

influx of workers were wholly inadequate. The result was acute overcrowding. Initially, the peasants who had left the land to take work in the urban factories accepted their grim conditions because of the considerably higher wages they were receiving. But when boom turned to recession there was widespread unemployment. The authorities in the towns and cities found themselves facing large numbers of rootless and disaffected workers who had had their expectations of a better life raised, only to be dashed by harsh economic realities. The regular presence of thousands of embittered workers on the streets of St Petersburg and Moscow played an important part in the growth of serious social unrest in Russia between 1900 and 1917.

The recession did not prove permanent. The period from 1908 to 1914 was one of overall recovery for the Russian economy, as the following figures indicate:

	1908	1914
State revenues (in roubles)	2 billion	4 billion
Number of banks	1,146	2,393
Number of factories	22,600	24,900
Number of workers	2,500,000	2,900,000

(the overall industrial growth-rate between 1908 and 1914 was 8.5%)

Against the bright picture painted by these figures has to be set the darker aspect. In general terms the workers did not gain from the industrial and financial expansion. The absence of effective trade unions and the lack of adequate legal protection left the workforce very much at the mercy of the employers. Little of the greater amount of money in circulation reached the pockets of the workers. Although the rate of inflation rose by 40 per cent between 1908 and 1914, the average industrial wage rose from 245 to only 264 roubles per month in the same period. Of course, a national average does not tell the whole story. Some workers did relatively better than others – for example, wages were a third higher in St Petersburg than in Moscow. Nonetheless, the strike statistics compiled by the Ministry of Trade showed the scale of the industrial unrest.

	Number of strikes
1905	13,995
1908	892
1910	222
1911	466
1912	2,032
1913	2,404
1914	3,574

The question of how strong the Russian economy actually was in 1914 remains a matter of lively debate among historians. There are those who suggest that until the war came Russia was in the process of developing into a modern industrial state. They cite figures showing increased industrial production, growth of the labour force, and expansion of foreign investment. Other historians, while accepting these figures, argue that, compared to developments in other countries, Russian growth was too limited to provide a genuine industrial base. They further stress that in 1914 about four-fifths of the population were still peasants, a fact which would seem to discredit any claim that there had been significant industrial development. In the end, no definitive answer can be given to the question as to how the economy would have developed had the war and the Revolution not intervened. The comment of Alex Nove, the outstanding western authority on the Russian economy, is particularly telling:

- 1 The question of whether Russia would have become a modern industrial state but for the war and the revolution is in essence a meaningless one. One may say that statistically the answer is in the affirmative. If the growth rates characteristic of the period 1890–1913 for industry and agriculture were simply projected over the succeeding 50 years, no doubt citizens would be leading a reasonable existence ... However, this assumes ... that the imperial authorities would have successfully made the adjustment necessary to govern in an orderly manner a rapidly developing and changing society. But there must surely be a limit to the game of what-might-have-been.¹

b) Stolypin and Land Reform

Peter Stolypin was appointed president of the Council of Ministers in the aftermath of the 1905 Revolution (see page 45). Like Witte before him, he was dedicated to strengthening tsardom in a time of crisis. He was a political conservative, whose attitude was clearly expressed in the coercive measures he introduced between 1906 and 1911. He declared his guiding principle to be 'suppression first and then, and only then, reform'. However, he also judged that, where possible, reform should be introduced as a way of reducing the social bitterness that produced opposition. It was in this spirit that he approached the agrarian problem in Russia. It is helpful to regard the work of Witte and Stolypin as complementary, Witte being mainly concerned with the development of industry, Stolypin with the development of agriculture. This is not to suggest that the two men co-operated in a common policy. Witte was deeply jealous of Stolypin. Nevertheless, they did share a basic objective – the preservation of the tsarist system. Indeed, it is sometimes suggested that the reforms they introduced represented the last hope that tsardom could save itself by its own efforts. Had the tsarist government and bureaucracy been willing to

support Witte and Stolypin in their efforts to modernise the Russian economy, this might have prevented the build-up of the social and political tensions which culminated in the 1917 Revolution.

