in passenger and freight charges. By 1905 almost two-thirds of Russian railways were owned by the State.

The urban poor

This 'industrial revolution' also brought profound social changes. Millions of peasants moved into the developing industries. By 1913, according to Robert Service, the working class in the cities and towns had reached almost 11 million. Russia's two 'capital cities' grew most dramatically.

Facts and figures

Populations of

	Moscow	St Petersburg
1881	753,500	928,000
1890	1,038,600	1,033,600
1900	1,345,000	1,439,600
1910	1,617,700	1,905,600

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As in Britain during the industrial revolution, the workers from the countryside moved into slums on the outskirts of the cities. Here they found unsurfaced roads, tenements or worse still barrack blocks. Some workers lived and slept by their factory machines. In 1904 the average St Petersburg apartment housed 16 people, about six people per room. Running water was available in only one-third of St Petersburg houses. Cesspools, piles of human manure and a polluted water supply were a constant threat to the health of the poor.

Wages were low and employment insecure. Things were much worse for women than men. In Moscow there was a daily market where labourers were hired just for the day.

Source 11

One workday at the factory lasted eleven and a half hours, plus a one-and-a-half-hour lunch break. In the beginning I would grow so terribly tired so that as soon as I got home from work and ate dinner, I would fall into my filthy sack and sleep like a dead man, despite the myriad bedbugs and fleas...We rented the apartment communally as an artel (collective) of about fifteen men...I was put in a tiny, dark, windowless corner room; it was dirty and stuffy ...All fifteen men ate from a common bowl with wooden spoons. The cabbage soup contained little pieces of meat.

From *A Radical Worker in Tsarist Russia* by S.I. Kanatchikov, describing his living conditions on arrival in Moscow in 1895. He later joined the Bolsheviks. This memoir was published in Moscow between 1929 and 1934

Russia was badly hit by the world depression of 1899, leaving a dangerous situation in urban areas. Most of the new workforce were born in the countryside and had left for the cities and mines to find a better life. They were obviously very susceptible to the propaganda of the revolutionary groups which also developed at the same time (see pp. 55–56).

In the past the Russian Orthodox Church had shaped the peasants' view of the world. This influence was, if not entirely shattered, seriously weakened when they moved into the cities. No longer was daily life governed by the accidents of weather. Nor would traditional village society mould a man's views. Literacy was also much higher in the towns than the country, leaving workers open to many new influences.

Source 10

◀ Living conditions in an early twentieth century workers' hostel.

Think about

- ▶ How reliable do you think Kanatchikov is as a source about the lives of the poor at this time?

Think about

- ▶ If you are also studying Britain at this time, did the same happen there?

Government finances

Autocracy needed sound finances. Towards the end of Alexander's reign (1877–1878) Russia was once more plunged into war with Turkey. As in 1854–1855, the government was forced to print more paper money, causing a depreciation of the rouble and inflation averaging about 30 per cent a year. Over 30 per cent of government expenditure was being spent on the armed forces, but another third simply disappeared on debt interest, leaving little left for education or social welfare. The government desperately needed to sell more grain overseas to restore international confidence. The famine of 1891 was the result.

Vyshnedgraskii, Finance Minister 1887–1892, began rescuing the government finances from their parlous state. He was able to reduce imports and raise more revenue by imposing tariffs on imported goods. He also built up Russia's gold reserves and balanced the budget. All this was put in jeopardy by the famine which overwhelmed large parts of the country in 1891. A more stable rouble was essential for international trade and for investment. There was little point in saving if inflation was running at 30 per cent! After his resignation, his work was continued by his successor Count Witte, who finally introduced a new gold currency into which paper money could be converted. He modestly later claimed it was, 'One of the great successes in the peaceful cultural development of mankind.'

Was Russia becoming a modern industrialized state at the end of the nineteenth century?

The number of factory workers in 1914, at the outbreak of the First World War, was still only 2.5 million, just 1.88 per cent of the total population. Although figures suggest that they were more concentrated in larger enterprises, like the Putilov Works in St Petersburg for example, this did not mean that Russian factories were particularly efficient. Much industrial production took place away from large factories in small workshops in the countryside and the towns. Most of the workers in the new industries had been born and brought up in the countryside and perhaps looked back with some nostalgia to a rural past. At the turn of the century many went back to their villages every year to help with the harvest and haymaking. When food was scarce during the First World War and afterwards, many went back to their villages to live.

