This booklet looks out the reign of Nicholas II from 1894 to 1917. It does not, however, deal with the revolution itself – you will find that in the next instalment.

This material could be examined in several different ways:

1) As part of the causes of the 1917 revolution.

2) Evaluating/assessing the impact of certain events /people in the loss of support for the Tsar.

3) A judgment on whether the revolution was inevitable from the start (a Marxist interpretation) or whether it was the specific events / policies of Nicholas’ reign that caused it.

4) A ‘what if’ style evaluation – e.g. if WW1 had not happened, were the reforms that had been undertaken by Witte and Stolypin sufficient?

Use this space to summarise key people/events:

**What was Nicholas II’s character?  How well-suited was he to rule Russia?  Is it surprising that he was the 'last Tsar'?**

* Came to power in 1894 after his father’s death.  Shy and lacking in confidence, Nicholas was **not prepared to be Tsar**and did not want this role.  As he wrote in his diary in 1894, "*I am not prepared to be the Tsar.  I never wanted to become one.  I know nothing of the business of ruling.*" **Unwilling to rule!**
* Historians agree that Nicholas was not equal to the challenges facing Russia - Hans Rogger, "*Nicholas had no knowledge of the world or of men*".
* Many faults as a ruler: *“not fit to run a village post office”,*as Trotsky memorably phrased it*.*He was weak, stubborn, not willing to make decisions, poorly organised and not keen to engage in political issues or read political reports etc.  **Unwilling *and* unable to rule!**
* Furthermore, given his upbringing at the hands of AIII and Pobedonostsev, Nicholas was **firmly committed to tsarist *Conservatism***.  He wished to maintain autocracy as the God-given and ordained structure of political power in Russia.  He believed that democracy would lead to the collapse of the Russian empire. He **pledged to uphold autocracy as firmly as his father had**in his coronation speech in 1895 (in which he also dismissed claims of democrats as "*senseless dreams*").
* Nicholas’ refusal to adapt politically to the changing social and economic conditions in Russia at the turn of the century was **reinforced by his wife, the Tsarina Alexandra, who was a strong believer in autocracy** and could persuade him not to listen to those moderates who argued that some reform was needed to save Tsardom.

**Key problems facing Nicholas II / Key Aims**

* **Backwards economy - needs to modernise and industrialise in order to compete with Britain, France etc and remain a ‘Great Power’.** A strong industrial economy was essential if Russia were to remain an important military power.  This meant a concentrated effort would be needed to move Russia away from its **backwards and agriculture-dominated economy**. As part of this plan to strengthen Russia on the world stage, Nicholas had specific foreign policy goals: obtain a year round ice free port in the Far East; promote the idea of Pan-Slavism in the Balkans as a cover to increasing Russia influence/territory there; assert Russia’s strength wherever possible.
* **National poverty**- backwards and inefficient agricultural economy struggled to feed the rapidly growing population, let alone provide the government with any surplus for national security etc.   Furthermore, the ‘peasant problem - of ‘land hunger’, low income, debt and starvation - was liable to lead to uprisings and revolts which **threatened the stability of the tsarist regime**.  Modernisation as a means to employ, and pacify, overflow of workers in the countryside.
* **Dangers of modernisation**in terms of social and economic forces it released, which would challenge the tsarist regime and leader to still greater political opposition - i.e. calls for parliament and democracy would be greater if an industrial working class living and working in poor conditions develops in cities, and with the growth of an educated workforce and the middle classes.  Key issue: how to get the political benefits of economic modernisation without making concessions to opposition calls for political change?

**Key and overriding aim:**

* Maintain autocracy and strengthen Russia’s position economically and militarily through modernisation.  However, this modernisation was to happen without social and economic reform.  So overall aim = **modernise without revolution! Or having your Tsarist cake and eating it!**

Remember, if you are asked to judge the success of an area of Nicholas II’s policy you must be able to set criteria against which to judge it – these should be the extent to which he achieved his main goals above.

