

orthodoxy and nationality') put forward by the Minister of Education, Sergei Uvarov, in 1833. Nicholas adhered to this manifesto for his entire reign. As a consequence, there was no thought of:

- political reform to redistribute the autocrat's political power
- cultural reform to dilute the Orthodox Church's role as the state's means of ensuring loyalty and a common cultural identity among the people at large
- making any concessions to non-Russian nationalities.

Cultural developments

Russia was not static in 1848, although the political system appeared so on the surface. Even in politics there was some change, the most important being Nicholas's decision effectively to free the state peasants in 1837 and later to set up commissions to investigate the possibility of doing likewise for privately owned serfs.

In cultural terms, Russia was developing fast. Russian intellectuals (notably authors like Alexander Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol and Mikhail Lermontov), sparked off a lively period of debate about Russia, its backwardness and its relationship with the West. Such free thinking naturally caused Nicholas serious problems. He personally censored some of Pushkin's work, and the ludicrous extent of Russian bureaucracy and censorship was humorously attacked by Gogol.

Although Gogol himself became a conservative supporter of the tsarist system around 1848, the obvious discord between the tsarist autocracy and intellectuals was to lead to a growth of criticism and alienation that bred opposition to the regime among students and university teachers.

In context, therefore, the impact of the 1848 revolutions confirmed, rather than seriously challenged, existing trends in Russian politics and society. Nicholas became even more conservative and repressive but continued to preside over a stable, if rather backward, empire. However, the ultimate effectiveness of his rule was to be tested severely in the Crimean War.

KEY TERM

Orthodoxy When the early Russians converted to Christianity in the tenth century they chose Orthodoxy, not Roman Catholicism like the Poles. Orthodox Christianity was based in Constantinople (now Istanbul). When Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453 Russia began to assume the role of leader and protector of Orthodox Christians under Turkish rule. Orthodox Christianity puts far greater emphasis on ritual and simple, unquestioning faith than western Churches.

KEY EVENT

Crimean War This arose from the instability and rivalry among the European powers caused by the weakness of the Ottoman Empire (Turkey). The major encounters took place on and around the Crimean peninsula on the northern coast of the Black Sea. Russia went to war with the Ottomans in 1853. Britain and France joined the Ottomans in 1854, forcing Russia to make peace on its enemies' terms in 1856. This was a heavy blow to the prestige and international standing of the Russian Empire.

CHAPTER 1

Alexander II's inheritance in 1855

This chapter looks at the threats to Nicholas I's regime, both at home and abroad, after 1848. It considers:

- the threats to Nicholas's regime
- how Russia ended up at war in 1853
- the death of Nicholas I and the end of the Crimean War
- Alexander II's inheritance.

Nicholas I's Russia appeared as strong as ever in 1848-9. There was no threat of revolution in Russia and Nicholas was able to use the Russian army to suppress the revolutionary movement in Hungary. However, complications in foreign policy led to Russia going to war with the Ottoman Empire in 1853. Great Britain and France joined on the Ottomans' side in 1854. This, the Crimean War, proved disastrous for Russia, revealing the weaknesses that lay behind the impressive façade of Nicholas's regime.

HOW SERIOUS WERE THE THREATS TO NICHOLAS I'S REGIME (1825-55)?

As we have seen from the introduction (see pages 10-12), Nicholas I's conservatism was deeply held and, from his standpoint, well justified. In the later years of his reign the stability he had given Russia was sorely tested, first by the 1848 revolutions and then by the Crimean war.

Russian reactions to the 1848 revolutions

In March 1848 Russia's conservative allies - Austria and Prussia - succumbed to student-led revolutions in imitation of the revolution in Paris in February. Both regimes were forced to make unpalatable concessions. From Nicholas's point of view, it was as if the Decembrists (see pages 10-11) had succeeded in both Vienna and Berlin. The upshot of the Viennese revolution was the chaotic disintegration of Austria.



Nicholas I, tsar until 1855 when he died during the Crimean War.