Industry depended hugely on State intervention and orders – especially the railways and the armaments industry. Foreign credit also played a disproportionate role in Russian development. From 1885 onwards, military spending was never less than 50 per cent of the government's expenditure. The internal market was too weak, it has been argued, to sustain industrial growth. The economy before the First World War was not producing what the peasants, making up 80 per cent of the total population, wanted. A 'command economy' of a kind was therefore in existence long before the days of Lenin and Stalin. It was an economy designed to protect the territorial integrity of the Empire in an increasingly threatening world. The needs of ordinary Russians in this situation were bound to be secondary.

Note

A 'command' economy is one where the government decides what is produced, not 'demand' i.e. what consumers want.

The intelligentsia and the middle class

As cities and commerce grew, there was also a relative growth in the professional and managerial middle classes. The work of the *zemstva* had also led to an expansion in this group, employing as they did educated teachers, administrators, doctors and experts. The number of banks and other financial

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institutions mushroomed. Many of these people had become used to some kind of involvement, at a low level, in public service and decision-making. They were confident about themselves and their future. As the work of the *zemstva* expanded, so did the expectations of their leaders and employees for wider political consultation at a national level. The intelligentsia had changed since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Nobles no longer constituted the great majority of students at university; these were now drawn from almost all classes, including wealthy peasants.

Despite this, the intelligentsia had little in common with the peasants or the workers, but were equally ignored by the political establishment. In Britain in the nineteenth century they had been included in the political system. In Russia this was denied to them, pushing them as well as the poor towards radical and revolutionary politics. It is noticeable that the intelligentsia and the prosperous middle classes throughout modern Russian history, as we have seen already with The People's Will, provided leaders for the revolutionary groups. The refusal of both Alexander III and his son Nicholas II to sacrifice any of their autocratic power meant that even moderate liberal-minded people were driven to support the calls of the men of violence. When violence began, it would be difficult to stop.

The nationalities question

In the last chapter we noticed that, as in many parts of Europe, some of the non-Russian peoples of the Empire were becoming more conscious of their national traditions and heritage. Fundamentally the Tsars could react to the growing sense of national consciousness in one of two ways:

- They could recognize and give to each developed nationality some form of autonomous structure.
- They could try to control and suppress manifestations of national culture and consciousness wherever they occurred.

Russification

The Tsars after 1881 took the latter course. Some have argued that this reaction to national dissent was crude. Where there was any talk of greater autonomy, the Tsars withdrew what local self-government they already had. In truth this was a policy that Alexander II had already begun in troublesome areas. In 1866, once the Polish rebellion had been crushed, the Kingdom of Poland became the Vistula Provinces, and subject to the same laws as the rest of Russia. The Russian language became the only language allowed in schools. The emancipation statute for Poland had been decidedly less advantageous to the Polish gentry, who had been sympathetic to nationalist ideas.

In the Ukraine in 1863 the Minister of the Interior, Valuev, said that the Ukrainian language, 'has not existed, does not exist and shall never exist'. He promptly banned virtually all publications in Ukrainian, or as he called it, the 'Little Russian dialect'. In 1876 all existing books in Ukrainian were ordered to be removed from schools, and, as in Poland, only Russian was to be used in schools. This repression of everything Ukrainian was continued by his successors.

The death of Alexander II was the occasion for widespread attacks on Jewish settlements. These continued throughout Alexander III and Nicholas II's reigns. The most notorious of these outbreaks occurred in Kishinev in 1903. Jewish houses and businesses were broken into, women were raped and men beaten

Think about

The Tsars had excellent advisers. Why did they not contemplate constitutional reform?

Cross reference

For a full table of nationalities in Russia see page 10.

Quotation

I am always happy when they beat the Jews.

Attributed to Alexander III

Note

The Cossacks were mounted troops from southern Russia.

and murdered. In all, 47 died. The Cossacks who arrived to restore order joined in the attacks. The government was blamed for this and many other such outrages. Though it probably had nothing to do with these attacks, the government set the tone for the public's view by its own actions. The Minister of the Interior at the time, Plehve, and both Alexander III and his son, were strong anti-Semites. His reign was marked by many more restrictions on the Jewish people. According to Figes, there were 1400 different statutes regulating their life. They were, for example, forbidden by law to own land or take commissions in the army.

Was Russification successful?

The Tsars would not have accepted this as a valid question. If they could not tolerate a free press or responsible organs of local government, how could they give recognition to demands for more regional or national self-government? Russification was to them an essential policy. To them autocracy, nationality and orthodoxy were integral to each other. If concessions were made on any front, it would jeopardize the whole structure of the regime. The alternative was to grant a constitution to all Russian people and begin what the Romanovs felt was the slippery slope to becoming a figurehead monarch without any real power, a monarchy on the British model perhaps. It would also be to betray a sacred trust from their forefathers.

