

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)

A Could Stolypin be the saviour of the Tsar?

FOCUS ROUTE

Draw up a chart to evaluate whether Stolypin could have saved the Tsar. You will need to continue this into Section C for his agrarian reforms.

Stolypin	Positive contribution	Negative contribution	Difficult to tell
Stolypin's abilities			
Restores order in 1906			
Relationship with the Dumas			
Relationship with the Tsar			
Agrarian reforms			



SOURCE 3.1 Since the collapse of Communism, Stolypin's reputation has grown. In a poll taken in Russia at the end of 2008 to name Russia's greatest historical figure, Stolypin was in second place behind Alexander Nevsky and ahead of Stalin. Vladimir Putin praised Stolypin as a role model whose attempts to achieve stability he would like to emulate

VIEWS OF STOLYPIN

Sir Arthur Nicolson, the British Ambassador to St Petersburg and a distinguished diplomat, said he 'was the most notable figure in Europe'. Dominic Lieven describes him as 'radiating vigour, forcefulness and self-confidence', with 'a talent for acting, oratory and public relations rare among senior officials'. According to Richard Pipes, 'Stolypin stood head and shoulders above his immediate predecessors and successors in that he combined a vision of the desirable with a sense of the possible; he was a rare blend of statesman and politician. Witte, his closest competitor, was a brilliant and realistic politician, but a follower rather than a leader and something of an opportunist.'

Peter Stolypin dominated the Russian government from July 1906, when he became Prime Minister, until his assassination in September 1911. He first came to notice as a provincial governor in Sartov due to his vigorous suppression of peasant unrest. A St Petersburg outsider, he was appointed Minister of the Interior and soon after Prime Minister, although he kept his former post also. He thus wielded a considerable amount of power.

Stolypin was a strong supporter of the autocracy and opponent of revolution and disorder. He set up field court martials in 1906 to crush peasant uprisings (see page 40). 'Stolypin's neckties' (the hangman's noose) dealt with thousands of peasants and nearly 60,000 political detainees were executed or sent into exile or penal servitude in 'Stolypin carriages' (railway cars). He was appointed by, and utterly beholden to, the Tsar and he never attempted to build a political base of his own. However, like Witte before him, he also believed that reform was essential to solve Russia's problems. He believed that industrial progress alone was not sufficient to take Russia forward and gave his attention to agriculture. He had two objectives:

- 1 to feed the rapidly growing population and avoid the cycle of famine and revolt
- 2 to create a strong conservative peasantry who would support the regime.

Stolypin was virtually the only Prime Minister of the constitutional decade to see the Duma as a partner in building a strong Russia (see pages 49-52). He did not consider that he was limiting the monarch's authority but rather giving it a broader social base. In particular, he developed an understanding with the Octobrists (more conservative liberals) which allowed him to push through his reforms. His success suggested the possibility of a working relationship between government and elected assembly. Yet he was only really prepared to work with it on his terms:

- When the Second Duma would not do his bidding, he changed the electoral system drastically to create one he hoped would be much more amenable. The liberals called this Stolypin's *coup d'état*.
- When he was having trouble getting measures through, he cynically used Article 87 of the Fundamental Laws which allowed him to pass emergency measures by decree when the Duma was not sitting.

In the end it was this last point that brought him down. He wanted to introduce zemstva in the western provinces to make local government more democratic. However, the upper chamber of the Duma opposed this as landowners feared they would lose their authority. In March 1911, he persuaded the Tsar to suspend both chambers of the Duma to allow him to force his measure through by decree.

STOLYPIN'S ASSASSINATION

On 1 September 1911, Stolypin went to the opera in Kiev at which Tsar Nicholas was also present. During the interval a young man, a Socialist Revolutionary but also a police informer, came up to him and shot him twice. It is reported that Stolypin turned to the Tsar and made the sign of the cross, saying, 'I am happy to die for the Tsar.' It took him five days to do so. It was the eighteenth attempt on his life.

This alienated both houses of the Duma including the majority of the Octobrists who had hitherto supported him.

The Left condemned Stolypin for his policy of repression while the Right considered that his dangerous reform policies undermined the principles of autocracy or, in the case of the land reforms, the power of the gentry in the countryside. He proposed a series of reforms to extend civil rights, reform local government and local justice, and improve education. In the event, he was only able to implement his programme of agrarian reform using emergency laws. The enmity which confronted him from all sides demonstrated the difficulty of taking a middle road in Russia. By 1911 his star was waning and had he not been assassinated, it is likely that he would have been dismissed.

Stolypin was a man of contradictions. On the one hand he supported the autocracy, using fierce and relentless repression to deal with dissidents; on the other he championed reform. In 1906, he commented to Bernard Pares, a British historian: 'I am fighting on two fronts. I am fighting against revolution, but for reform. You may say that such a position is beyond human strength and you may be right.' He wanted citizens to participate in political life and build a state based on the rule of law. However, some of his actions contradicted this - particularly his field court martials, his *coup d'état* and the use of Article 87. Perhaps this expressed the problems of trying to modernise Russia within the framework of an autocracy.

Whether Stolypin could have saved tsarism is a matter for conjecture but it is probably fair to say that he was the Tsar's last, best hope. Abraham Ascher argues that he had a vision for the transformation of Russia and that his reform proposals were 'more feasible and more likely to lead Russia out of the abyss than any other'. Other historians, however, would maintain that there was no hope of reforming the archaic regime and he was bound to fail. But in failing to support Stolypin, Nicholas showed his stubborn opposition to reform. After Stolypin he made a series of disastrous appointments to the government - people at best inefficient, at worst incompetent.

B The constitutional experiment

The October Manifesto had offered the chance of political change. The setting up of an elected duma was a major step towards some sort of constitutional government. Was the Tsar willing to take up the constitutional challenge? The initial signs were not good. The Tsar made it clear in the Fundamental Laws, issued in April 1906, that the autocracy was still in the ascendancy: 'The Sovereign Emperor possesses the initiative in all legislative matters . . . The Sovereign Emperor ratifies the laws. No laws can come into force without his approval.' It seemed that the Duma was to have little real power to initiate or enact legislation. This was confirmed when it was announced that there would be a second chamber, the State Council, with equal powers to the Duma. Half of the State Council's members would be chosen by the Tsar. Only if both agreed to a legislative proposal would it go forward to the Tsar for approval. Also, Article 87 of the Laws gave the Tsar the right in 'exceptional circumstances' to pass his own laws without consulting the Duma at all. The Tsar also retained control of the military, foreign policy and the appointment of ministers. To many liberals it seemed the Tsar had reneged on his promises in October.

The elections for the Duma employed a complicated system of electoral colleges designed to represent the different social classes. It was profoundly weighted towards the upper classes. For instance, 2000 landowners were represented by one deputy and 90,000 workers were represented by one deputy. Despite this, the elections returned the Kadets as the largest party and there was significant representation on the Left despite the fact that the revolutionary parties had boycotted the elections. The home of the Duma was the Tauride Palace.

FOCUS ROUTE

As you work through sections B-F keep a running list of:

- points at which Nicholas repulsed moves to constitutionalism in favour of maintaining the autocracy
- mistakes and misjudgements by Nicholas.