**How successful was the Economic modernisation programme introduced by Witte?**

**Key indicators of backwardness:**

* **Agriculture inefficient and backwards**: peasants used medieval tools and old-fashioned land usage.  This meant Russian farming was much less efficient per acre than UK or the USA.  (Caused by *mir* system preventing innovation and incentive to work hard, and lack of investment in agricultural technology).
* While **industrial output** had increased during the reigns of Alexander II and Alexander III, it was still at a **low level**when compared with the industrial powerhouses of Western Europe and the USA.  (This late industrial development had been the result of an underdeveloped banking system, and partly due to serfdom preventing an available source of workers for new industries in the earlier nineteenth century.)
* Development was also prevented by Russia's **backwards communications and transport system**, making the transport of raw materials and finished goods virtually impossible.  By 1860 Russia had 1,600 km of railways compared to Britain's 15,000 km.  This increased by c. 5,000 km by 1890, but this still left Russia far behind the West, especially given its huge size!

**Sergei Witte and the answer to Russia’s problems!**

* Sergei Witte, a Russian nobleman of Dutch origin, served as **Minister of Finance from 1892 and 1903**and oversaw some impressive changes to the Russian economy.
* Witte’s belief was that the key to Russia’s continued **‘Great Power’ status rested on successful and rapid forced industrialization**.  Developing industry would be a way to avoid dependency on more developed economies and also create a strong modern state in Russia.
* Witte’s plan to deliver an industrialized Russia was based on a four-fold plan to fund the programme of capital investment: i) **protective tariffs**on foreign goods to protect against competition from Europe, ii) attraction of **foreign capital in the shape of loans**, iii) placing currency on the **Gold Standard** to encourage further foreign investment, and iv) squeezing resources out of the **peasantry and workers**- through low wages, high taxes and exporting ‘surplus’ grain.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Policy | Achievements | Limitations |
| **Loans and Currency reform.** Witte made the Russian currency, the rouble, easier to trade internationally – placing it on the **‘Gold Standard’**. This encouraged foreign companies to invest in factories in Russia. He also managed to negotiate huge loans from France which were used to invest in industry. | Between 1893-1900 all this extra investment meant that thousands of factories were built in Russia. Production of things like steel and coal (which meant world economic power) increased massively – by at least 40% 1890-1910. | a) All of these loans meant that the Russian government became **heavily in debt.**  b) The factories that were built focused on **heavy industry**, not on more luxury goods that might have made the lives of the people better.  c) Despite the industrialisation, the Russian Empire was **still behind** countries like Britain and Germany.  d) Industrial workers, still only a small proportion of the population, were **increasingly radicalised** by the terrible working and living conditions caused by such rapid industrialisation.  e) Focus on industrialisation was paid for by high taxes and export of grain – this increased food prices and was a **burden on the peasants**. Agricultural reform was neglected, affecting the majority! Poor harvests in 1902 actually led to starvation in some areas and consequent uprisings. |
| **Encourage and fund the rail network – this was seen as vital to stimulate the economy and allow the outlying areas of Russia to benefit economically.** | The railway improved trade and helped Nicholas II’s government to control his huge empire. The rail network increased from 7,000 km in 1890 to over 60,000 km by 1905.  Trans-Siberian railway was built – a remarkable engineering feat, connecting the Pacific coast of Russia with the European cities, nearly 10,000 km! | The Trans-Siberian railway was very expensive and not fully completed in places, only one track. It also perhaps gave Nicholas II misplaced confidence that he would be able to fight a successful war with Japan in the East.  The rail network, while a vast improvement, was still far short of what was needed for Russia. |

**Overall assessment of Witte**

* On the one hand, his **policies strengthened Russia leading up to WW1**.  Huge capital investment led to considerable industrial and railway developments, bringing clear economic and military benefits to Russia.  In this sense, successful economic modernization achieved from a very low base - though it should also be noted there were clear limitations to this economic modernization, it should not be over-exaggerated.
* On the other hand, the fact there were **no political reforms to match this economic modernization created a tension which undermined Russia before 1914**. For instance, the growth of a disgruntled industrial working class in the cities created fertile conditions for the growth of radical opposition in the face of poor conditions.  Furthermore, his industrial drive **failed to address the fundamental agricultural backwardness of Russia.**
* In 1903, Nicholas II transferred Witte to the Chairman of the Committees - this was arguably largely a symbolic position, and **NII was removing Witte from position of influence in the face of conservatives and landed gentry who disliked his modernising policies.**  Witte, and his somewhat liberal tendencies, would also be of importance to Nicholas II in the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese war after 1905.
* Historian Hugh Seton-Watson is not alone in claiming Witte as "*one of the outstanding statesmen of the 19th century.*"