Ignoring national differences or trying to minimize them seemed to them the only policy.

The implications of this were profound. A large standing army would need to be maintained in the frontier regions not only to protect Russia's frontiers but to secure it from possible enemies within.

Activity**How many of Alexander II's reforms were discarded after his death?**

To assess the changes made by Alexander III and his son you will need to go back to Chapter 2 or the table you made of the reforms between 1855–1870. Make out another table like the one below and work out for yourself whether Alexander III did reject all his father's reforms.

	<i>Actions taken under Alexander III</i>	<i>What was left of Alexander II's reforms?</i>
Serfdom		
Civil rights		
Good government		
Justice and the law		
Education		
Popular representation		
National rights		
Dissent		

- 1 How accurate is it to label Alexander II as a great reformer and Alexander III as a great reactionary?
- 2 Does the evidence above suggest that Russia had found a basis for future stability?

The rising tide of opposition

The Romanovs seemed to face difficult dilemmas at almost every turn. The pressure to maintain Russia as a major European and world power forced the regime to try to modernize the economy and follow the western example, to some extent at least. However, industrialization and modernization meant new social forces were being created which threatened to overwhelm the regime itself. An educated and freethinking middle class, able to travel and read the works of western authors, was one such force. An industrial workforce, concentrated in the urban areas in squalid conditions, was another potential source of opposition. In the 1880s and 1890s the industrial workers were preoccupied with making a living and had not developed a political consciousness of their own.

Populism

The opposition groups we studied in Chapter 2, Land and Liberty, The People's Will etc., are loosely lumped together by historians as 'Populists', the term originating from those who 'went to the people' in the 1870s. Radical intellectuals dominated these early groups, who argued passionately about how the regime could be changed. All, however, believed in a society based on the village communes, where all land was held in common. As the number of industrial workers increased, the Populists also attracted some support at the factories. The chosen method of most of the Populists was terrorism and assassination. This continued after the Tsar's assassination.

Immediately after Alexander II's death, 150 members of the People's Will were arrested. The secret police had repeated successes in penetrating the organization, even at the highest level. There were few successful terrorist attacks. The most notable exception was the shooting in 1882 of Governor Strelnikov in broad daylight. Khalturin, who had planted the bomb in the Winter Palace in 1880, and his associate were immediately captured, tried before a military tribunal and hanged four days later. In 1883 Vera Figner, the movement's most active leader, was betrayed to the police. She spoke these words in her final speech to the military court in 1884:

Source 12

All my experience had convinced me that the regime could only be changed by violence. Without the liberty of the Press the dissemination of ideas through the written word is impossible. If some social institution had shown me some other way of achieving Russia's liberty perhaps I would have adopted it. I would certainly have tried it ... I do not attach any great importance to supporting a republic or a constitutional monarchy, but I do believe it to be essential that conditions should be created in which the individual should have the possibility of developing to the full all his talents and devoting them without reservations to the service of society.

Figner's arrest did not bring an immediate end to terrorist activity. None the less after Alexander Ulyanov's failed attempted assassination of the Tsar in 1887, the interest in new attempts seemed to wane. The secret police were too effective and the waste of life too high perhaps. There had also been very little support for the attacks amongst the general public. The terrorists were, for example, always short of money. Famine in 1891–1892 also meant many were preoccupied in relief work where their efforts could see some tangible results.

Note

Populists are 'Narodniks' in Russian.

Think about

- ▶ Which groups in Russia were likely to be sympathetic with this statement by Vera Figner?

■ Biography

Karl Marx (1818–1883)

Born 1818 in Trier, Germany
Studied law in Bonn and Berlin

1841

Journalist in
Cologne

1843 Studied
the French
Revolution in
Paris

1845

Expelled from
Paris. Settled
in Belgium

1848–9

became involved in the German
revolutions, writing *The Communist
Manifesto* with his friend Friedrich
Engels.

1849 settled in Britain, where he
wrote his major work *Das Kapital*
(Money).

1883 died in exile.



By the later 1890s, after the disappointment of a new Tsar, Nicholas II, who seemed just as unbending as his father, the few surviving Populists began to re-emerge in a slightly different guise. Groups of Socialist Revolutionaries were set up in Moscow, the Ukraine and Minsk. A new publication *Revolutionary Russia* appeared on the streets. In 1902 these different groups formed themselves into a political party 'The Party of Socialist Revolutionaries' (SRs). This party was of course illegal on its foundation so its headquarters was established in Switzerland, where *Revolutionary Russia* was now published. This new party did not abandon terrorist activities, but it also saw the need for propaganda campaigns to raise the political understanding of the masses.