- A new German national state took its first steps under the Frankfurt Parliament.
- Piedmont-Sardinia tried to create a new Italian national state.
- Most frightening of all for Nicholas, a Slav congress was held in Prague in an attempt to liberate all non-Russian Slavs in Austria and elsewhere – another challenge to the Russian repression of Poland.
- Finally, a revolution in Budapest promised an independent Hungary, which would share a border with Russia. Even worse, its army was led by a Pole – General Josef Bem.

Fearing that this revolutionary disease would spread to Russia, Nicholas took immediate countermeasures. He mobilised his army in March 1848, saying he would meet his enemies wherever they appeared, and occupied the Danubian Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia in June

KEY TERM

Slavs The term used to describe the peoples of east and central Europe with a common tribal origin and similar languages. As well as Russians, Slavs include Belorussians, Ukrainians, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Bulgarians, Croats, Slovenes and Serbs.

KEY PLACE

Poland Caused Russia endless problems in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Poles were the strongest Catholic Slav nation and natural rivals, culturally and geographically, to the Russians. In 1815 the eighteenth-century 'partition' (division) of Poland between Russia, Austria and Prussia was resumed. As a consequence, the Poles made a bid for independence and took up arms against the Russians in 1830–1. The revolt was brutally suppressed by Nicholas I's army, deepening the two nations' mutual hatred. General Bem, one of the leading officers of the 1830–1 revolt, escaped to the West. In 1848 he helped the Hungarians, partly in the hope that their revolution would spread to Poland.

KEY TERM

Intelligentsia A term invented by Russians to describe the section of the educated class that viewed intellectual debate and the spreading of new ideas as its most important activity, its reason for existence. Centred on the universities, the media and sections of the professional classes, the intelligentsia became unusually prominent in Russian politics in the late nineteenth century mainly because Russia lacked a numerous middle class. The intelligentsia was often associated with radical political ideas, imported from the West, then adapted to Russian conditions (see 'populism', pages 51–4 and 'marxism', pages 80–1). However, many members of the intelligentsia were neither radical nor revolutionary.

KEY PERSON

Fyodor Dostoevsky One of Russia's most famous writers. He made his name on his return from exile with a series of novels, including *Crime and Punishment*, *The Devils* and *The Brothers Karamazov*. In his later life Dostoevsky rejected western politics and became a firm advocate of Russia's unique spiritual mission, centred on the Orthodox Church. This aligned him with conservatives like Robedonostsev (see page 59).

and August respectively. This put Russia in a position to intervene in Hungary on its eastern frontier. Nicholas's claim that the Hungarian revolution was not a Hungarian national movement, but a Polish plot against the Russian state, was his justification for invading Hungary, first with a small force in March 1849 and then in overwhelming strength in June.

The Hungarians, attacked simultaneously from the west by Austria, surrendered in August 1849.

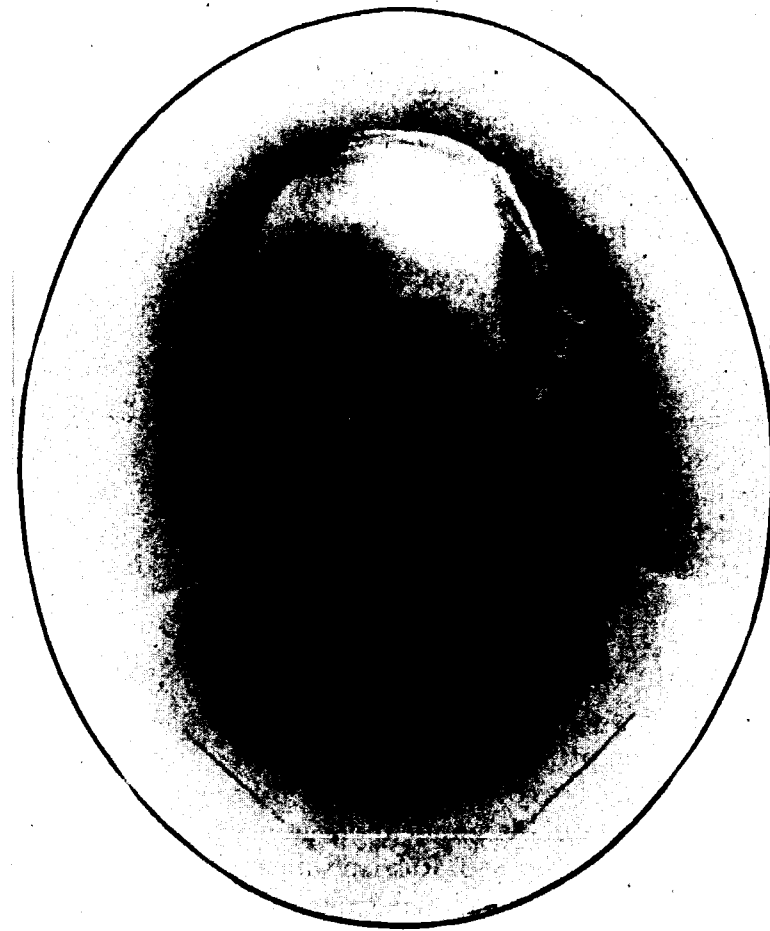
Fortunately for Nicholas, only the Hungarian revolution had proved durable. All the others failed to put up significant military opposition to the Austrian and Prussian armies, which had remained loyal to their sovereigns, and the liberal experiments were crushed. Even Paris had succumbed to counter-revolution by 1852.