Stolypin appreciated that industrial progress could not of itself solve Russia's most pressing need – how to feed the nation's rapidly growing numbers. The marked increase in population that occurred in the late nineteenth century had resulted in land shortage and rural over-population. This 'rural crisis' was deepened by a series of bad harvests; the years 1891 and 1897 witnessed severe famines. The government's land policies following the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 had not helped. The scheme under which state mortgages were advanced to the emancipated serfs to enable them to buy their properties had not created the system of stable land tenure that the government had anticipated. The high price of land, which led to heavy mortgage repayments being undertaken, had impoverished the peasantry. Their sense of insecurity both inhibited them from being efficient food-producers and made them a dangerous social force. One of the reasons why the peasants joined the Revolution in 1905 was their fear that the government was about to repossess the land of the mortgage-holders who had defaulted on their payments. When the government came to understand this fear, it bought off the peasants by announcing that the outstanding repayments would be cancelled (see page 48).

Stolypin planned to build upon this successful 'de-revolutionising' of the peasantry. In 1906 and 1907 he introduced measures which allowed the individual peasant to opt out of the *mir*. The position of the independent householder was promoted. Peasants were encouraged to replace the antiquated strip system with separate blocks of land, based on the pattern that existed in western Europe. A special Land Bank was established to allocate funds to assist the independent peasant to buy his land. Stolypin defined his policy as 'the wager on the strong'. His aim was to create a stratum of prosperous, efficient peasants whose new wealth would turn them into natural supporters and allies of the tsarist system. This would effectively decapitate the peasantry as a revolutionary movement. He complemented his land reform policy by supporting schemes for large-scale voluntary resettlement of the peasants. The aim was to populate the empire's remoter areas, such as Siberia, and bring them into productive agricultural use.

Even in advanced economies land reforms take time to work. Stolypin was well aware that, in a country as relatively backward as Russia, reforms would take even longer to become effective. He spoke of needing twenty years for his 'wager on the strong' to show dividends. In the event, his assassination in 1911 allowed him personally only five, and the war in 1914 allowed Russia only eight. However, there is doubt whether, even without the intrusion of murder and war, his peasant policy would have succeeded. The deep conservatism

of the Russian peasants made them slow to respond. In 1914 the strip system still prevailed; only about 10 per cent of the land had been consolidated into farms. The peasants were reluctant to leave the security of the commune for the uncertainty of individual farming. Furthermore, by 1913 the Ministry of Agriculture had itself begun to show signs of losing confidence in the policy.

Number of peasant households becoming independent

(out of an estimated total of 10–12 million households)

1907	48,271	1911	145,567
1908	508,344	1912	122,314
1909	579,409	1913	134,554
1910	342,245	1914	97,877

One notable feature of Stolypin's land policy was his effective working relations with the *duma*. This elected assembly, which had been set up under the terms of the tsar's October Manifesto in 1905 (see page 48), had not been granted legislative powers. Nonetheless, it did provide for the first time in Russian history a forum for public discussion at national level. Stolypin chose to treat it with respect. The understanding which developed between him and the Octobrists, the largest party in the *duma*, allowed him to pursue his land reforms with little obstruction from the *duma* deputies. His success in this regard hinted at what might have been achieved in terms of co-operation between government and progressive opinion, had tsarist authorities been willing to trust their own ministers.

3 Russian Foreign Policy

KEY ISSUES Why was imperial Russia defensive in its dealings with the European Powers?
Did the Russo-Japanese War serve any genuine Russian interests?

a) Russian Objectives

The foreign policy of tsarist Russia was largely determined by the size of its empire. The protection of its many frontiers was a constant pre-occupation. Three particular developments had occurred in Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century which alarmed Russia: the growth of a united Germany, the formation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the continued decline of the Turkish Empire. Russia feared that the unification of Germany in 1871 had left central Europe dominated by a young and powerful nation, ambitious to expand eastwards. The process of German unification