In 1903, one of Witte’s rivals accused him of being part of a Jewish conspiracy to ruin the country. *(Note here – this was the way that the slavophile aristocratic members of the government tended to characterise much of the reforms of more liberal ministers – but, remember, the Jewish conspiracy theories were a common feature of anti-capitalist narratives throughout Europe at this time, as you have seen elsewhere in this course).* Bizarrely (but perhaps not unsurprisingly), Nicholas II bowed to this pressure and transferred Witte to a symbolic post in the government, depriving him of real power. However, we will meet him again after the Russo-Japanese War.

Pause to make additional judgments – how would you judge these reforms using the success criteria of Nicholas II’s aims?

**Causes of the Russo-Japanese War, 1904**

* Nicholas II’s determination that Russia should not be left out of the **European ‘scramble for colonies’** across the world, drove an expansionist policy in the Far East.  Russia’s **long-term economic interests in the East** were shown by the building of the Trans-Siberian railway (1891) and the railway across Manchuria (1897), which brought valuable political and economic access to the region.
* Growth of Russian presence in Korea - i.e. 25 year lease of ice-free Port Arthur, 1898 - caused**friction with Japan**.  Japan was a growing power in the region, who also wished to benefit and expand into the collapsing empire of China and whose **nationalist pride resented Russian territorial gains in Manchuria**.
* **Tension between Russia and Japan increased**as Russia did not remove ‘temporary troops’ from Manchuria in 1903.  Russian apathy led to a failure to come to a peaceful agreement about ‘spheres of influence’ in the region, and Japan launched a surprise naval attack on Port Arthur in February 1904.  **War as dispute over trade and territory in Korea.**
* Nicholas II had been **encouraged** into launching a war following this Japanese attack, both by the **Kaiser of Germany**, who was pleased to see Russia distracted by events in the East, and by **domestic political considerations**.  **Disastrous economic situation in Russia in 1904** - bad harvests causing starvation for peasants and high food prices, economic depression causing high unemployment for industrial workers - led to **strikes and peasant riots**which Minister of the Interior Phleve thought would be best countered by a “*short victorious wa*r” against the Japanese.  War therefore used as an attempted distraction from domestic problems: Phleve, “*to stem the tide of revolution, we need a successful little war*.”

**Course of the war:**

* **On land:** superior Japanese troops encircled and cut off **Port Arthur** by May 1904, placing the Russians under siege until they surrendered and **lost the port in January 1905**.   Russian attempt to win back the port failed with the crushing defeat at the **Battle of Mukden** (which involved c. 600, 000 troops).  Humiliating and **crushing military defeat for Russia.**
* **At sea: naval campaign the decisive factor** in determining the war’s outcome, as Japan’s success depended on its being able to reinforce its troops on the mainland.  Russia’s key fleet did not arrive until May 1905, and then it suffered a crushing defeat in the **Battle of Tsushima.**  Out of 35 Russian ships, 20 were sunk and 5 were captured, while the Japanese only suffered minimal losses.

**Why did Russia lose?**

* General expectation that Russia, as a ‘Great Power’, should easily overcome the ‘Yellow Peril’ of the lesser Japan.  **Russia presumed a fast and easy victory over their Asian opponents.**
* However, in fact **Japan enjoyed many key strategic advantages**: easier access to war (short sea route vs Russia’s single railtrack), greater troop numbers (180,000 which could easily be re-inforced vs Russia’s 100,000), fanatical nationalist troops, and Russian weaknesses caused by its chaotic command structure and competing generals.