Draw up a chart to record what happened in the four Dumas under the following headings:

- dates of each duma, e.g. First Duma, April-June 1906
- composition (main parties or groupings)
- main achievements (if any)
- key events
- notes and comments (anything else you want to add)

New Liberal parties

The Kadets – The Constitutional Democrats – were formed in October 1905 just before the October Manifesto was signed. The Kadets were not a liberal party in the Western sense. They called themselves ‘the Party of Popular Freedom’ and saw themselves as a national party, not a class party, although they did draw support mainly from the liberal intelligentsia – academics, lawyers, progressive employers, doctors and zemstvo employees. The leader of the Kadets was Paul Milyukov, a professor of history. They wanted a democratically elected assembly, full civil rights for all citizens, the end of censorship, recognition of trade unions and free education. There were tensions in the party between the right wing, which supported monarchy, and the left wing, which wanted Russia to be turned into a republic.

The **Octobrists** took their name from the October Manifesto, which they saw as the definitive statement of reform – it should go no further. They were more conservative than the Kadets and did not want full constitutional government. They wanted the Tsar to exercise strong government and were nationalists who supported the maintenance of the Russian Empire. They were more an association of different groups rather than a defined political party. Their support came from industrialists, landowners and those with commercial interests. Two key leading members were Mikhail Rodzianko, a powerful landowner, and Alexander Guchkov, a factory owner.

First and Second Dumas

When the First Duma met in April 1906, there was immense hostility towards the Tsar (see Source 3.2). The deputies demanded that the powers of the Duma should be increased and that elections should be universal and secret. They also wanted guarantees of certain freedoms, e.g. speech and assembly. There followed two months of bitter disagreement. The Tsar, horrified by the hostility and lack of respect, dissolved the Duma. It is reported he said: ‘Curse the Duma. It is all Witte’s doing.’ Two hundred Kadet and Trudovik deputies went to Vyborg in Finland from where they urged the Russian people not to pay their taxes. Later they were arrested and disbarred from re-election.

In the elections for the Second Duma, which met in February 1907, the Kadets and the moderates lost out to increased representation on the Left. There were over 200 left-wing deputies, partly because the revolutionary parties had ended their boycott. It was much more radical than the First Duma and was called ‘The Duma of National Anger’. The Second Duma was riven by division and deputies made fierce attacks on the government (see Source 3.2). As a result it lasted only three months. You can see a more detailed description of the work of the dumas in Chart 3A, page 51.

■ Learning trouble spot

You need to consider the early dumas in the context of the times to make sense of what was going on and of the regime’s response. Russia was still very unsettled in 1906. There was a major upsurge in peasant disturbances and, to a lesser degree, industrial unrest among workers. Also, 141 mutinies took place in the armed forces from May to July 1906. What was worrying for the regime was that much of this was political. The peasants were very aware of the First Duma and sent in a large number of petitions. The Kadets felt there was a chance of winning concessions on key issues and were pitting themselves against the government. After the First Duma, the government cracked down hard on the Kadets, closing down their offices and dismissing members of the party from government service. However, the peasants and workers had confidence in and great hopes for the Second Duma and flocked to the polls in huge numbers. In St Petersburg over 70 per cent of eligible workers voted.

ACTIVITY

Use the information in this section and Source 3.2 to answer the questions below:

- 1 Do you think the hostility in the Duma was more the fault of the Tsar or the deputies?
- 2 Why was it unlikely that the First and Second Dumas would be able to collaborate with the government?

SOURCE 3.2 Lionel Kochan, *Russia in Revolution, 1890–1918*, 1971, pp. 120–1 and 128–9

On the First Duma

The Duma was solemnly opened by the Tsar in the throne room of the Winter Palace. Had its walls ever enclosed such a strange scene, one ministerial onlooker wondered to himself. To one side stood the uniformed members of the Imperial Council and the Tsar's retinue, the ladies of the court liberally bedecked with pearls and diamonds. To the other stood the members of the duma, dressed overwhelmingly in the garb of workers and peasants. Prominent among the latter stood a tall workman named Onipko; he surveyed the throne and those about it 'with a derisive and insolent air' . . . So threatening was his mien already that one minister turned to his neighbour, whispering: 'I even have the feeling that this man might throw a bomb.' The dowager empress also felt herself surrounded by enemies, 'so much did they seem to reflect an incomprehensible hatred for all of us,' she confessed.

On the Second Duma

(quoting Bernard Pares, 1925–4, SEER 11, 48–9)

Right-wing members were openly provocative. They told an English liberal, Bernard Pares, that 'they aimed at dissolution and the curtailment of the franchise' . . . Shulgin introduced a cleverly worded mock bill for the socialization of all brains and once began a speech by asking the Socialist Revolutionaries if any of them happened to have a bomb in his pocket . . . On the other hand, ministers speaking in the duma were interrupted by the lefts; sometimes at unsatisfactory answers to abuses of official or police authority . . . A genuine thrill ran through the house when an old SR peasant, Kirnosov (from Saratov), with flaming eyes and shaggy hair and beard, intervened in a debate which touched on the rights of property. 'We know all about your property,' he said, 'we were your property. My uncle was exchanged for a greyhound.'

Third and Fourth Dumas

For the Third and Fourth Dumas, Stolypin decided to change the electoral system to favour the upper and propertied classes. The peasants and workers were virtually excluded and non-Russian national groups much reduced. As a result, the Octobrists and right-wing parties predominated. Even so, the Third Duma was not subservient and questioned the government hard, particularly on state finances. Stolypin was able to work with the more moderate centre parties to achieve progress in his social and economic reforms. However, this time he found that it was the right-wing groups and nationalists who tried to put a brake on his reforms, probably with the support of the Tsar. At least it showed the Duma could work positively with the government and it did provide a training ground in constitutionalism.

The Fourth Duma was interrupted by the outbreak of the First World War and met intermittently during the war. Before the war, it attempted some reform of the Orthodox Church and supported the law of 1908 providing for universal education – but progress was slow. It was also critical of the government's handling of increasing social unrest, especially the Lena Goldfields Massacre (see page 55). On the outbreak of the war the Duma threw itself behind the Tsar and the national war effort. It agreed to suspend itself for the duration of the war. However, when it became apparent that the government was managing the war very badly, the Duma pressurised the Tsar into recalling it in July 1915. It offered the Tsar one last opportunity to agree to limited constitutional government (see pages 62–63).

ACTIVITY

Why might Stolypin have approved of the future British Prime Minister Lord Liverpool's statement of 1793: 'We ought not to begin first by considering who ought to be the electors, and who ought to be elected; but we ought to begin by considering who ought to be elected, and then constitute such persons, electors, as would be likely to produce the best elected.'

■ Learning trouble spot

It is difficult to work out exact numbers for the various parties and factions in the dumas. In the First Duma around 112 deputies did not join a party for various reasons. The groupings were fluid and deputies moved between them. Other significant groupings included:

- The **Trudoviks** or Labour Group was a loose grouping whose main aim was agrarian reform. Since the SRs had boycotted the elections, it was the party for the peasant deputies, although other socialists supported it at various times. A prominent member in the later dumas was Alexander Kerensky.
- The **Rightists** were not a party. The name represents a variety of groups on the Right with views ranging from moderate to extreme.
- The **national parties** represented the national minorities like the Poles and Lithuanians.