The SRs had their own Combat group, which continued its activities. In 1902 Sipyagin, Minister of the Interior, was killed by a young volunteer. He entered the Minister's office, disguised in military uniform, and shot Sipyagin without making any attempt to escape. He was sentenced by a military tribunal and hanged. In 1904 the Combat group had its greatest success when it blew up the new Minister of the Interior, Plehve, who had become the Tsar's closest adviser.

Marxism

The SRs were not the only revolutionary organization to be formed. The ideas of Karl Marx, a German exile living in England, were becoming popular, not only in Russia but also throughout Europe. You will already know that a party claiming to follow his ideas took over and dominated Russia for over 70 years. It would be a mistake to think, as you read this, that this outcome was in any way foreseeable.

Karl Marx based much of his thinking about history, economics and philosophy on his research into the history of France and Great Britain. The French Revolution particularly interested him. Like many other political thinkers of the nineteenth century, Marx was a socialist. He believed that an economic and political system that allowed a few individuals to become rich while others went poor was unfair. However, Marx's ideas went further than this. He believed that he had in his research discovered the law which governed the development of society. Hence he regarded himself as a 'scientific socialist', unlike many other 'ideal' socialists at the time.

The force driving history was, he believed, the struggle between different classes in society (see quotation 1 on page 54). A person's class was decided by his relationship to 'the means of production', that is by whether he owned or managed land or factories or whether he worked for other people. Marx's view of history led him to think that the course of history was predictable. Marx did not claim to be able to foresee specific events or individual actions, but he did believe that he knew the broad lines along which most societies would develop. History, for Marx, reflected the march of human progress. For him progress meant the growth of human production to the point where all basic needs would be fully satisfied. Only when material needs were satisfied would everyone reach fulfilment and happiness.

The first humans were hunter-gatherers. At that time there was no property or means of production, and everyone was roughly equal. When farming was developed, this equality was shattered. Whoever owned the land producing the food on which people depended would also dominate and control society. This would eventually end with feudalism, where peasants were virtually slaves to the landowners.

Note

An example of an 'ideal socialist' was Fourier. He planned ideal communities, which he called *phalasteries*. These apparently included a platform complete with piano in the middle of the fields to entertain the workers.

3 Stemming the tide 1881–1905

Within feudal society itself, however, would develop a new class of people, capitalist entrepreneurs, who would eventually overthrow it when industry and trade expanded with the industrial revolution. This created new means of production, machines; power now passed away from landowners to capitalist factory owners, the 'bourgeoisie' as Marx called them. Those who worked on their machines he called the 'proletariat'. They became a new slave class.

Marx thought that competition between factories would grow more intense, and successful companies would buy out or put out of business those who were less efficient. This process would continue until production was in the hands of monopolies. Political power also would be in the hands of the owners of these monopolies. The proletariat would be more and more exploited as the bourgeoisie struggled to make maximum profits, until finally they would be driven to revolt against their exploiters.

Then would follow a period which Marx called the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', when the new ruling class would use the power of the State to destroy all traces of bourgeois society (quotation 2). Once this had been achieved, all people would be on the same level, private property would not exist and the State would no longer be necessary. People would live side by side in harmony, taking from society what they needed and putting into society their talents and their labour (quotation 3). A classless, Communist society would have been reached. An important point to note is that Marxists were internationalists, believing national borders would disappear after a successful Communist revolution (quotation 4).

Why were these ideas so appealing in the nineteenth century? One of the great attractions was the theory's seeming scientific character, but it had almost a religious aspect too. It taught that the exploited would eventually inherit the good things of life, almost a heaven on earth. Marx himself was an atheist. He believed that religion had been developed to persuade the poor to accept their position on earth, rather than try to change their situation by force (see quotation 5). After the famine of 1891–1892 Marxism attracted more support from intellectuals who could see little future in a peasant revolution.

■ Activity

Marxists and Populists

Read through the last few pages and then fill in the table below.

	<i>Populists</i>	<i>Marxists</i>
How did they believe power would be achieved?		
Which groups held the key to future power?		
What was their vision of the future Russia?		

- 1 How did the ideas of the Populists and Marxists differ?
- 2 In what ways were their ideas similar?
- 3 Whose ideas seem to have been more relevant to conditions in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century?

Quotation

Quotations from the works of Karl Marx

- 1 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle.'
- 2 'The class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat.'
- 3 'From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.'
- 4 'The workers have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to gain. Workers of the world, unite!'
- 5 'Religion...is the opium of the masses.'