Domestic affairs: politics

If Nicholas's fears for a general European revolutionary conflagration proved unfounded, they did little to assuage his principal anxiety – a new outburst of political opposition within his empire. Foreign news was heavily censored in March 1848. Russian subjects were forbidden to travel and those abroad were requested to return, although ironically this only served to spread the news of the European revolutions to the intelligentsia within Russia.

The Buturlin Committee. On 2 April 1848 Nicholas gave permanence to his heightened fear of revolution and subversion by establishing a new three-man committee known as the Buturlin Committee. It remained in being until Nicholas's death in 1855, and extended censorship from the more obvious political and philosophical challenges to the regime to anything academic that could slightly be considered politically subversive.

The Petrashevsky Circle. The first and most important victims of the paranoia referred to above were the members of the Petrashevsky Circle. Mikhail Petrashevsky's group, which included the writer Fyodor Dostoevsky, bore little relation to the European revolutionary movements of 1848 but simply subjected the tsarist regime to critical



Fyodor Dostoevsky, a Russian novelist whose most famous works included *Crime and Punishment*, written in 1870.

discussion. In 1845 and 1846 Petrashevsky had published his *Pocket Dictionary of Foreign Words Which Have Entered the Vocabulary of the Russian Language*, a title intended to get what was essentially a discussion of modern social and political ideas past the censors. The ruse did not work for long; volume two was banned shortly after publication. Petrashevsky followed this up with a pamphlet advocating looser restrictions on merchants and some serfs – hardly radical, but in February 1848, not well timed.

The outcome. The Ministry of Internal Affairs put the Petrashevsky Circle under surveillance for a year so that the quality of its findings would score a point over its rival, the Third Section (Nicholas's internal espionage service, set up in 1826). Then, in 1849, a re-run of the Decembrist

KEY TERMS

Mock execution A punishment in which the condemned were put on 'death row', prepared for execution then reprieved at the last minute.

Nobility Russia's landowning and, before 1861, serf-owning class. Catherine the Great's Charter of the Nobility (1785) had confirmed these essential rights and, in addition, had given the nobility the right to travel abroad and take a foreign (European) education. Hence although the nobles were first and foremost a vital support for the autocracy with a vested interest in the stability autocracy claimed it could provide, they were also a source of criticism as new European ideas such as liberalism and socialism became fashionable.

prosecution was launched. Given that the Petrashevsky Circle was, in reality, little more than an idealistic student group it is staggering to discover that 252 people were questioned, 51 were exiled, and 21 were condemned to death.

The death sentences were commuted at the end of the year, but only after those condemned had been subjected to a **mock execution**. Instead, the defendants were given long penal sentences (Petrashevsky himself died in Siberia in 1866).

Domestic affairs: serfdom and the economy

Economic progress was limited in this period. The most obvious reason for this was the maintenance of serfdom as the prime source of labour and means of social organisation.

Differences between Europe and Russia. The year 1848 had seen the last remnants of serfdom eliminated in central and western Europe, one of the few concrete achievements of the 1848 revolutionaries. This left Russia as the only European state still to retain serfdom. However, the gulf between the West and Russia in this regard was actually much deeper.