■ 3A The dumas

First Duma

Duration: April–June 1906 (2 months)

Representation: Of the 478 seats, the Kadets with 185 seats and the Trudoviks (left-wing labourists) with 94 were dominant along with moderate business interests. 112 were non-partisans, generally sympathetic to the liberals.

Main events/achievements

- Deputies demanded increased powers.
- Little in practice achieved though there were fierce debates on a range of issues, such as civil rights, amnesty for political prisoners and land ownership.
- Tsar claimed Duma unworkable and dissolved it.

Second Duma

Duration: February–June 1907 (4 months)

Representation: The number of Kadets halved to under a 100 but they were still significant. The Trudoviks were the largest group with 104 deputies. Also, there were 47 Mensheviks and 37 SRs who joined the elections for the first time. In all there were well over 200 deputies on the Left. The National parties had 93 deputies. However the right-wing groupings had also increased their number with over 60 deputies from various factions; the Octobrists had increased their number to 44.

Main events/achievements

- Left- and right-wing deputies attacked each other, debates frequently ending in brawls.
- Left-wing deputies made fierce attacks on Stolypin and his land reforms.
- The Duma co-operated with the government over famine relief.
- The government claimed Menshevik and SR deputies were subversive and, amid scenes of disorder, the Duma was dissolved.

Third Duma

Duration: November 1907–June 1912 (four and a half years)

Representation: Electoral system changed restricting franchise; peasant and working class vote radically reduced (only one in six able to vote). As a result the parties on the Right dominated; the Octobrists with 154 deputies and the Rightists with 147 out of a total of 441 seats. The Kadets had been cut down to 54, the national parties to 26 seats and the Trudoviks to 14.

Main events/achievements

- Relations with the government were more harmonious now that the Duma was biased towards the Right but it was by no means servile.
- Stolypin was able to work with it and put through his land reforms although he faced a lot of opposition.
- A law on universal education was passed aiming at a minimum of four years compulsory primary school education.
- Steps were taken to modernise the army.
- Justices of the Peace were restored, replacing the hated land captains.
- The Duma developed a progressive national health insurance scheme for workers to cover sickness and accidents.

Fourth Duma

Duration: November 1912–August 1914, suspended but also met in 1915 and 1916.

Representation: Similar to Third Duma.

Main events/achievements

- This was a period of some tension as the Lena Goldfields Massacre heralded industrial unrest and strikes.
- Some reform of Orthodox Church reducing state control and broadening education in church schools.
- Progress in education, supporting 1908 law which had provided for universal education; increased spending on teacher's salaries.
- Discussion of the health of people, in particular ways to reduce drunkenness.

WHY DIDN'T THE TSAR JUST GET RID OF THE DUMA ALTOGETHER?

- 1 He was bound by the agreement in the October Manifesto. He feared a popular reaction if he ditched it.
- 2 Britain and France were Russia's allies in the international arena and the Tsar wanted to give the appearance of a more democratic Russia.
- 3 The electoral system was changed to make the Duma more docile.

FOCUS ROUTE

As you work through this section:

- 1 Assess whether Stolypin's agrarian reforms could have helped save the Tsar and enter your thoughts on Stolypin in the table that you constructed for Section A.
- 2 Make notes in preparation for the essay at the end of this section.

Summary

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.

C How far had the economy improved by 1914?

Agrarian reforms

Stolypin saw his land reforms as the key to transforming Russia into a stable and prosperous country. Peasants were allowed to leave the mir (commune), to consolidate their strips of land into a single unit and build a farmhouse on it. He called it 'a gamble not on the drunken and feeble but on the sober and strong'. A land bank was set up to help the independent peasant buy land. Stolypin believed that the mir with its antiquated farming methods 'paralysed personal initiative'. Also, making peasants into independent property owners and giving them full civil rights would give them a stake in the country and lead to them becoming supporters of the regime. There were also schemes to re-settle peasants in Siberia which had been opened up by the Trans-Siberian Railway. This was in order to use peasants to create new food-growing areas.

The view of Abraham Ascher in his major study of Stolypin is that, 'given more time for implementation, the agrarian reforms might have contributed to a more moderate revolution than the one of 1917.' However, by 1914 only about 10 per cent of households in European Russia lived on farms separated from the commune. Only a minority lived on farms in the West European sense with a cottage and fields fenced off from their neighbours. Communal institutions remained strong, embodying the peasants' notions of social justice, and the mir was appreciated by many peasants as a 'life jacket'. Those who left – the 'Stolypin separators' – were seen as traitors to the peasant tradition. The reform was more successful in the west – in the Ukraine and Belorussia – than in other parts of Russia where reform was most needed.

Judith Pallot argues that, 'Stolypin's reform was "in essence a utopian project", and too narrowly conceived to create a loyal peasantry and modernise peasant farming – there were alternatives which could have done as much if not more to increase peasant farm productivity.' (J. Pallot: *Land Reform in Russia 1906–1917*, 1999, pp. 30–31). She points out that the commune was not always backward: new crops, seeds, crop rotations and fertilisers were being employed in some go-ahead communes. Also, some 'separators', eager to make a quick profit, used poor farming methods that exhausted the soil.

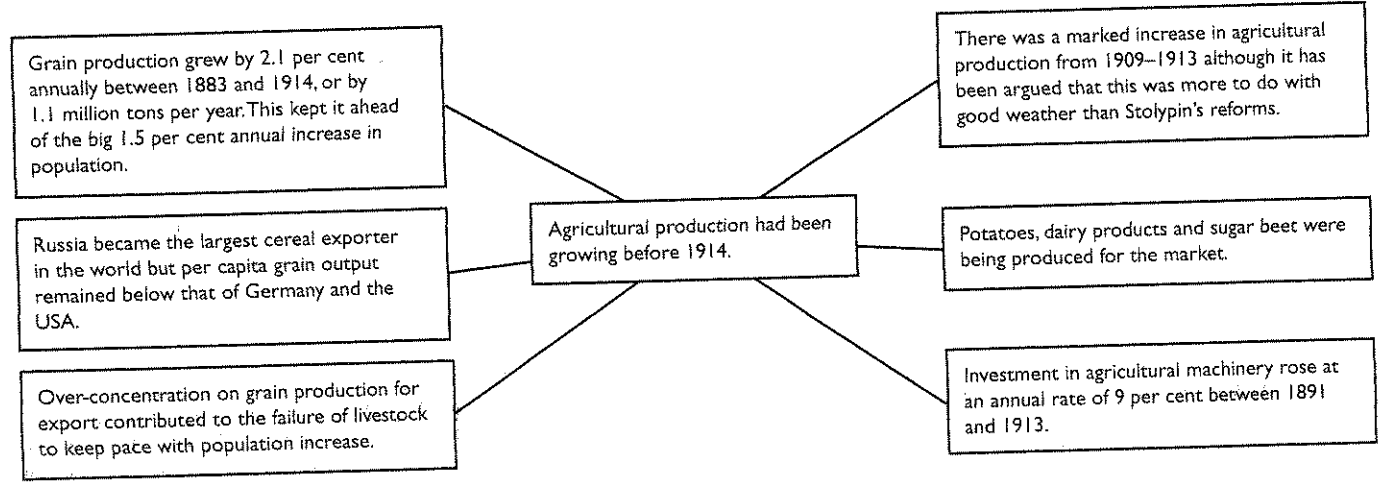
SOURCE 3.3 Number of peasant households becoming independent 1907-1914 (out of an estimated total of 10-12 million households)

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

SOURCE 3.4 A peasant in a Soviet prison after collectivisation talking to a companion, quoted in S. Williams, *Liberal Reform in an Illiberal Regime: The Creation of Private Property in Russia, 1906-1915*, 2006, pp.1-2

I had 20 desiatines (about 54 acres). This means I was a kulak by their ideas. I worked hard, but got little from it. At least until the Stolypin booklet (booklet on soil management and crop production distributed to accompany the reforms) fell into my hands. When I applied what was written there to my land, I got rich directly. But of course, when it (the Revolution) began they took everything away and threw me out into the forest. There they set aside 4 desiatines for my family and me . . . They took away everything but I brought my Stolypin booklet. And then the years passed, and again I did things according to Stolypin, and again I was rich - not rich, but well enough off. And again they were envious, and again took everything and threw me out.

