

Cross-reference

Sergei Witte is profiled on page 45.

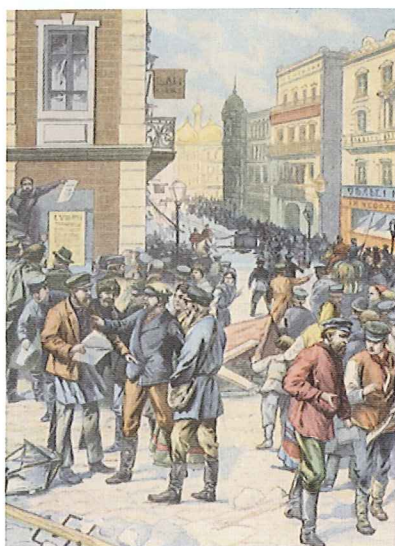


Fig. 8 The promise of reform brought a temporary respite from the troubles

Key terms

Duma: this was the term originally used to denote the elected town councils but it was also to be adopted for the representative parliament set up after the 1905 revolution, sometimes known more formally as the State Duma.

Questions

- 1 In what ways did the October Manifesto go beyond the promises made by Bulygin in July?
- 2 Which promise ended Nicholas's autocratic powers?

The October Manifesto and the promise of reform, 1905–06

The October Manifesto

With the Russian Empire near to total collapse, the tsar agreed to sign a decree on October 17th promising constitutional reform. Even then, he took some persuading. Sergei Witte, the Chairman of the tsar's Council of Ministers, warned that the country was on the verge of a revolution that would 'sweep away a thousand years of History', while even Trepov declared the need for some moderate reform and the Grand Duke Nicholas, the tsar's uncle, reputedly threatened to shoot himself unless reforms were instituted. The tsar's 'October Manifesto' promised:

- To grant the population the unshakeable foundations of civic freedom based on the principles of personal rights, freedom of conscience, speech, assembly and union.
- To admit to participation in the **Duma** those classes of the population which at present are altogether deprived of the franchise.
- To establish it as an unbreakable rule that no law can become effective without the approval of the State **Duma** and that the representatives of the people should be guaranteed the supervision of the legality of the actions of authorities appointed by Us.

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There were celebrations on the streets of St Petersburg, as crowds gathered to wave red flags and sing the French revolutionary anthem, the Marseillaise. The General Strike was called off and there was talk of the birth of a new Russia. However, the real radicals, like Trotsky and Lenin, were far from convinced and tried desperately to get the workers to fight on. Lenin's Bolsheviks wrote in their workers' bulletin: *'We have been granted a constitution, yet autocracy remains. We have been granted everything, and yet we have been granted nothing'*. In some ways their view accorded with that of the tsar himself. Nicholas had no intention of becoming a 'constitutional monarch' and few of his ministers had a real commitment to the manifesto promises.

On October 19th, Nicholas was to write to his mother, the Empress Maria:

You can't imagine what I went through before that moment. From all over Russia they cried for it, they begged for it, and around me many, very many, held the same views. There was no other way out than to cross oneself and give what everyone was asking for.

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The October Manifesto seemed to offer a number of concessions, but:

- it stated that the Duma was to be consultative – implying that while it could offer advice, the tsar did not have to accept it
- it was not to be elected by direct universal suffrage with a secret ballot (as the liberals had wanted) and whilst all social groups would be

represented in the suffrage system, this was not equal representative democracy

- there was no promise of a 'constituent assembly' (again demanded by liberals) with the task of drawing up a new constitution for Russia.

The manifesto was added to by a 'Manifesto to better the conditions of the peasant population' on November 3rd. This promised to reduce by half, from January 1st 1906, and to discontinue altogether, from January 1st 1907, the redemption payments to which peasants were liable and to improve the resources and terms of the Peasant Land Banks. It was an attempt to win back the peasantry and reassure those who feared the government might seize their land because they had fallen behind with their payments during the years of bad harvest.

