

## Did life get better for Russian people after 1905?

THE TSAR SURVIVED the 1905 Revolution with the opportunity to make changes and to carry out the promises he had made. He managed to stay in power for another twelve years, but in 1917 he was forced to abdicate. Some historians think the First World War was the reason for this and that without the war he would have survived. Others argue that he was heading for disaster anyway. See what you think.

1. Who do you think is riding the horse in Source 1?
2. What is the attitude of the cartoonist to what was going on in Russia?

### Order and control

Although most of the trouble in the cities had stopped by the end of 1905, violent disturbances continued in the countryside well into 1906. The Tsar appointed Peter Stolypin as Prime Minister to deal with this. He had a reputation for being tough. He set up military courts, which could sentence and hang a person on the spot. Thousands were executed by these courts, and the hangman's noose became known as 'Stolypin's necktie'.

The Okhrana, the secret police, were still very active, with thousands of informers. Everybody had to carry internal passports and travellers had to register with the police outside their home districts. Freedom of the press had been guaranteed in 1905, but newspapers were often fined for writing articles offending the government, and frequently newspapers appeared with white spaces where material had been censored.



SOURCE 1 A cartoon captioned *Peace and Quiet*, 1906

### The Dumas

At the end of 1905, the Tsar had given way to demands for a parliament or DUMA elected by the people. But would it have any power, and how would it be elected? By the time the first Duma met in April 1906, the answers to these questions were clear. The Duma could not pass laws, could not appoint ministers and could not control finance in important areas such as defence, and the Tsar could dissolve it whenever he wished. Elections favoured the nobles: there was one representative for every 2,000 nobles, but one for every 90,000 workers.

Despite this, the first two Dumas of 1906 and 1907 were very radical, demanding more power for themselves and rights for ordinary people (e.g. freedom to strike, free education). They also demanded that more land should be given to the

SOURCE 2 What Nicholas said about the Duma in 1908

“I created the Duma not to have it instruct me, but to have it advise me.”

SOURCE 3 Count Kokovstov gives an eye-witness account of the opening of the Duma in the Tauride Palace on 26 April 1906

“The entire right side of the room was filled with uniformed people . . . the Tsar’s retinue. The left side was crowded with the members of the Duma . . . the overwhelming majority . . . dressed in workers’ blouses and cotton shirts, and behind them was a crowd of peasants in the most varied costumes, some in national dress.

. . . The first place among these representatives of the people was occupied by a man tall in stature, dressed in a worker’s blouse and high, oiled boots, who examined the throne and those about it with a derisive and insolent air . . . P.A. Stolypin turned to me and said, ‘I even have a feeling that this man might throw a bomb.’”

peasants. The Tsar would have none of this and dissolved both Dumas after a few weeks.

For the third Duma, Stolypin changed the way the members were elected to favour the gentry and urban rich even more. As a result, the third Duma was much more conservative. Even so, this Duma, which lasted from 1907 to 1912, was often critical of the government, and some good measures were passed on matters to do with the army and navy and accident insurance for workers. The fourth Duma (1912–14) achieved little before war was declared, but at least the Tsar was starting to work with it.

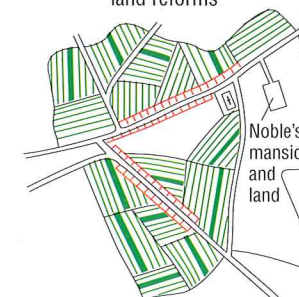
3. What power did the Duma have?
4. From the information in Sources 2 and 3:
  - a) Do you think the Duma had much chance of working successfully with the Tsar?
  - b) Whose fault do you think this was?

### Changes in the countryside

To try to make agriculture more efficient, Stolypin introduced reforms to encourage the ‘best elements’ amongst the peasantry.

Peasants were allowed to buy up strips of land from their less enterprising neighbours to make one single land holding, which they owned individually. Stolypin

Diagram 1 A village before Stolypin’s land reforms

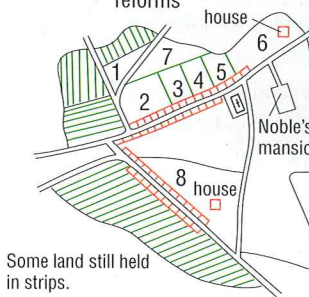


Peasants held land in strips.

— = strips held by one household

□ = houses

Diagram 2 The same village after the reforms



Some land still held in strips.

1–5 and 7 show blocks of land where one peasant’s strips have been put together as a block.

Some peasants bought strips from poorer neighbours to form larger blocks (6 and 8). These peasants were called ‘kulaks’.

SOURCE 4 Stolypin’s land reform

set up a peasants’ bank to provide loans for them to do this. He believed that peasants would want to improve their own land and use modern methods to produce more food. He also hoped this would create a new class of prosperous landowning peasants – KULAKS – who would be loyal to the government.

About fifteen per cent of peasants took up his offer and there were improvements. Production of grain did increase and there was a record harvest in 1913. Unfortunately, the outbreak of war in 1914 interrupted the reforms. The reforms did, however, have another consequence: a lot of poorer peasants were forced to sell their land and became labourers, wandering around the countryside seeking work. Some went to work in the cities, but many remained in the countryside, with not even a small patch of land to support their families.