By 1914, the vast majority of agricultural production, in what was still an overwhelmingly agricultural country, was the responsibility of 20 million peasant households, most of whom were still organised in rural communes using the inefficient strip system. Helped by loans from the state bank and migration to new farms in Siberia, the amount of land held by peasants increased, and by 1916 less than 10 per cent of the sown area was directly cultivated as landowners' estates.



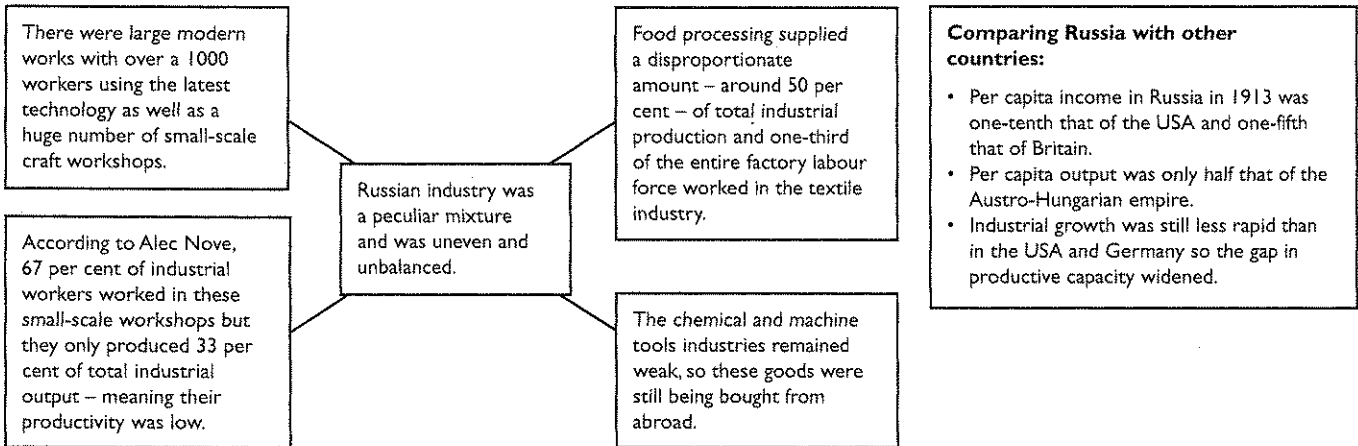
INDUSTRY AND ARMAMENTS

Throughout the whole of the period from 1890 to 1914, the government was highly focused on producing ships, weapons and related materials. P. Gatrell says that 'industrial recovery (1908-15) was a by-product of rearmament'. This means that a coherent plan for developing different sectors of the economy never materialised and so a more balanced economy was not created.

Progress in industry

After 1907, industrial production grew steadily at a rate around 6 per cent per annum until 1914, although this high rate was largely due to the fact that it started from a low base. Although well behind the major Western industrial powers, the achievements were impressive. By 1914, Russia was the world's fourth largest producer of coal, pig-iron and steel, and the Baku oilfields were only rivalled by Texas. Heavy industry was still the driving force. This was in large part due to the government's rearmament programme with huge orders for metallurgical companies to rebuild the Baltic fleet after the losses of the Russo-Japanese War and also to re-stock with weapons generally. The downside of this focus on rearmament was that industry could not meet the demand for agricultural tools and machinery.

Industrial development was still largely state sponsored with companies dependent on government contracts. Foreign loans were still important but less so than they had been. In Russia there was a growing internal market and the production of consumer goods rose. Demand was coming from the peasants as the agricultural sector became more successful and prices for farm produce increased. However, as a proportion of total industrial production, the share of consumer goods actually fell from 52 per cent to 45 per cent.



SOURCE 3.5 The Tsarist economy: annual production (million tons)

	Coal	Pig iron	Oil	Grain
1870	0.68	0.33	0.03	
1880	3.24	0.42	0.5	
1890	5.90	0.89	3.9	
1900	16.10	2.66	10.2	56
1910	26.80	2.99	9.4	74
1913	35.40	4.12	9.1	90
1916	33.80	3.72	9.7	64

SOURCE 3.6 Growth of St Petersburg

Year	Inhabitants (millions)
1812	0.308
1830	0.435
1863	0.539
1869	0.667
1881	0.861
1897	1.260
1914	2.20

ACTIVITY

Writing an essay to answer a specific question:

How far do you agree that the economy of Tsarist Russia was transformed in the years to 1914?

To answer this question you have to look carefully at what it is asking you to do. 'Transformed' means changed fundamentally. 'How far do you agree' suggests there is a debate on this issue and that you have to make a judgement. You need to:

- look at the development of agriculture and industry in 1881-1914. Some figures, but not many, will be required as supporting evidence
- look particularly at Witte's industrialisation drive and Stolypin's land reforms
- acknowledge ups and downs – growth in the 1890s, depression after 1900, effect of Russo-Japanese War and 1905 revolution, boom after 1909
- survey the economic situation in 1914 and make some international comparisons
- consider the views of historians about the state of the economy before 1914.

Some historians consider that the economy was stabilising and set to do well if growth rates had continued at the same pace. Alexander Gerschenkron, a Russian-American economist, thought that the signs were so encouraging that, if the First World War had not occurred, Russia was well on the way to developing into a successful modern industrial state. Others, more pessimistic, contend that, despite her growth, Russia was still backward in many respects and falling behind more advanced industrialised countries, especially in terms of production per head of the population. A third view is that the boom was likely to be short-lived and that Russia would soon face another crisis. Alec Nove, one of the most highly regarded historians of the Russian economy, highlights the uneven nature of Russian industry and points out that the question of whether Russia would have become a modern industrial state had it not been for war and revolution is, in essence, meaningless. It assumes that the regime would have proceeded on an orderly path and adjusted to the strains of a changing society. Nove quotes Gerschenkron: 'Industrialisation, the cost of which was largely defrayed by the peasantry, was itself a threat to political stability and hence to the continuation of the policy of industrialisation.'

D How revolutionary was Russia in 1914?