**Consequences of the war: what was the significance of the defeat for Tsar Nicholas II?**

* Tsar Nicholas II forced to accept the **humiliating Treaty of Portsmouth** to end the war.  Given Russian belief in their own racial superiority, this was hugely embarrassing for the Russian state, especially in the eyes of the European Great Powers.  Even if the terms of the treaty were lenient (Witte’s tough negotiations meant Russia would pay no war reparations and keep hold of Manchuria), the bare fact of **military defeat was a disaster for the Tsar and his government.**
* War can be seen as a huge mistake for Nicholas, as it became the**catalyst for**[revolution in 1905](https://sites.google.com/site/ibhistoryrussia/syllabus-overview---imperial-russia/f-1905-revolution). Lack of military preparations and eventual crushing defeats led to vast increase in discontent and calls for reform, as greater parts of the **Russian public saw the government as incompetent.**  Furthermore, t**he war worsened the economic plight of the peasants and workers** in causing food and fuel shortages, high prices and unemployment.  This made promising conditions for the spread of opposition ideas - as socialist leader Plekhanov wrote the war “*promises to shatter to its foundations the regime of Nicholas II*”. This situation, and the increase of opposition towards the Tsar, contributed directly to [**Bloody Sunday, 22 January 1905**](http://www.google.com/url?q=http%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2FBloody_Sunday_%281905%29&sa=D&sntz=1&usg=AFrqEzd6nFaAsn9QACqAlujTwYH0xidUrg)**.**

**The 1905 Revolution - Causes**

**a) The Spark**

By January, the people of St Petersburg were desperate. A priest, **Father Gapon**, led a huge protest march through the city. Their aim was not revolution but to deliver a petition to the Tsar at his Winter Palace asking for:

1. Peace with Japan.
2. Better working conditions. This included higher pay, safer factories, shorter working hours etc.

It is important to note that the 200,000 workers and families who marched with Father Gapon were not trying to get rid of Nicholas II. Indeed, many were loyal to him and had high expectations that, once their ‘Little Father’ saw how badly off they were, he would enthusiastically support their ideas. Many carried images of him and sang patriotic songs.

Once again, the government badly miscalculated. The police tried to stop the marchers and as a result some scuffles broke out. The army were called and misinterpreted the situation. Perhaps sharing the unsympathetic view of the workers held by the Tsar, the army officer ordered his men to open fire on the crowd. Up to 1000 marchers (the exact figure is not known) were killed and many more wounded. This massacre became known as **Bloody Sunday.**

 As Richard Charques states, this *“did more than perhaps anything else during the whole of the reign to undermine the allegiance of the common people to the throne.”*

**b) The Short-term Catalyst**

Defeat in war against Japan, in 1905, led to increased opposition to the Tsar, who was viewed as incompetent.  The war was also important in intensifying and worsening longer term social and economic problems, as it caused food shortages, high prices and unemployment - the factors which motivated many to take part in the march on the Winter Palace that resulted in Bloody Sunday.

**c) The Long Term Problems**

**Long term social and economic problems:** Witte’s industrialization drive had led to greater pressure on workers and peasants, in terms of higher taxes and low wages.  This worsened long-standing problems and caused resentment which resulted in tension, violence and riots.

**Long term political problems:** refusal of Nicholas’s regime to make any political concessions towards representative government and a less oppressive rule meant there was growing political opposition to the regime - from both middle class liberals and the more revolutionary socialists.

**The 1905 Revolution – The Course**

The **Grand Duke Serge** (Nicholas II’s uncle and one of the most powerful men in Russia) was assassinated by terrorists and hundreds of government officials were murdered. This continued throughout the year, becoming known as the 1905 Revolution. Some of the key events were:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Event** | **Significance** |
| **The Potemkin Mutiny** | The battleship Potemkin was the most famous ship in Nicholas II’s fleet. In June 1905 the sailors decided to join the protests. They threw their officers overboard and set sail on their own. Historians see their protest as mainly being due to frustration at not receiving enough food and pay, rather than a deliberate plan to fight the Tsar. It does appear the sailors had no overall aim; sailing around until they gave themselves up a few months later. However, it was still a terrifying blow to Nicholas II – if he could no longer rely on the armed forces then he was in big trouble. |
| **The Nationalities** | Many of the ethnic groups took the opportunity provided by the general chaos to declare themselves independent of the Russian Empire (such as the Georgians and the Poles). Clearly, ‘Russification’ had failed. |
| **Peasant revolt** | As the year went on the Tsar lost control of much of the countryside. Not only were his officials murdered, but peasants were also seizing land from the aristocracy and even killing many of them in the process. It looked like the Tsar’s key supporters, the aristocracy, might lose their power completely. The army had to intervene 3,000 times (!) across Russia. |
| **The Soviets** | Workers in towns and cities went on strike in September, stopping all trade and work – 400,000 in St Petersburg alone. They set up **soviets**, which were councils elected by the workers, to organise themselves. Many cities were basically taken over and run by these soviets – the workers were happy to follow their instructions whilst ignoring those of the Tsar’s officials. The first Soviet was set up by Trotsky (then a Menshevik) in St Petersburg – this inspired the creation of a further 50 across Russia by the end of the year. Remember, these Soviets were NOT mainly run by Bolsheviks (actually a wide variety of people – from respected individuals in the factories, Mensheviks etc) and did not follow a single goal/programme. |
| **The Kadets** | **Politically**, various opposition groups believed that the time had come to force the autocracy to change.  Middle class liberals, many involved in the zemstvo at a local level, established the ‘Kadets’ party and demanded universal suffrage to a national assembly. Note that these are far from left wing revolutionaries, more like westernisers. Indeed, many were likely motivated by the evident failure of the Tsars to keep the working classes satisfied/under control, rather than for support for the left wing political ideas. |

