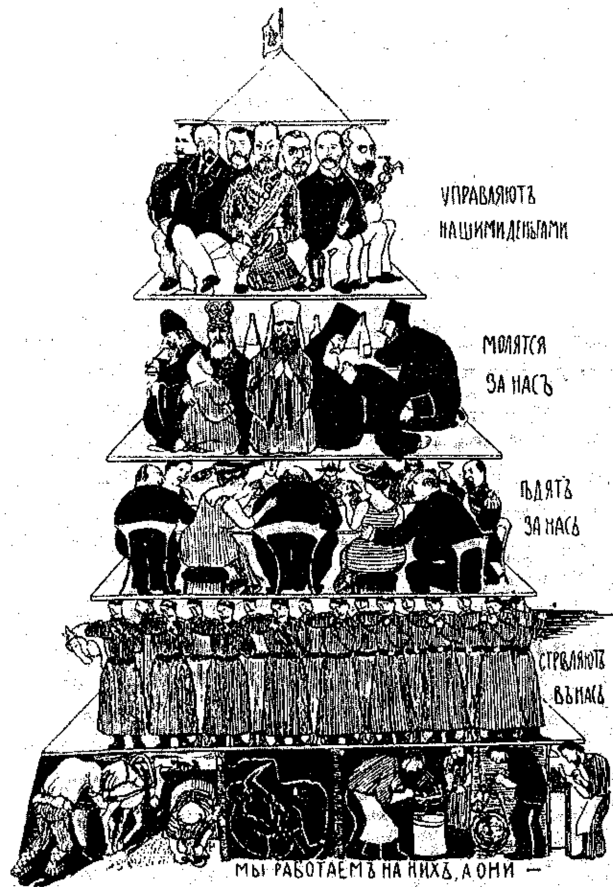
I

And Russia?
(1900–1914)

No imperial power before the First World War was more reviled in Europe than the Russian Empire. Generations of democrats hated the Romanov dynasty. Neither Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany nor Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria-Hungary rivalled Russia's Emperor Nicholas II in notoriety. Repression of Russian parties and trade unions was severe. In 1905 Nicholas reluctantly conceded a parliament (or *Duma*) after months of revolutionary turmoil; but the First Duma, which met in 1906, proved unable to stand hard against the monarchy. Manipulating the new Basic Law to his advantage, the Emperor dispersed the Second Duma and redrew the electoral rules so as to obtain a more compliant Third Duma.

Yet the Russian Empire had weaknesses. Although in 1812 its troops chased Napoleon's troops back into France, its subsequent embroilments were less impressive. In 1854–6, confronting British and French expeditionary forces in Crimea, it failed to drive them out of Russia into the Black Sea. Russian pride was retrieved to some extent by victory over the Turks in the war of 1877–8. But there was no room for complacency; for the Ottoman Empire was generally recognized as being in a condition of irreversible decline. Successive Romanov emperors, whose dynasty had ruled Russia since 1613, saw that much needed to be done to secure their frontiers. And two powers were thought extremely menacing: Germany and Austria-Hungary. They were expected to take military and economic advantage of Turkish decline; and, in particular, Berlin's plan to construct a railway from the Mediterranean seaboard to Baghdad was regarded with trepidation in St Petersburg.



An anonymous picture of the structure of Russian Imperial society circulated before 1917. The workers at the bottom declare how the other layers of people relate to them. From top to bottom, the statements are as follows:

'They dispose of our money.'
'They pray on our behalf.'
'They eat on our behalf.'
'They shoot at us.'
'We work for them while they . . .'

Nicholas II's problems did not exist solely in the west. The Russian Empire, covering a sixth of the world's earth surface, was a continent unto itself. Its boundaries stretched from the Baltic and Black Seas to the Pacific Ocean. In the late nineteenth century, the government in St Petersburg – which was then the Russian capital – joined in the international scramble to expand imperial possessions in Asia and, in 1896, compelled Beijing to grant a profitable railway concession to Russia in northern China. But Japan's rising power gave cause for concern. In January 1904 Nicholas ill-advisedly decided to declare war on her: the result was humiliating defeat both on land and at sea. Japanese military power remained a menace to Russia for the ensuing four decades.