FOCUS ROUTE

Assess each group as you read through this section:

	How far a potential revolutionary threat?	Reality in 1914
Workers		
Peasants		
Liberals		
Revolutionaries		
Army		

The workers

By 1914, the industrial workforce had established itself as a distinct section of the population: a majority of workers who began employment between 1906-13 were the children of workers. The level of literacy among workers was high, reaching 64 per cent in 1914 compared with less than 40 per cent for the adult population in general. Things had not improved much for most of them since 1905; they had seen very little reward from the growth in industrial production. Workers' wages were less than one-third the average in Western Europe and the Russian government had made no real attempt to improve their conditions in contrast to the social reforms enacted elsewhere in Europe. In 1912, limited insurance had been introduced for accidents and sickness but this covered only a minority of the workforce. People still worked long hours for low pay. In some workplaces their hours had actually been increased since 1905 and others had been put onto piece work. For old age, occupational disease and unemployment there was little or no support.

After 1905 the labour movement had retreated due to the repression of trade unions and strikes, but there was a revival of militancy from 1912. It started with the Lena Goldfields Massacre in April 1912. Striking workers, protesting about degrading working conditions, low wages and a 14-hour working day, clashed with troops and over 200 people were killed and many injured. This opened the floodgates to workers' protests.

Strikes grew in militancy from 1912 to 1914. July 1914 saw a general strike in St Petersburg involving barricades and street fighting. However, only a quarter of the work force were involved, compared with four-fifths in February 1917. Students, whose relationship with the government had become increasingly embittered in the years leading to 1914, supported the workers. The regime was right to be worried by industrial and urban unrest but was not likely to be toppled by it in 1914.

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

Some historians argue that workers in larger factories were turning towards the Bolsheviks who supported violent upheaval and armed struggle and that this indicated a similar situation building to that of 1905. However, R. B. McKean in his study of *St Petersburg Between the Revolutions: Workers and Revolutionaries June 1907–February 1917* argues that most workers did not work in the larger factories targeted by the socialists but in the domestic and service sectors. He maintains that most workers were not socialists and the strikes were mainly about pay and working conditions; only a relatively small number, predominantly male metal workers, were engaged in radical activity before 1917.

The peasants

Some historians contend that recent evidence suggests that living standards were rising amongst peasants in the years leading to 1914. Several years of good harvests certainly helped. They point out that the villages were relatively quiet before 1914 and militancy was to be found in the cities rather than the countryside. However, it is difficult to generalise about the standard of living for peasants because there was so much variation between and even within regions. It seems likely that while a minority prospered, others remained impoverished.

Although there had been no major upheavals and disturbances, some historians have noted simmering resentment in the countryside. The divisive nature of the Stolypin reforms was shown by conflicts over enclosure between 1906 and 1914. In some instances, the separators faced violence and intimidation from the older entrenched peasants and troops had to be brought in to make sure the reforms went ahead. The peasants had not been tied closer to the Tsar as Stolypin hoped. Their expectations of change had been dashed after 1905 and the growth in population had only increased their hunger for land, particularly in the central agricultural province. Their main aims had not changed: getting their hands on the nobility's land and farming it free from government interference. Orlando Figes' research suggests that landowners felt that, 'the next – and imminently more powerful revolutionary outburst by the peasantry would only be a question of time.'

Stolypin's reforms had other consequences

The peasants who had left the land as a result of the reforms were often full of resentment and many of these had gone into the towns and cities to become industrial workers. Also thousands of peasants who had been encouraged to go to Siberia returned home, having found the land inhospitable or been cheated by land speculators. They also were resentful. The net result was to increase a section of the labour force that was rootless and disoriented and who provided good material for revolutionary propaganda.

The liberals

The liberals were in a weak and uncomfortable position sandwiched between the Right, who firmly supported the autocracy, and the radical workers and peasants. The liberals were divided and no real threat. The Octobrists and the Kadets distrusted each other, were out of touch with the masses and refused to seek their support. They feared mass anarchy and did not support the strike movement. They depended on the government to implement their programmes so they needed the Tsar more than he needed them. However, Guchkov, the Octobrist leader, told his followers in November 1913 that he was reminded of 1905 but this time the danger came from a government whose actions were revolutionising society and the people. 'With every day, people are losing faith in the state and in the possibility of a normal, peaceful resolution of the crisis' the probable outcome of which was 'a sad unavoidable catastrophe'.

How strong were the revolutionaries?

The SRs and the Mensheviks had both been weakened in the years before 1914. The SRs were in turmoil after 1908 as a result of the exposure of Azef (see below), especially as the party's terrorist wing had such prestige within the party. The SRs became obsessed with the issue of double agents and party organisation broke down. There were divisions amongst the leadership, and between the leadership and the rank and file. The party was unable to take advantage of the revival in militancy after the Lena Goldfields Massacre. Until that event the Mensheviks, with their emphasis on the creation of a legal labour movement taking advantage of the new political freedoms won in 1905, enjoyed more support inside Russia. Lena was a blow to any illusions about the regime and peaceful change, and gave the more radical Bolsheviks their opportunity. By 1914 the Bolsheviks had more influence in the trade unions than the Mensheviks, gaining control of some of the biggest unions in St Petersburg and Moscow, like the Metalworkers Union. The Bolshevik paper, *Pravda*, had achieved a national circulation of 40,000 copies per issue, over twice that of its Menshevik rival. However, the workers were generally not housed in large factories, radicalised and under Bolshevik control as some Soviet historians claimed them to be. The leadership was either in exile or, like Lenin, isolated abroad. Lenin had failed to build a national illegal party organisation. Even in January 1917 Lenin said, 'We, the old people, perhaps won't survive until the decisive battles of the forthcoming revolution.' A huge problem for the Bolsheviks as well as the SRs was that they were thoroughly infiltrated by the Okhrana.

How reliable was the army?

The events of 1905 had shown that the regime could survive if it could rely on the army, and in 1914 the army remained loyal. However, Edward Acton points out that the experience of 1905-6 and the subsequent reforms had weakened the reliability of the army as an instrument of control. The mutinies in 1905 and 1906 could not be easily forgotten. Cutting the period of service to three years brought the army into much closer contact with the stresses and strains of civilian society. Also, as the officer corps became more professional, it became more determined not to be used for crushing civilian disturbances.

POLICE, SPIES AND THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTIES: AZEF AND MALINOVSKY

Evno Azef has been called the greatest double agent of them all. He had a remarkably long 15-year career and by 1905 he had risen to become the overseer of the SR's Combat Organisation when it was at its most active, assassinating in 1904 Plehve, the Minister of the Interior, and in 1905 Grand Duke Sergei. Anna Geifman, using newly available Okhrana archive material, sees Azef's role as that of a typical spy and informer. She claims the assassination of Plehve was due to police incompetence since Azef had provided enough information to foil the attempt.

After the assassination of Grand Duke Sergei, Azef met the new police chief regularly in a flat in St Petersburg and together they prevented any further assassination attempts on major figures – including one on the Tsar – until Azef's exposure in 1908 (he fled abroad with his mistress and settled in Germany). The unmasking of Azef was a devastating blow to the SR's Combat Organisation. One member wrote: 'If the person we believed in as the best of friends, as a brother, turns out to be such a base traitor, does this not mean that it is no longer possible to believe in man altogether, that there is no truth in the world, that there is nothing worth living for?' Almost two dozen more informers were exposed in the next four years and the debilitating effect on the SRs contributed to their failure in 1917.