- In most European states serfdom had either been entirely abolished, or remained only in small pockets from the second half of the eighteenth century.
- In Russia, despite Nicholas's reform of the state peasants in 1837 (see page 12), the majority of the working population remained privately owned serfs.

Attempted reform. Nicholas's government, anxious to avoid economic stagnation, introduced reforms to alleviate serfdom in the early 1840s but, so stringent were the requirements that, of 22 million privately owned serfs, only a few hundred families were able to free themselves.

The main reason why serfdom was so long-lived and deeply rooted in Russia was because it served the economic interests of the **nobility** and the political interests of the tsarist state.

- Serfs were, in the final analysis, the noble's private property, so any reform of the system would require compensation, hard to achieve in a state with low tax revenues and extensive military commitments.
- Furthermore, the state depended on the nobility as the prime source of the officials needed to maintain government, law and order, and to staff the officer corps in the army.

Nicholas I's position. If natural social and economic change could not bring serfdom to an end, as it had in the West, the government would have to force the issue and come up with a complex, risky and potentially costly reform package. This explains why Nicholas I was actually in favour of ending serfdom, but simply lacked the political conviction and context to push through such a dramatic reform. Proof for this view lies in:

- his reform of the state peasants in 1837, and
- the committees set up in 1844 and 1846 (the latter chaired by his son, the future Alexander II) to investigate the possibilities of reforming serfdom.

Therefore, there is every reason to suppose that, had Nicholas survived defeat in the Crimea (see page 12), he might well have tackled emancipation, as his son, Alexander II, was forced to do after 1855.

The economic impact of serfdom. One of the reasons serfdom faded out in the West was that it hindered economic progress. Nicholas I was well aware of this and of the serious danger of Russia being left behind economically, technologically and militarily. Railway construction, the most important breakthrough, was proceeding rapidly in western Europe. Nicholas consequently authorised Russia's first major railway project, a line linking St Petersburg and Moscow. This was completed in 1851. However, Russia was making a start at a time when comprehensive railway networks were already being constructed in Britain, France and the German states. In more general terms, industrial progress was hampered by the social immobility caused by serfdom and by a simple lack of funds.

KEY TERMS

Landless proletariat A nineteenth-century term for a lower class with no land or property, unlike most peasants. The landless proletariat therefore had no stake in the existing order and was likely to be rebellious or revolutionary. Landless proletariat was most often used to describe the urban working class created by industrialisation.

Ottoman/Sultan Turks from the Ottoman tribe ruled Turkey and its huge empire, known therefore as the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman head of state was the Sultan.

KEY PERSON

Napoleon III, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte (1807–72) Nephew of the great French general and Emperor of France (1804–14) Napoleon I. Louis Napoleon won a landslide victory in the French presidential election of 1848. With only a four-year term of office, he staged a successful *coup d'état* in 1851 to prolong his power, making himself Emperor Napoleon III with the creation of the Second Empire in 1852. (Napoleon I's son Napoleon II had died in 1832.)

KEY PLACE

Holy Places Christian shrines in the Ottoman province of Palestine, such as those in Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

Further pressures on Nicholas. Finally, Nicholas feared what was termed the **landless proletariat**. Despite the fiasco of 1848, they posed the most menacing threat of revolution. To say that the later years of Nicholas I's rule lacked reform is fair. But this judgement fails to appreciate the political pressures, real and imaginary, under which Nicholas worked. It also fails to appreciate that in its essentials (political and social stability, foreign and military power) the tsarist state seemed, at least outwardly, to be perfectly healthy.

Foreign affairs: the Crimean War

The background to the war. In 1849 and 1850 Nicholas had helped to restore Austrian power and the status quo in Europe. He then convinced himself that Austria would support Russia in the great powers' struggle for influence over the Ottoman Empire. Thus, when France's new ruler **Napoleon III** provoked Russia over the control of the **Holy Places**, Nicholas responded forcefully.

The failure of diplomacy. Prince Menshikov, Nicholas's envoy to the Ottomans, then provoked Stratford Canning, the British ambassador in Constantinople, by demanding that Russia should have rights to protect the Ottomans' Christian subjects. Canning urged the Ottomans to resist the Russians which resulted in the failure of subsequent diplomatic moves to defuse the crisis.