Around four million peasants were encouraged by the government to settle on new lands along the Trans-Siberian Railway. They made long journeys, crammed into wagons, but when they arrived they found that the best land had been taken by rich land speculators. Over half of them returned to European Russia, very angry that they had been misled and with nothing to go back to.

5. Stolypin called his policy a ‘wager on the strong and sober’ among the peasants. What do you think he meant by this and why did he think this would solve problems in agriculture?
6. What consequences of the reforms could prove dangerous for the government?
7. Which peasants would think their situation was improving in 1914 and which would think it was getting worse?

### Changes in the cities

Between 1906 and 1914, there was an industrial boom in Russia. Between 1905 and 1914, total industrial production increased by 100 per cent. Russia became the world's fourth largest producer of coal, pig iron and steel. The Baku oil fields were rivalled only by those in Texas. Many of the factories were very efficient, using the most up-to-date mass-production methods.

By 1914, two-fifths of factory workers were in factories with over 1,000 workers. This made the factories more efficient, but it also made it easier to organise strikes.

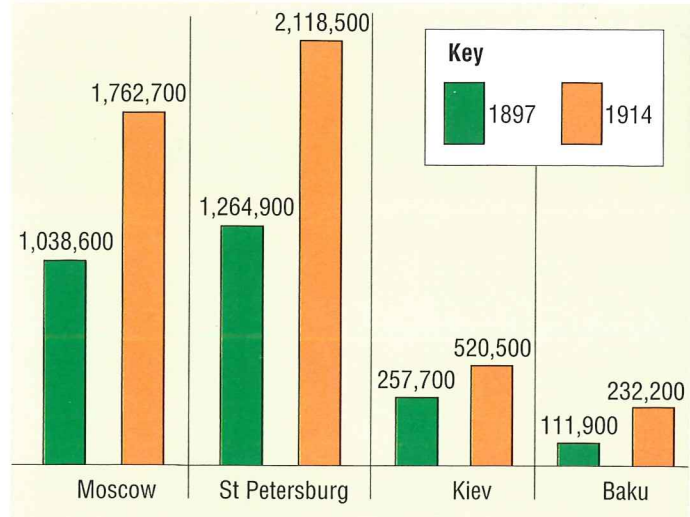
However, the workers did not benefit much from the boom. Working conditions improved little, if at all, over the period. Average wages were, in real terms, below the pitiful levels of 1903. Prices had risen so much that workers could only just manage to buy the bread they needed.

In 1912, an important strike took place in the Lena goldfields in Siberia. Striking workers protested about degrading working conditions, low wages and a working day which lasted from 5.00 a.m. to 7.00 p.m. They clashed with troops, and 170 workers were killed and 373 wounded. The Lena Goldfield Massacre had a similar effect to Bloody Sunday in 1905 and opened the floodgates for workers' protests.

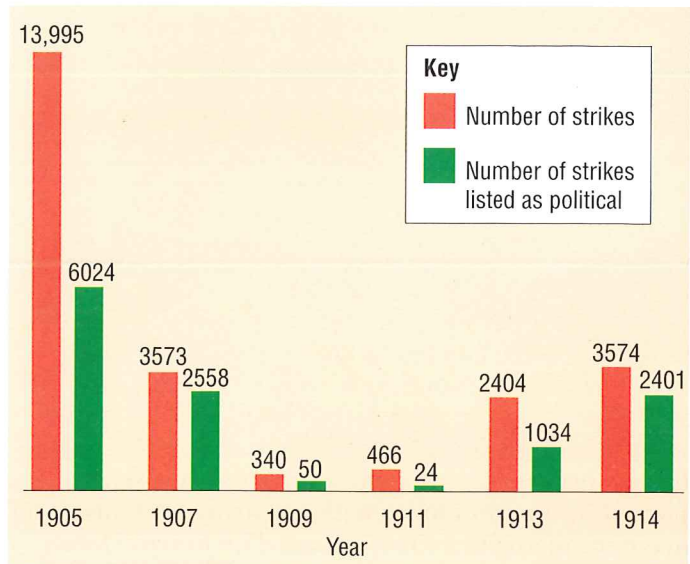
1. a) What does Source 5 tell you about changes in Russian cities?  
b) What pressures might this create?
2. Study Source 6.  
a) What is the pattern of strikes between 1905 and 1914?  
b) What does the pattern for political strikes tell you?
3. What reasons can you suggest for the strikes?
4. Who, according to Source 7, was benefiting from the industrial boom?

### ACTIVITY

Work in pairs. One of you must argue that things were improving in Russia before 1914, using the evidence from pages 24–26 to support this view. The other side must collect evidence to put the opposite case. Try to come to some agreement at the end of your discussion, then write your own balanced account of whether life was improving before 1914 or not.