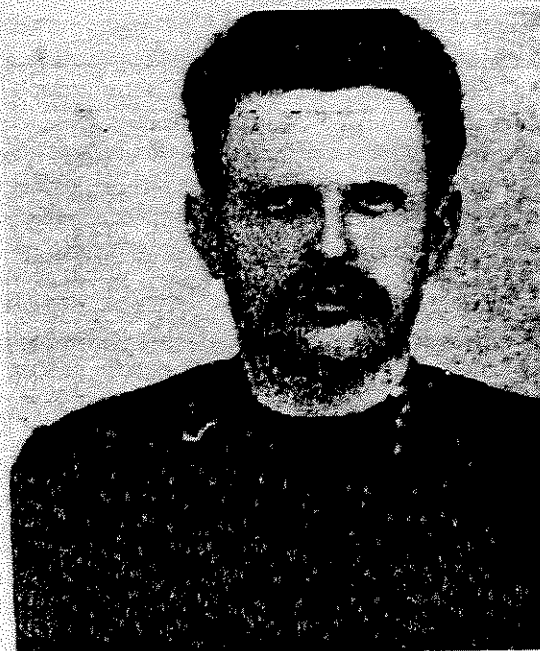
For their Bolshevik rivals, Lenin insisted that the revolutionary movement would triumph only if a 'few professionals as highly trained and experienced as our [security] police' were allowed to organise it: hence the secret meeting places, forged passports, secret codes and aliases – Lenin himself had 150 of them. Despite this, four out of five of the party's St Petersburg committee in 1908-9 were Okhrana agents. In 1911, the Bolsheviks set up a special three-man commission 'to expose and isolate provocateurs'. It included Roman Malinovsky, an SD member of the Duma, who became Lenin's closest political confidant inside Russia. But Malinovsky was an Okhrana agent, ordered by the Director of the Police Department to attach himself closely to Lenin. Lenin refused to consider suspicions that he was a police agent.

Police files opened after the February revolution finally established Malinovsky's guilt, showing drafts of his speeches in the Duma with amendments in the handwriting of both Lenin and the police chief. He submitted 88 reports on his SD colleagues between 1910 and 1915 which wreaked havoc on the Bolshevik underground. Stalin, Sverdlov, Bukharin and Ordzhonikidze were among those Malinovsky had arrested. He even persuaded Lenin to appoint an Okhrana agent editor of *Pravda*. In 1914, a new police chief decided that rising Bolshevik support might be undermined by exposing their best known spokesman as an agent provocateur. Malinovsky fled Russia. When Lenin returned to Russia in 1917 and read of Malinovsky's guilt, Zinoviev tells us he went white with astonishment and said, 'What a scoundrel! He tricked the lot of us. Traitor! Shooting's too good for him!' After the revolution Malinovsky returned to Russia voluntarily, was put on trial and shot.

The Okhrana were the best secret service of their day: Molotov, a leading Bolshevik, admitted that, 'they had smarter people than ours'. Typically, when SR terrorists considered flying a dynamite-packed biplane into the Winter Palace in 1909, the Okhrana ordered the monitoring of all flights as well as people learning to fly. Even so, the Okhrana could not prevent the major upsurge in terrorism during Nicholas II's reign. Nevertheless, their widespread penetration of the Social Democrats destroyed morale and comradeship. Simon Sebag Montifore argues that the Okhrana were so successful in poisoning revolutionary minds that, 'thirty years after the fall of the tsars, the Bolsheviks were still killing each other in a witch-hunt for non-existent traitors'. Molotov, justifying Stalin's terror in his retirement, said, 'We never forgot the agent provocateur Malinovsky.'



Evno Azef



Roman Malinovsky

FOCUS ROUTE

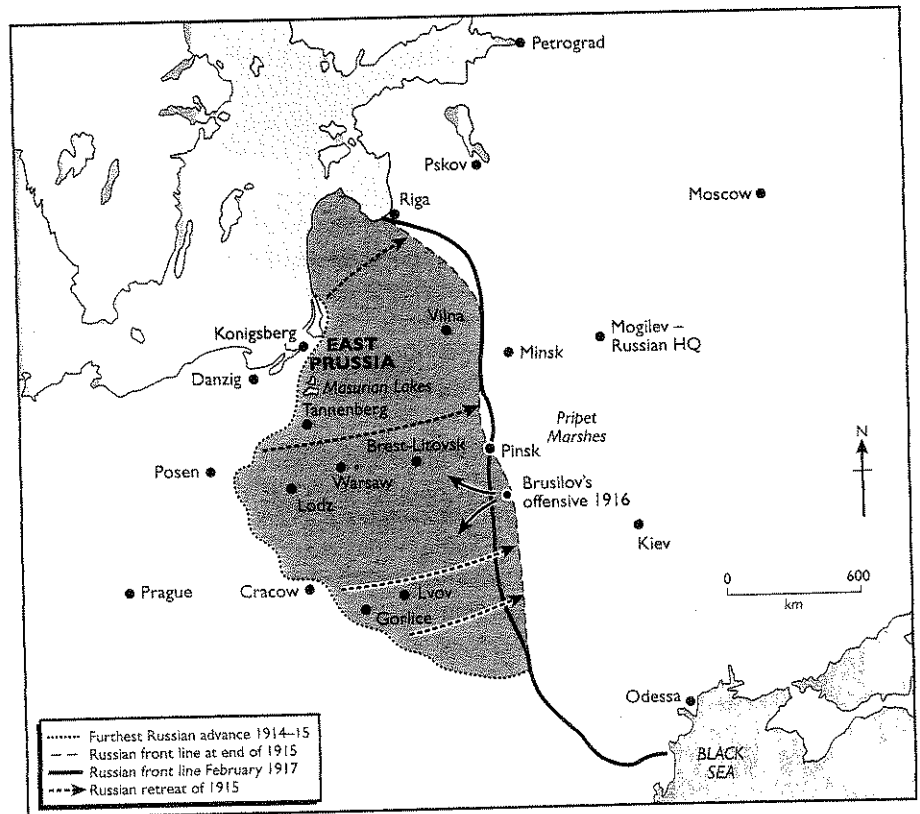
As you read through this section make notes on how the war contributed to the problems facing the Tsar.

When war broke out in July 1914, Russia's internal divisions were temporarily forgotten and Nicholas rode a wave of popular support. Paintings of the Tsar were carried in processions and crowds sang the national anthem. The *Times* correspondent wrote: 'For perhaps the first time since Napoleon's invasion of Russia, the people and their Tsar were one, and the strength that unity spreads in a nation stirred throughout the Empire.' But the enthusiasm did not last long.