War broke out between Russia and the Turks in October 1853. In November 1853 the Russians destroyed the Turkish fleet at Sinope. This helped to persuade Britain and France to fight with the Turks from March 1854.

THE INVASION OF CRIMEA

The invasion of the Crimea by Britain and France in September 1854 and the subsequent campaigns culminating in the siege of Sevastopol in 1855–6 were caused by misunderstandings and by the momentum generated by sending an Anglo–French expeditionary force earlier in the year. This force either had to be recalled or used. The failure of diplomacy resulted in it being used, but even then the war was limited. Russia was only

prepared to commit about one-quarter of its armed forces, and the Anglo-French force was only capable of achieving a tactical victory in the Crimea. There was never any serious intention on the part of the allies to attack the Russian interior.

The outcome of the conflict

Given these restrictions on both sides, the outcome of this conflict was predictable. It was fought on a scale and in a location that made the most of the more advanced weaponry of the Anglo-French forces. Some Russian guns captured in the Battle of Alma (1854) dated back to 1799. Anglo-French artillery and firearms represented post-industrial technology and had a greater range, greater accuracy, and a higher rate of fire.

More than anything, these advantages proved decisive. The more specialised, technological nature of modern warfare showed that backward, peasant Russia was poorly equipped to survive in the second half of the nineteenth century.

THE DEATH OF NICHOLAS I AND THE END OF THE CRIMEAN WAR

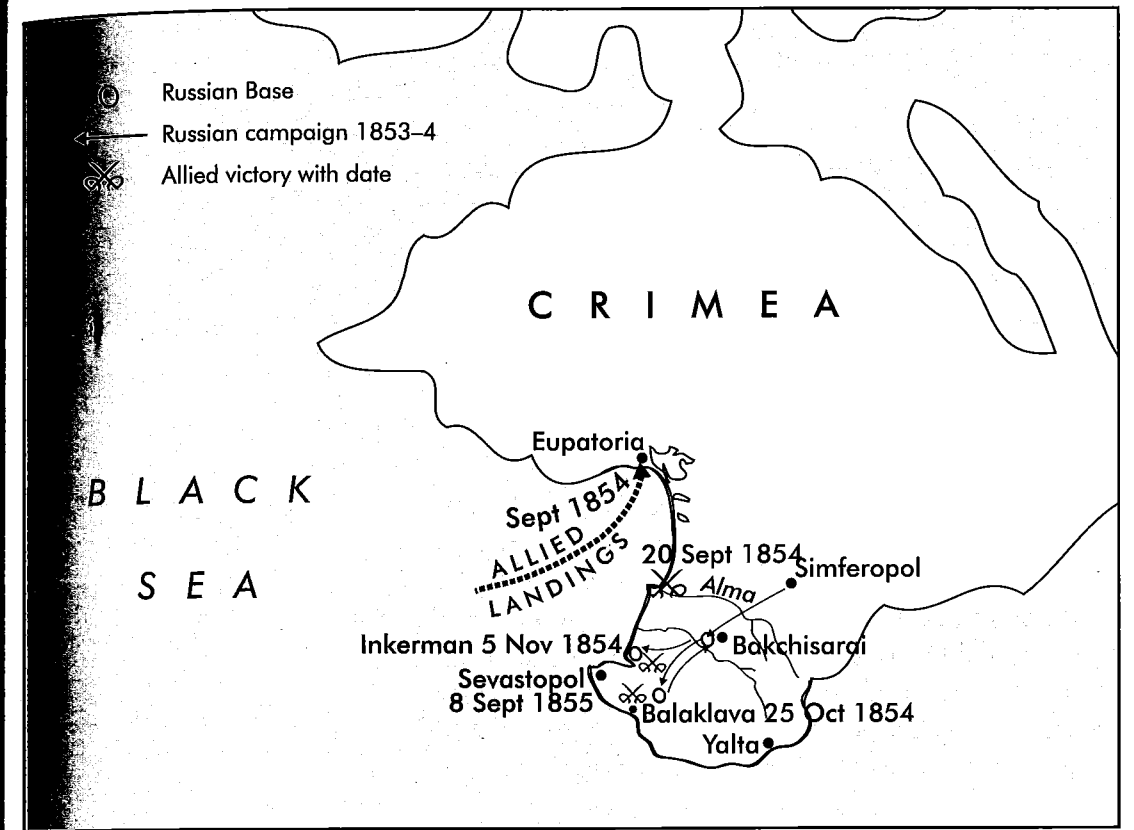
In February 1855 Nicholas, despite having a cold, insisted on reviewing troops in a temperature of minus 23 degrees Centigrade, and contracted pneumonia. Some days later he became one of the few later Russian tsars to die of natural causes.