On April 23rd 1906 a new set of 'Fundamental laws of the Russian Empire' were issued:

- The supreme autocratic power is vested in the Tsar of All the Russias. It is God's command that his authority should be obeyed not only through fear but for conscience sake.
- The tsar exercises the legislative power in conjunction with the Council of the Empire and the Imperial Duma.
- The initiative in all branches of legislation belongs to the tsar. Solely on his initiative may the Fundamental Laws of the Empire be subjected to a revision in the Council of the Empire and the Imperial Duma.
- The tsar approves the laws and without his approval no law can come into existence.
- The tsar appoints and dismisses the president of the Council, the ministers themselves and the heads of the chief departments of administration, as well as all other officials where the law does not provide for another method of appointment and dismissal.

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Reactions to the October Manifesto

The initial reaction to the manifesto was a wild rejoicing on the streets and a new mood of public optimism which saw many workers return to their factories. The Manifesto had, it appeared, achieved its purpose, even though Witte, one of its architects might say of it, *'I have a constitution in my head, but as to my heart, I spit on it.'*

The more moderate liberals from the *zemstva* tradition, accepted the promises and sought to work with the tsar to make the new Dumas a success. This group became known as the 'Octobrists' and under Alexander Guchkov they created a new party with its own newspaper – *Golos Moskvyy* (*The Voice of Moscow*).

However, the left wing liberals were less convinced. They became the Constitutional Democrats, or Kadets, under Pavel Milyukov and, while they accepted the tsar's concessions as a first step, they continued to demand the setting up of a constituent assembly to draw up a fresh Russian constitution. Nevertheless, they supported the government's actions in bringing the radical revolution to an end. Indeed, Pyotr Struve (who moved from the Marxists to join the Kadets) said, *'Thank God for the Tsar who has saved us from the people'*.

Activity

Thinking point

Do you think the October Manifesto was a sham, or were its concessions a real breakthrough for the opponents of the autocracy?

Cross-reference

Pavel Milyukov is profiled on page 80, and Pyotr Struve on page 66.

Not all workers and peasants were appeased by the October and November manifestos however and the radical revolutionaries denounced the promise of elections and called for an armed rising to bring tsarism to an end. Trotsky publicly declared the tsar's promises worthless and, on November 8th, Lenin returned to St Petersburg in the hope of winning more support for a revolution. Having grown more politicised during the troubles of 1905, some of the industrial workers, encouraged by revolutionary activists, kept up their strike activity over the following months. November saw a second General Strike in St Petersburg, although the Soviet proved unable to sustain it, and in December there was a Bolshevik-led uprising in Moscow.

In the countryside, some peasants saw the promises as an opportunity to seize land which they believed to be rightfully theirs, and there was actually an increase in peasant risings, after the Manifestos, peaking in November/December. From November 6th – 12th, a second Congress of Peasants' Unions was held, which demanded the nationalisation of land.

There were also continuing troubles in the army and navy. After October, the number of mutinies also increased and at Kronstadt on October 26th and 27th, 26 men were killed and 107 injured when a sailors' rebellion was crushed. A similar rising in Sebastopol led by a retired naval Lieutenant, Pyotr Schmidt, was only suppressed after fierce fighting.

In the East, the Trans-Baikal railway fell into the hands of strikers' committees and demobilised soldiers returning from the Japanese war, and the tsar had to send a special detachment of loyal troops via the Trans-Siberian railway to restore order. However, the government was not always able to rely on the armed forces and frequently had to turn to the Cossacks and Black Hundreds to restore order.

By November, 10 out of 19 of the largest cities in the Empire were out of control and outbreaks of mutiny continued through the month of December.

Repression and the recovery of tsarist authority

Despite the October Manifesto promise of 'full civil rights', repression was extensively used to bring about the recovery of tsarist authority. In St Petersburg, Trepov ordered troops to 'fire no blanks and spare no bullets' in forcing striking workers back to their factories. The Black Hundreds rounded up and flogged peasants, attacked revolutionaries, students and nationalist groups such as the Poles, and in the final months of 1905, in particular, persecuted the Jews, whom the right-wing associated with 'socialists and revolutionaries', in terrible pogroms.