At the Front

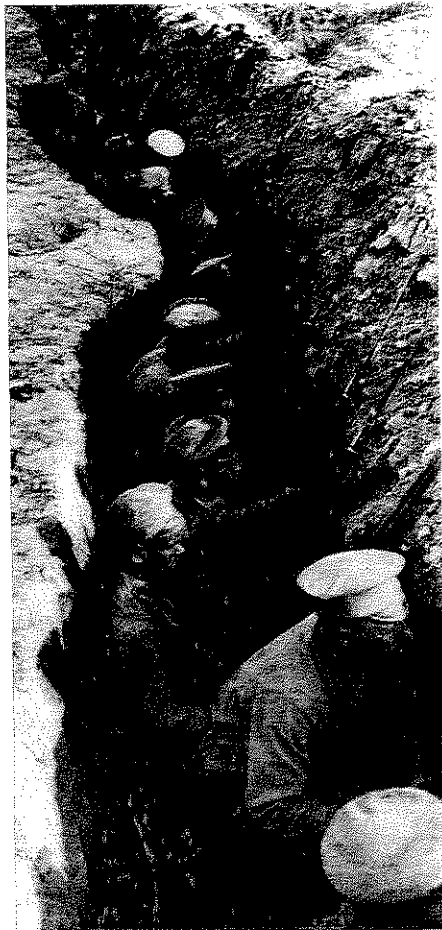
The Russians had the largest army and gained some early successes against the Austro-Hungarians. But it was a different story against the Germans. In August 1914, at the battle of Tannenberg, and in September at the Masurian Lakes, the Russians took heavy losses and were driven back. There followed a long retreat throughout 1915. By the autumn of 1915 they had been forced out of Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. Between May and December of that year one million Russians were killed and a similar number were taken prisoner. The Russians recovered during the winter of 1915-16 and in the summer of 1916 General Brusilov launched a brilliant offensive, which brought the Austrians to their knees with over half their army killed or captured. But the Germans moved troops to reinforce them and the Russians were pushed back once more.

The real problem for the Russians was at the top: the quality of leadership was poor, with notable exceptions like Brusilov. Many of the top officers had been appointed because of their loyalty to the Tsar. They had no experience of fighting and little military expertise. There was no clear command structure and no war plan was developed. The performance of the War Ministry was dire, compounded by the breakdown of the distribution system (see The home front, page 61): there was a lack of supplies and equipment, especially rifles, ammunition and boots. The shortage of rifles was so bad on some parts of the Front that soldiers had to rely on picking up the rifles of men shot in front of them. Often the war materials were available but they were not where they were needed.

3B Russian battle lines, 1914-17

SOURCE 3.8 Mikhail Rodzianko, A report from the Front

The army had neither wagons nor horses nor first aid supplies . . . We visited the Warsaw station where there were about 17,000 men wounded in battles. At the station we found a terrible scene: on the platform in dirt, filth and cold, in the rain on the ground even without straw, wounded, who filled the air with heart rending cries, dolefully asked: 'For God's sake order them to dress our wounds, for five days we have not been attended to.'



SOURCE 3.10 Russian troops awaiting German attack, 1917

When Mikhail Rodzianko, the President of the Duma, went on a special fact-finding tour, he received a lot of complaints about poor administration and the lack of basic supplies. He also found that provision for dealing with wounded soldiers was abysmal (see Source 3.8). The morale of the soldiers was hard hit by the incompetence of their officers and the lack of regard for their welfare – tens of thousands deserted.

SOURCE 3.9 Rodzianko's son, who was in the army, told of criminal incompetence and lack of co-operation in the high command. He reported the following attack on the Rai-Mestro Height to his father. It had been ordered by the Grand Duke who had been warned about a swamp which lay in the way, but he still ordered the advance

The troops found themselves in the swamp, where many men perished. . . . My son sank up to his armpits and was with difficulty extricated. . . . The wounded could not be brought out and perished in the swamp. Our artillery fire was weak . . . and the shells fell short and dropped among our own men. . . . Nevertheless, the gallant guards fulfilled their task, WHICH THEY WERE THEN ORDERED TO ABANDON.

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



However, the Russian war effort was not the total disaster it has sometimes been portrayed as, by mostly Soviet historians. Norman Stone has pointed out that by 1916 the Russians were matching the Germans in shell production and there had been a 1000 per cent growth in the output of artillery and rifles. They had success against the Austrians and contributed significantly to the Allied victory by mounting attacks on the Eastern Front to relieve pressure on the Western Front. In 1916, Brusilov saved the French at Verdun when the Germans had to pull out 55 divisions to counter his offensive. The Eastern Front engaged enormous numbers of German troops. Also, according to Stone, the army was not on the verge of collapse at the beginning of 1917; it was still intact as a fighting force.

THE CHANGING NAME OF ST PETERSBURG

The German-sounding St Petersburg (Peter's town) was changed to the more Slavonic Russian-sounding Petrograd in 1914 as a wave of anti-German feeling swept through Russia on the outbreak of war. After the death of Lenin in 1924, it was renamed Leningrad (Lenin's town). After the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, it reverted to its original name.

The home front

The strain of equipping and feeding millions of soldiers proved too much for the Russian economy and revealed its structural weaknesses. Military needs had priority and the railways, which were barely able to cope with freight traffic in peacetime, were now overloaded. There were bottlenecks at Moscow. The signalling system collapsed and trains were left stranded on lines due to engine failure. Early in the war, goods and supplies were available but trucks ended up in sidings waiting for engines or lines to be unblocked.

The loss of land in Poland and the West knocked out the more important of the two main lines from northern to southern Russia. As a result, there was a major problem moving grain from the south to the cities, and Petrograd suffered particularly. Making matters worse was the lack of grain coming onto the market. The peasants were not selling it as there was little incentive for them to do so. The government would not pay higher prices and the conversion of factories to military work meant there was little for peasants to buy - the production of agricultural implements was only 15 per cent of the pre-war level.

Inflation compounded these problems. Russia abandoned the gold standard and started printing money to pay wages, and so government spending rose. With people desperately seeking goods in short supply, inflation kicked in. Whilst wages more or less doubled between 1914 and 1916, the price of food and fuel quadrupled.

The expansion of the workforce in factories and mines servicing military needs and the influx of refugees from German occupied areas led to very serious overcrowding in the towns and a deterioration in living standards. There were food and fuel shortages and endless queues. Petrograd suffered more than other places because it was remote from food-producing areas. By 1916, it was receiving barely a third of the food and fuel it required. The shortage of food was a major source of anger, matched only by the ban on vodka sales. Strikes had broken out in 1915 and they increased in number, frequency and militancy during 1916. The war also took its toll in a more personal way. As the list of casualties mounted there was hardly a family that had not been affected by a son killed or captured.

The role of the Tsar in the war

The support the Tsar enjoyed at the beginning of the war faded as the military defeats piled up. As in 1905, confidence in the government evaporated as its incompetence and inability to effectively organise supplies for the military at the Front and the people in the cities became apparent. The zemstva and municipalities started forming their own bodies to provide medical care, hospitals and hospital trains for the thousands of wounded soldiers. These bodies eventually united to form one organisation - Zemgor. They went on to supply uniforms, boots and tents. Professional groups and businessmen formed War Industries Committees (WICs) to shift factories over to military production. Leading liberals played an important role in these non-governmental organisations that seemed to offer an alternative - and much more effective - form of government. So, even though these organisations were fully supportive of the war, the autocracy regarded them with suspicion and would not co-operate with them. The Tsarina, in particular, saw them as revolutionary bodies undermining the autocracy; and indeed they did act as a focus for criticism of the bureaucracy's failings.