What the Russians thought of Nicholas

Despite his unpopularity with radical intellectual critics and foreign enemies, Nicholas was genuinely respected by the majority of Russians for his firmness of purpose and overriding sense of duty, a respect possibly magnified by the reverses in the war. His funeral witnessed a real display of public affection.

How Nicholas's succession was affected by the war

The succession (in March 1855) came at a point when defeat in Crimea was only a matter of how long the besieged garrison in Sevastopol could hold out. International humiliation forced the new Tsar Alexander II



Military campaigns in Crimea, 1853-5.

to address the fundamental reasons for defeat in order to recover his empire's prestige. He thus embarked on the epic reform of the emancipation of the serfs, setting Russia on a new, more liberal, course.

The impact of the Crimean War on Russia

The Crimean War, although a limited one, was important for Russia. Russia's southward expansionism had been checked. In the Treaty of Paris of March 1856 the new Tsar Alexander II was forced to remove all Russian military establishments from the Black Sea and, with the formation of an independent Kingdom of Romania, to give up hope of taking over the Danube delta. Such a reverse, the most serious for Russia since 1700, forced a complete reassessment of Russia's social and economic structure.

Reasons for defeat

Nicholas I's conservatism had been, in a sense, self-defeating. At the time of his funeral the Russian Empire was on the point of suffering a humiliating reverse at the

hands of the western European powers. Lack of reform under Nicholas was a major reason for this defeat.

CONCLUSION: WHAT WAS ALEXANDER II'S INHERITANCE?

Alexander II's inheritance from his father, Nicholas I, can be summarised as follows.

In international affairs: a nation on the verge of defeat, isolated in Europe and therefore dangerously weak.

In politics: an intact autocracy; repression of all western-influenced political thinking and practices within Russia.

In social and economic policy: Russia's economic and social progress had been extremely limited under Nicholas I, especially compared with the rapidly industrialising western European powers. Serfdom was at the root of Russia's increasing relative backwardness.

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

- 1 What were the main problems facing Nicholas I in 1848?
- 2 Why was Nicholas I so conservative in domestic affairs from 1848 to 1855?
- 3 Why did Nicholas I go to war in 1853?

CHAPTER 2

Alexander II, 1855-81

This chapter looks at what Alexander II's reforms achieved, whether they caused more problems than they solved, and whether they improved the chances of evolutionary social, economic and political development in Russia.

HOW SHOULD ALEXANDER II'S REIGN BE CHARACTERISED?

Alexander II's reign was a pivotal period in Russian history. The young tsar, faced with defeat in the Crimea, had to modernise Russia – starting with the abolition of serfdom. In itself a momentous change, this reform also opened up the possibility of Russian development on western European lines, socially, economically and politically. Such development directly threatened the bedrock of Russian politics: the autocracy. Alexander II's reign was, therefore, a difficult balancing act. On the one hand, he felt it necessary to conserve autocracy, out of respect for tradition and the need for political stability. On the other, he needed to reform certain aspects of Russian society and the Russian economy in order to bring about modernisation.

NEW EMPEROR, NEW PROBLEMS

Unlike many of his predecessors, Alexander II had been heir to the throne for most of his boyhood and earlier adult life. Therefore, he had been better prepared for his role as autocrat than many of his predecessors. His reign was to be characterised by two significant events – the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, and his assassination 20 years later. The first gave him the title 'Tsar Liberator'. The second showed that Russian politics had entered a new and violent phase and made him a martyr, both to liberals and conservatives.