By October 1905, it appeared that Nicholas II had completely lost control of his country. He now only had one choice; compromise.

**How did Nicholas II survive the 1905 Revolution?**

Nicholas II finally had to offer something in order to stop the revolution. He at least had the good sense to recall **Sergei Witte** to active government, who was able to persuade him to follow a double policy:

1. **The October Manifesto**

This document was published in October of 1905 and promised to give the Russian people more say in government. There would now be an elected **Duma** (parliament) that would help run the country and he also guaranteed that the Russian people would have more rights – these included free speech (remember Alexander III had introduced censorship) and the right to form political parties. Nicholas II also reduced taxes on the poor.

The effect of the October Manifesto was powerful. It really pleased many of the middle class liberals and moderate protesters who wanted more say in government and lower taxes, but who feared what would happen if the Tsar was actually overthrown (chaos, communism etc). They accepted the October manifesto and began to support Nicholas II. They became known as the **‘Octobrists’.**

Some of the revolutionary groups wanted more than this (or did not trust Nicholas II) and so did not accept the October Manifesto. Now that the opposition was divided, the second part of the Tsar’s policy began.

1. **Oppression**

Nicholas II ordered the Okhrana to arrest the leaders of the St Peterburg Soviet, exiling 15 of them to the frozen wastelands of Siberia. In Moscow, the army moved in and crushed the soviet there despite heavy fighting with revolutionary groups. The Okhrana also organised terrorist groups known as the **Black Hundreds** who were encouraged (and sometimes paid) to murder revolutionaries and beat up striking workers. Thousands were killed by the Black Hundreds throughout 100 towns and cities over the next couple of months.

**By March 1906 the revolution was over and the Tsar’s government was back in control of the Russian Empire (including the nationalities). Nicholas had survived for three reasons:**

1. Despite the Potemkin Mutiny, **the armed forces had stayed loyal**. He was able to rely on them to retake control once things had started to calm down.
2. **The opposition to Nicholas II was divided by the October Manifesto**. The liberals and middle classes (as well as large numbers of peasants and workers) still trusted the promises of the Tsar and were willing to accept the Duma as a compromise in return for things getting back to normal. This left the revolutionaries and the soviets isolated and the balance of power tipped back in favour of the Tsar.
3. **Lack of leadership** **and Coordination among the Revolutionaries** – Apart from the division between the liberals and the revolutionaries, it is important to note that even within the revolutionary left wing there was division and no clear leadership. The Mensheviks and Bolsheviks were at each other’s throats and Stalin, Lenin and many other key leaders were away serving sentences in Siberia, while many others were hiding in Western Europe.

While Soviet historians have stressed the significance of the 1905 revolution as a ‘dress rehearsal’ and the role of the Soviets in particular, you will see that the similarities with the eventual Bolshevik revolution or not particularly strong.

**Stolypin and Reform**

Petr Stolypin was appointed chief minister in 1907, and like Witte is seen as one of the few who could have saved the regime, if Nicholas had been prepared to listen to him more carefully.  **Stolypin played an important role in restoring order and crushing opposition after 1905,** and also in **introducing some reform measures that contributed to relative stability** in the years leading up to WW1.