On December 3rd, the headquarters of the St Petersburg Soviet, was surrounded and all 300 members, including Trotsky, arrested. Trotsky was subsequently exiled to Siberia which weakened the revolutionary movement in the capital and helped the authorities to regain control.

The final spasm of revolution was played out in Moscow where the Moscow Soviet assumed the leadership of the revolutionary movement and staged an armed uprising in December. This attempt to mount a General Strike was entirely misjudged. The autocracy was in a position to reassert its authority and heavy artillery and troops from St Petersburg were sent in to restore order. There was bitter street-to-street fighting and the working class Presnaya district suffered an intense bombardment which reduced workers' homes to rubble. Only when a thousand workers had been killed and parts of the city were in ruins, did the militant,

Bolshevik-inspired workers give in. Although there were sporadic outbreaks of trouble in the countryside for a further two years, the 1905 revolution had been suppressed and the autocracy had survived.

The major events of October–December 1905 are as detailed below:

Table 1 Events of October–December 1905

| | |
|----------|--|
| October | <p>6th Railway strike begins</p> <p>10th Moscow railways brought to halt – General Strike in the city</p> <p>12th General Strike in St Petersburg</p> <p>Liberal Kadet party established by the Union of Unions and Zemstvos groups</p> <p>13th St Petersburg Soviet is set up to direct strikes</p> <p>17th October Manifesto is issued pledging a constitution, extended franchise and civil liberties. Witte becomes Prime Minister and issues an amnesty for political prisoners. The General Strike in St Petersburg is called off</p> <p>18th Demonstrations for and against the Manifesto – Trotsky publicly denounces it – right-wing violence led by the Black Hundreds and strikers begin to return to work. Pobedonostev is dismissed but the reactionary Durnovo replaces Bulygin as Minister for Internal Affairs</p> <p>Military mutinies continue</p> |
| November | <p>3rd Peasants' redemption payments halved amidst heightened rural unrest</p> <p>4th–7th Second General Strike in St Petersburg ended and demand for 8-hour day abandoned</p> <p>8th Lenin arrives in St Petersburg</p> <p>6th–12th Second Congress of Peasants' Union demands nationalisation of land</p> <p>14th Peasant union leaders arrested</p> <p>14th Press censorship ended</p> <p>26th Head of St Petersburg Soviet arrested – Trotsky takes over</p> |
| December | <p>3rd Government arrests 300 members of the St Petersburg Soviet, including Trotsky</p> <p>7th General Strike in Moscow paralyses the city</p> <p>11th New electoral law grants wide, but indirect male suffrage</p> <p>Ruthless suppression of rural unrest using the army begins</p> <p>16th Durnovo orders mass dismissal of all 'politically unreliable' local government employees</p> <p>Full-scale artillery barrage of working class district (Presnaya) of Moscow by government</p> <p>19th last remnants of Moscow revolt crushed</p> |

Learning outcomes

In this section you have seen how the war with Japan brought festering political and social tensions to a head and forced through an incomplete revolution in 1905. You have studied the events of Bloody Sunday and their repercussions throughout Russia as the liberals, revolutionaries and nationalists sought to take advantage of the disturbances to advance their own causes. You have also looked at the tsar's October Manifesto, which, among other promises, agreed to a State Duma and will be aware of the great weight of expectation attached to this document. You will also have noted that Nicholas II had already recovered some of his authority by the end of 1905 and in the next section you will discover how sincere his promises of change actually were.

Cross-reference

For the Black Hundreds, see page 83 above.



Fig. 9 Nicholas had survived the events of 1905, but the power of the Russian workers could no longer be ignored. From *L'Assiette au Beurre*, Paris, February 10th 1906

Activity

Group activity

By the end of 1905 the tsarist regime was still intact. Can you suggest reasons why the 1905 revolution failed to topple the tsar? Consider the opposition's aims, methods, and support. Make a list of the strengths and weaknesses of the opposition forces and the tsarist autocracy in order to arrive at a conclusion.

Activity

Thinking point

Does the 1905 Revolution deserve the name 'revolution'?

To answer this you will need to think about what a revolution is.