Chapter 3

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 simply hanging on 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 necklace."

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.

The Duma

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 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 gentrity 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.

5. What power did the Duma have?
4. From the information in Sources 2 and 5:
   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 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 percent 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 1905. 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 573 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?
5. 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>1897</th>
<th>1914</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moscow</td>
<td>1,068,600</td>
<td>1,762,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Petersburg</td>
<td>1,124,900</td>
<td>2,118,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiev</td>
<td>257,700</td>
<td>350,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baku</td>
<td>111,900</td>
<td>332,200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1905</th>
<th>1906</th>
<th>1907</th>
<th>1909</th>
<th>1911</th>
<th>1913</th>
<th>1914</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strike</td>
<td>6024</td>
<td>3573</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1034</td>
<td>3574</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 rupees appeared as if out of this air—people doped themselves with music—wine—wine—half-naked women—wine—wine—wine. Gambling clubs, theatres, picture houses, amusement parks cropped up like mushrooms. Everything was accessible: the women no less than the rich.”

SOURCE 1 A photograph of Rasputin

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

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. In the whole expression of the face was concentrated in the eyes—flaunting eyes, of a strange brilliance, depth and fascination. His glance was at the same time piercing and caressing, ingenious and astute, direct and remote. With his speech became animated, his pupils seemed to be charged with magnetism.”

SOURCE 5 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 vernix sitting opposite me. Still, I did realise that the man possessed great hypnotic power.”

1. Use Sources 1–5 to explain the impression Rasputin created.

SOURCE INVESTIGATION

What was the truth about Rasputin?