**Stolypin and reactionary counter-terror**

* As a ruthless provisional governor before coming to the duma, Stolypin was **well-prepared to use violence to deal with opposition** in the years following 1905.
* Faced with an increase in radical violence in 1907 - with 3,000 killed by terrorists - Stolypin responded by carrying out **over 1,000 death sentences.**  He also put **pressure on trade unions and newspapers**, and by 1908 these policies seemed to have worked with considerably less political assassinations recorded.

**Stolypin and agricultural reform**

* Stolypin was aware that beyond violent repression, **reform was essential** if the tsardom was to be maintained, and where Witte had looked to industry **Stolypin attempted to get to grips with the deep-rooted problems of Russian agriculture.**
* The idea underlying Stolypin’s reforms was that the**best way to strengthen support for the regime was to create a class of prosperous peasants**.  The key problems that he needed to address were: i) negative effect of the mir on economic development, ii) ineffective land usage in the village leading to inefficient agriculture and iii) the ever-present ‘land hunger’ among peasants.

**Reform measures:**

* **Redemption payments to the mir cancelled**, giving peasants **free ownership of their land**and giving them the option to **leave the mir and become individual landholders.**
* Cheap loans offered by ‘Peasants’ Bank’ to allow more capitalist peasants to buy strips of land from their neighbours and **consolidate into larger, more efficient holdings**.  These ‘kulaks’ could then effectively withdraw themselves from the village community and be more independent.
* Peasants who sold their land could either become wage labourers, move to the new cities or take a government grant to populate uncultivated Siberia.

**Successes**

* **Agricultural production increased**, leading to record harvests in 1913 - though some historians claim this has more to do with the weather than reforms, and output was still low compared to Western standards.
* By 1916 **24% of households in European Russia owned their own land**, and more were in the process of doing so.  By 1914 **over 1/3 of peasants had left the mir.**
* Over 1.5 million migrated to Siberia between 1907 and 1909, which helped to broaden the base of Russian agriculture.

**Failures**

* Huge tracts of the best land was still owned by the Tsar and the gentry - and **only 10% of peasants had managed to consolidate their land into a larger farm** by 1914.
* **Reform did not address problem of overpopulation** and the ‘land hunger’ this generated.
* The reforms produced a **growing class of alienated poor peasant**s, some of whom drifted into cities to work, others who became discontented farm labourers.  This was a dangerous class of people, who lacked much in the way of material wealth and stability and were therefore susceptible to revolt and radicalism.
* Stolypin’s attempt to construct a middle ground of ‘enlightened conservatism’ ended up giving him enemies on both sides of the political spectrum, conservative and radical alike, before he was assassinated in 1911 by a left-wing radical with connections to the Secret Police (!!!).

**Assessment:**

* Stolypin said that 20 years of peace were needed if Russia was to be stabilized, but his reforms only had 7 years of peace before WW1 broke out.  Difficult to say if his reforms could have proved the basis for a prosperous class of independent farmers as a way of solving Russia’s agricultural problems, as the impact of the First World War and the 1917 revolutions meant they were not given the chance to continue!
* Some historians - the ‘optimists’, generally Western and non-Marxist - have argued that the Stolypin era was one of hope and possibility: agriculture and industry were making progress, there was some limited political reform, perhaps progress towards a more modern, liberal Russia would have been possible if not for the First World War?  Such a view sees Stolypin as a positive reformer who could have saved the Tsarist autocracy.
* However, against this view is that of the ‘pessimists’ who argue that little real progress was made either politically or economically.  Stolypin’s agricultural reforms still left poverty-stricken peasants and a greater number of industrial workers in the cities, both factors likely to contribute to instability.  This position is often taken by Soviet and Marxist historians, who argue that any attempt to rescue Tsarism was doomed to failure, as revolution was the only possible outcome to the social and economic forces at work in early twentieth-century Russia.

**The Impact of the Dumas 1906-17**

**Initial promises withdrawn: the constitution of 1906**

* Despite the liberal promises of the ‘October manifesto’, 1905, Nicholas went back on some of his concessions in the **‘Fundamental Laws’ of 1906**, which r**e-asserted the supreme power of the tsar as autocrat**(in contradiction of the manifesto).  These laws**limited the power of the Duma** before it had even started by stating that the **Tsar**, and not the Duma, would **appoint ministers, conduct foreign affairs, have the right to rule by decree**whenever the assembly was not in session - furthermore, the Duma could not pass laws without the Tsar’s agreement, making it **dependent on his approval**for any action!