SOURCE 5 Populations of major cities in 1897 and 1914



SOURCE 6 Ministry of Trade and Industry figures on strikes in workplaces covered by factory inspection

SOURCE 7 Alexei Tolstoy describes St Petersburg before 1914

“In the last ten years huge enterprises had sprung into being with unbelievable rapidity. Fortunes of millions of roubles appeared as if out of thin air . . . People doped themselves with music . . . with half-naked women . . . with champagne. Gambling clubs, theatres, picture houses, amusement parks cropped up like mushrooms . . . Everything was accessible: the women no less than the riches.”

## Rasputin: sex maniac or holy man?

ONE OF THE most fascinating episodes in the period before the war was the arrival of Grigory Rasputin at the royal court. Rasputin was a starets (a holy man) from Siberia. It was rumoured he belonged to a religious sect, the Klysty, who believed that the way to religious ecstasy lay in the senses. Men and women flogged themselves and sometimes engaged in sexual acts.

Rasputin organised gatherings which attracted women from the higher circles of society. Many came to him seeking advice or healing – and later favours, when he became a friend of the royal family. There were stories of wild drunken parties and orgies, and of Rasputin seducing women with his hypnotic powers.

To what extent these stories were true is not clear. Rasputin had many enemies. Was he the coarse, uncouth, smelly peasant that some made him out to be? It does seem that his weakness was sex and that he had a string of lovers. But did they include the Tsarina and her two eldest daughters as rumour had it?

It is his relationship with the Tsar and Tsarina that makes his story important. The Tsar's son, Alexis, was a haemophiliac. This meant that his blood did not clot easily. Cuts and even bruises could lead to long bouts of bleeding, which caused him severe pain. In 1907, it was thought that he was dying, and Rasputin was called in. After Rasputin's visit, Alexis started to recover. The Tsarina, a very religious woman, was convinced that Rasputin had been sent by God to save her son. Rasputin became a close friend of the royal family.

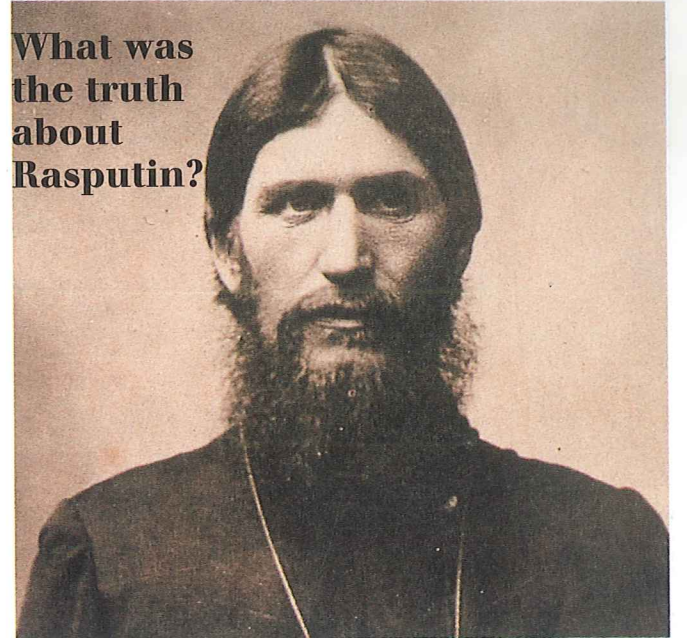
How Rasputin helped Alexis is not known. It may be that he had skill with herbs and medicines, or some mastery of hypnosis. Whatever he did, it was effective, or thought to be so. In 1912, a famous incident took place when Alexis was seriously ill and Rasputin was not in St Petersburg. On hearing of Alexis' plight, Rasputin sent a telegram saying that Alexis would recover on the following day – and, apparently, he did.

The Tsar and Tsarina's reputation suffered from their association with Rasputin, the most talked-of man in St Petersburg. The relationship shocked the highest levels of government and society. It also soured relations with Stolypin, the Tsar's most able minister. Stolypin had Rasputin banished from St Petersburg, much to the Tsarina's fury. But after Stolypin's death in 1912, Rasputin returned and his influence increased.

This brought the Tsar into conflict with the Duma and the press. Articles about Rasputin were censored, which was not only seen as an attack on the freedom of the press, but of course also increased the gossip. The Rasputin connection had serious repercussions for the Tsar, and matters were to get worse during the First World War.

### SOURCE INVESTIGATION

What was the truth about Rasputin?



SOURCE 1 A photograph of Rasputin

SOURCE 2 From the memoirs of the French Ambassador at the time, Maurice Paleologue

“Brown hair, long and ill-combed; a black stiff beard; a high forehead; a large, jutting nose; a powerful mouth. But the whole expression of the face was concentrated in the eyes – flax-blue eyes, of a strange brilliance, depth and fascination. Their glance was at the same time piercing and caressing, ingenuous and astute, direct and remote. When his speech became animated, his pupils seemed to be charged with magnetism.”

SOURCE 3 A description of Rasputin by Stolypin, the Tsar's chief minister, who disapproved of him

“He ran his pale eyes over me, mumbled mysterious and inarticulate words from the Scriptures, made strange movements with his hands, and I began to feel an indescribable loathing for the vermin sitting opposite me. Still, I did realise that the man possessed great hypnotic power.”

1. Use Sources 1–3 to explain the impression Rasputin created.