The Tsar was pressurised into reconvening the Duma in July 1915. Progressive elements in the Duma (about two-thirds of the total deputies) formed the 'Progressive Bloc'. They wished to be fully involved in the war effort and wanted to prevent the country slipping into revolution and anarchy, which frightened them as much as anybody else. The Bloc called for a 'ministry of national confidence' in which elected members of the Duma would replace incompetent ministers to form a new government. This offered a real chance for the Tsar to be seen to be working with the people and offload some of the responsibility for the war. But the Tsar would not countenance it and suspended the Duma, which only met again briefly in 1916 and 1917. The Progressive

Bloc became frustrated by his intransigence. In November 1916, Milyukov, the Kadet leader, made a speech listing the government's shortcomings around the question: 'Is this stupidity or treason?' (see Source 3.12). He also declared that the Duma would fight the government 'with all legitimate means until you go'.

SOURCE 3.12 Speech by Paul Milyukov to the Duma, November 1916, quoted in John Laver, *Russia 1914–41*, pp. 6–7

We now see that we can no more legislate with this government than we can lead Russia to victory with it. When the Duma declares again and again that the home front must be organised for a successful war and the government continues to insist that to organise the country means to organise revolution, and consciously chooses chaos and disintegration – is this stupidity or treason? [Voices from the left: 'treason'.] . . . We have many reasons for being discontented with this government. But all these reasons boil down to one general one: the incompetence and evil intentions of the present government . . . And therefore in the name of the millions of victims and their spilled blood . . . we shall fight until we get a responsible government which is in agreement with the general principles of our programme. Cabinet members must agree unanimously as to the most urgent tasks, they must agree and be prepared to implement the programme of the Duma. A Cabinet which does not satisfy these conditions does not deserve the confidence of the Duma and should go. [Voices: 'bravo'; loud and prolonged applause.]

In August 1915 the Tsar made a huge mistake: he decided to take direct control of the army and went off to military headquarters in Mogilev, 600 kilometres from Petrograd. This had a number of serious consequences for him:

- 1 He now became personally responsible for the conduct of the war. If things went badly he would be directly to blame. He could not pass off the responsibility to his generals.
- 2 He was away from Petrograd for long periods of time, leaving the Tsarina and Rasputin (see opposite) in control of the government. 'Lovy,' she wrote to her husband, 'I am here, don't laugh at silly old wifey, but she has "trousers" on unseen.'

This created chronic instability in the government. There were constant changes of ministers – a game of ministerial leapfrog (see box) in which the hand of the Tsarina can be detected. Competent people were dismissed: for instance, the War Minister, Polivanov, who was rebuilding the army and supply system with some success after the disasters of 1915, was discharged. The Tsarina regarded him as a traitor and a 'revolutionist' because of his willingness to work with Zemgor and the WICs. Incompetent people were appointed, often because they flattered the Tsarina or because they were recommended by Rasputin. The appointment of Sturmer as Prime Minister in February 1916 caused great disquiet: not only was he incompetent and dishonest but he also had a German name.

It is not surprising that by the end of 1916 support for the Tsar was haemorrhaging fast. All classes in society were disillusioned by the way the government was running the war and since the Tsar embodied the government and had taken direct control of the armed forces it was towards him that the finger of responsibility was pointed. The governing élite was in disarray and even some of the nobility were supporting the Progressive Bloc in the Duma. People were talking about an impending revolution.

The situation in Petrograd was becoming tense. A secret police report at the end of 1916 said that the workers in Petrograd were on the verge of despair, with the cost of living having risen by 300 per cent, food almost unobtainable and long queues outside most shops. The secret police reported a rising death rate due to inadequate diet, unsanitary and cold lodgings and 'a mass of industrial workers quite ready to let themselves go to the wildest excesses of a hunger strike'.

**MINISTERIAL LEAPFROG:
SEPTEMBER 1915 TO
FEBRUARY 1917**

- 4 Prime Ministers
- 5 Ministers of Internal Affairs
- 5 Ministers of Foreign Affairs
- 3 Ministers of War
- 3 Ministers of Transport
- 4 Ministers of Agriculture

ACTIVITY

- 1 Why do you think Sources 3.14 and 3.15 might have serious consequences for the Tsar?
- 2 In what ways do you think that Rasputin contributed to the Tsar's downfall?

THE IMPACT OF RASPUTIN

SOURCE 3.13 Grigory Rasputin surrounded by ladies of the aristocracy



Grigory Yefimovich, born into a Siberian peasant family, gained a reputation as a holy man, or 'starets', and the name Rasputin. It was rumoured that he belonged to the Kylsty, a sect that found religious fulfilment and ecstasy through the religious senses and, in particular, sexual acts. In 1905, Rasputin was introduced into polite society in St Petersburg and became known to the royal family. The Tsar's son, Alexis, suffered from haemophilia, and doctors found it difficult to stop the bleeding that resulted from this. In 1907, when Alexis was experiencing a particularly bad episode, Rasputin was called in and Alexis recovered. This happened on other occasions. It is not known how Rasputin did this: he may have had some skill with herbal remedies or some ability in hypnosis that calmed Alexis. The Tsarina, a deeply religious woman, believed that Rasputin had been sent by God to save her son. This gave him an elevated position at the Russian court with direct access to the royal family. Women from the higher social circles flocked to him to ask for advice and healing or to carry petitions to the Tsar to advance their husbands' careers. There were rumours that Rasputin solicited sexual favours for this help and stories of orgies emerged. However, secret police reports and subsequent investigations seemed to show that his sexual activity – and he was very active – was restricted mainly to actresses and prostitutes rather than society women.

Whatever the truth about Rasputin's relationships, his reputation for debauchery played a significant role in damaging the standing of the royal family and caused the Tsar political problems. The Tsar had newspaper reports about Rasputin censored. He fell out with the Duma over this and Rasputin's influential position at court. Ministers like Stolypin profoundly disapproved of Rasputin, but any mention of the problems he caused brought short shrift from the Tsar.

The impact of Rasputin became even more damaging during the war. When the Tsar went to the Front, he left the Tsarina and Rasputin effectively in control of domestic matters. They played havoc with ministers and contributed to the government's instability. As a result, they became the

focus of growing public anger and antagonism towards the regime. She was portrayed as a German spy, deliberately conniving with Rasputin to betray Mother Russia. Pornographic cartoons (see Source 3.15) and letters found their way into the press and implied that she was having an illicit relationship with Rasputin and was under his control. Even the rapidly diminishing supporters of the Tsar could not put up with the degenerate monk and the 'German woman' running the country. In December 1916, a member of the royal family, Prince Yusupov, arranged to murder Rasputin in a last ditch effort to save the autocracy. But the damage had been done: many were now convinced the regime was not worth saving.

SOURCE 3.14 One of the letters from the Tsarina to Rasputin that was leaked to the press. Some historians think these letters were edited to the detriment of the Tsarina. Others point out that she used gushing, over-the-top language in all her letters. There is no evidence that she had a sexual affair with Rasputin

My beloved, unforgettable teacher, redeemer, mentor! How tiresome it is without you. My soul is quiet and I relax only when you, my teacher, are sitting beside me. I kiss your hands . . . I wish only one thing: to fall asleep . . . forever on your shoulders and in your arms . . . will you soon be again close to me? Come quickly, I am waiting for you and I am tormenting myself for you . . . I love you forever.

SOURCE 3.15 Postcards like this circulated freely during 1917



3C How the First World War contributed to the Tsar's downfall

COULD TSARISM HAVE SURVIVED? 1906-1917

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.



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.