**The composition of the Dumas**

* The first Duma (1906) was made up largely of liberal and centrists - Kadets and Octobrists - as left-wing groups refused to participate.  However, this first Duma was also hostile to the government and made major demands for reform in terms of land reform and releasing political prisoners.  It was therefore **dissolved by the Tsar after just 73 days.**
* The second Duma (1907) was more representative, in that in included more members from both the extreme right and left.  However, this led to these extremists using the Duma for their own propaganda, making it a loud and disruptive session of **three and a half months before the government closed it down**.
* After 1907 the Tsar and Stolypin had recovered enough from 1905 to **retreat further from the reforms of the October Manifesto** and thus**rigged the electoral system further in favour of the conservative forces of landowners at the expense of industrial workers**.  Landowners had 50% of the vote, while workers had just 2%, which led for a **much more conservative assembly**.  The third and fourth Dumas therefore represented mainly the propertied and middle classes, and hovered between reform and reaction.  Even though Nicholas was reluctant to co-operate with the Duma they managed to achieve **some successes in this period in terms of social reforms.**
* Faced with the immense challenges of **WW1** **Nicholas still refused to allow the Duma an active role** in the war effort.  This led to a virtual alternative government emerging, and eventually a **Duma plot to overthrow the Tsar**!  Nicholas II's rejection of the ‘Progressive Bloc’s’ call for a new government in 1915 also played an important role in **encouraging liberals to oppose tsarist rule and in politically isolating him in the lead up to the February revolution.**

**Evaluating the Dumas: were they an important break with autocracy?**

**Yes,** they represented an**important constitutional step forwards**because …..

* **political parties were legally established for the first time In Russia,** and even if Nicholas II did not allow a truly representative body to be formed, open **political debate was tolerated and printed in the press** - unimaginable in 1904!
* The Dumas were also able to pass some **legislation for social progress**: i.e. 1912, compulsory insurance for industrial workers, and 1908 universal primary education introduced (which was 50% completed by 1914).

**However**, against this view, the Dumas should**not be seen as a step forward** because …..

* Fundamentally, **Nicholas still regarded the institution of the Duma with contempt**, and not something that he should have to co-operate with.  This did not fit in with his worldview of autocratic rule!
* The government and **Nicholas** were still able to **block any legislative issues proposed by the Dumas** that it disliked.
* The **representative nature of the dumas was severely limited** both by the Fundamental Laws (1906), and altering the electoral laws (1907).  Conservative groups, esp. landowners, were over-represented, and peasants and especially industrial workers were severely under-represented.

**Did the Dumas help to strengthen Nicholas’ position after 1905, or did they contribute to his downfall in 1917?  How far did the institution solve the long-term political problems of Russia?**

* On the one hand, granting the Duma after 1905 **helped put the Tsar in a stronger position**.  The duma provided an arena in which the various political groups (liberals, SD, SR) could argue and become more divided.  This, together with Stolypin’s ruthless suppression of opposition, helped to **marginalize the opponents of the regime’s position after 1905.**
* On the other hand, though, the **Tsar’s negative attitude towards the Duma** - as shown in the Fundamental Laws, the alterations to the electoral system, failure to co-operate in dealing with WW1 - would have **disastrous long-term effects** for the Romanov dynasty.  Nicholas’ lack of commitment to the transition to constitutional government meant that the **political parties of the Duma remained largely unreconciled to the regime**.  In the final analysis, a **stubborn and reactionary commitment to autocracy on behalf of Nicholas II prevented progress towards a more modern Russia, contributing directly to the February revolution.**

**The Impact of World War 1 – 1914-17**

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**Impact of WW1 on Russia and Nicholas II's rule:**

**Could WW1 have saved Russia?**

* Initially, as in all of Europe, the War was met with **great enthusiasm** – attempt to make up for humiliation of Russo-Japanese War 1905 and to re-awaken the dreamed of pan-slavic unity in the Balkans (i.e. support of Serbia v/s Austria-Hungary)
* **Evidence for positive impact:** Raise in strikes and protests that had been led by Bolsheviks in St Petersburg and other cities cease immediately. Instead mass gatherings singing hymns in favour of the war – foreign ambassadors note autocracy seems stronger than ever. Duma actively supports – votes to approve financial support for war by issuing government bonds and Rodzianko, the president, organises a duma committee to support victims of the war.
  + Clear war had a short term unifying effect on Russia – who knows what success would have meant for longer term stability?

**Most historians agree that the First World War played a crucial role in bringing down the regime in February 1917.  How?**

* **Military failures**.  Despite initial popularity of the war amongst the Russian people, and increased patriotic support for the Tsar, **heavy military defeats and huge death tolls** in 1914 and 1915 led to **disillusion and anger** at the way the war was being conducted.  The first battle of Tanenburg, 300,000 casualties, quickly dampened enthusiasm. Some limited successes vs Austria-Hungary, but clear would not be short decisive victory that was hoped for. Nicholas II worsened the situation by **assuming control of the Russian army at the front** from September 1915, making him **personally responsible for future military defeats** and leaving the Tsarina and Rasputin in Petrograd. It also left him distracted from political developments at home and he failed to unite with the intelligentsia / liberals. The failures mounted up as the long term weaknesses of Russia came to the fore – series of severe defeats in **Galicia after 1915 worsened**, destroying much of the remaining support. 4 million dead by end of the year. Despite growing hatred of Rasputin, Tsar fails to go against his wife and leaves situation unchecked – three members of the Tsar’s inner-circle assassinate Rasputin (serious division even at the top). **By 1916 some generals even calling for abdication.**
* **Role of Tsarina and Rasputin**: left in charge of the government, these two **decreased support for Tsarism further**by making such a horrible job in charge: dismissing competent Ministers and replacing them with incompetent ones.  This led to chaos, and worsening conditions in the cities.  Powerful opponents mocked these two, and the Tsar was blamed for leaving them in charge.  Even though Rasputin was murdered by a loyalist in 1916, who hoped thus to reduce the damage being done to the Tsar’s reputation, it was too late. **Support for Nicholas from the army and higher levels of society faded away**, leaving few prepared to defend him in 1917! Rasputin’s political meddling led to instability in government with his influence leading to the dismissal of four agriculture minister and two foreign ministers in the period. **Administrative chaos** just when unity required.
* **Failure to make political reforms**: allowing the **‘progressive bloc’ of discontented liberals a greater role in running the country** might have helped ease the pressure on Nicholas II and for Russia to have become a constitutional monarchy. The merging of the zemstvo, at their own initiative, into the **All Russia Union for the Relief of the Wounded and Sick** gradually morphed into an association with the urban duma who went a long way to coordinating society and the economy during the war.  **>** However, Nicholas’ **‘dogmatic devotion to autocracy’** meant that he refused to allow a greater role for representative bodies, leaving himself to answer for the condition of Russia personally – even though **Prince Lvov** (who was influential in these areas) would have kept them loyal.  His refusal to compromise on his autocratic principles contributed importantly to his downfall in February 1917.
* **Impact of war on living conditions**: eventual collapse of the Tsardom in 1917 not caused ultimately by ideology or political ideas, but by the **desperate suffering**experienced by the Russian people as a result of WW1.  War caused huge distress, as there was a **shortage of food, fuel and goods**, as well as **high prices, inflation and worker unemployment**.  Urban workers were hostile to the Tsar’s regime, while peasants were angry about the loss of young men at the front. Some poor decisions evident here too – Nicholas II bans alcohol, cutting off a huge revenue from tax and leading to dangerous and often poisonous home made vodka.
* **Relied on borrowing, attempted tax rises and printing more money to fund the war**. Essentially punished middle classes once more, costing him further support.
* **Army recruitment reduced food production while influx of peasants to factories was not matched by housing spending etc** – general rise in prices and drop in living conditions in the cities.
* **While peasants did better from rising prices (unrest had almost ceased by 1916),** they started to horde grain as the government tried to reduce the price of food by buying and setting low prices. This, coupled with a failure to organise the transport network, led to a crisis in the cities – only 15% of food harvested was reaching the cities by 1917, compared to 25% prior to the war.

**By 1917, over 10 million Russian soldiers were dead, wounded or in POW camps – would now be impossible for Nicholas to redeem himself or the autocracy.**

**In February 1917, the Tsar was forced to abdicate and the liberal progressive bloc essentially seized power through the dumas.**