Japan ended this particular war in 1906 through the treaty of Portsmouth on terms generous to Nicholas II. Central Europe, however, remained dangerous and Russia had to cultivate a friendship with France in order to counterbalance the Germans. A Franco-Russian security agreement had been signed in 1893, and this was followed in 1907 by an Entente involving both France and Britain. Meanwhile conciliatory gestures continued to be made to Germany. For Russia, while being a rival of Germany, also benefited from trade with her. Grain, timber and dairy products were exported to Germany; and German finance and industry were important for the growth of manufacturing in St Petersburg. Russia had reason to avoid any closer alliance with Britain and France. Britain competed with Russia for influence in Persia and Afghanistan, and France made occasional demands infringing Russian interests in the Near East. Yet Russia's financial well-being depended more heavily upon France and Britain than upon Germany; and in the longer run the rivalry with Germany and Austria-Hungary would be hard to restrict to the modalities of diplomacy.

Russia's very vastness was more a problem than an advantage. Only Britain with her overseas domains had a larger empire; but Britain could lose India without herself being invaded: the same was not true of Russia and her land-based empire. Russia had prospective enemies to the west, south and east.

The link between industrialization and military effectiveness had

been recognized by Peter the Great, who reigned from 1689 to 1725 and set up armaments works in Tula and elsewhere. But Peter's fervour for industrial growth resulted more from a wish to improve his armies' fighting capacity than to achieve general industrialization. In any case, his keenness to establish factories was not emulated by his immediate successors. Even so, railways had started to be built in the 1830s, and in the 1880s and 1890s governmental policy became favourable again to rapid industrialization. Sergei Witte, Minister of Finances, zealously promoted the case for factories, mines and banks as the Russian Empire pursued its capitalist economic development. Nicholas II gave him his support at home, and Witte relayed his own message to the world's financiers that the profit margins in Russia were huge and the workers obedient.[1]

And so manufacturing and mining output rose by an annual rate of eight per cent in the last decade of the nineteenth century and of six per cent between 1907 and the outbreak of the Great War. Fifty thousand kilometres of rail-track had been laid by 1914, including the Trans-Siberian line which linked Moscow to Vladivostok on the edge of the Pacific Ocean. State contracts were vital for this purpose. The armaments factories were sustained by the government's determination to become secure against Germany and Austria-Hungary in the west and Japan in the east. Investment from abroad was also crucial. Nearly half the value of Russian securities excluding mortgage bonds was held by foreigners.[2] Metallurgical development was especially dynamic. So, too, was the exploitation of the empire's natural resources. Alfred Nobel turned the Baku oilfields into the world's second largest producer after Texas. Timber was also a major export; and coal, iron and gold were extracted intensively.

Russia's domestic industrialists and bankers, too, were highly active. In the Moscow region in particular there was a growing number of large textile plants. At the same time there was an increased output of consumer goods. Clothing, which was manufactured mainly for the home market, was easily Russia's largest industry and, in combination with food-processing, amounted to half of the empire's industrial output (while metal-working and mining enterprises contributed about a seventh).[3] Not only armaments and

railways but also shoes, furniture and butter were vital elements in the Russian Empire's economic transformation. Her industry was by no means neglectful of the market for goods of popular consumption.

Although industry led the advance, agriculture was not motionless. Grain harvests increased by an annual average of roughly two per cent from the beginning of the 1880s through to 1913. This change was not smooth and there were several set-backs. The worst was the great famine which afflicted Russia's Volga region in 1891–2, and droughts remained an intermittent problem across the empire. Yet the general situation was moderately positive. For example, cereal production per capita rose by thirty-five per cent between 1890 and 1913. The Russian Empire's exports of wheat and rye made her the world's greatest grain exporter, and roughly 11.5 million tons of cereals were sold abroad each year in the half-decade before the Great War. In the villages, moreover, there was a growing willingness to experiment with new crops: the acreage of sugar-beet was expanded by two fifths between 1905 and 1914.[4] There was success with the attempt to expand the production of potatoes and dairy products in the Baltic region, and areas of 'Russian' central Asia were given over to cotton-growing.

This diversification of crops was facilitated by the use of factory-produced equipment. Such machinery was found mainly on the large landed estates where the hired hands were the principal section of the labour-force; but peasants, too, bought metal ploughs, corrugated-iron roofs and wire fences as well as leather shoes, nails and greatcoats whenever they could afford it.

Attitudes, however, were altering only very slowly. Peasants, while making money from the expanded market for their products, kept to traditional notions and customs. In Russia the main rural institution was the village land commune. This body meted out justice according to the local understandings about economic and social fairness. In some areas this involved the periodic redistribution of land among the households of the commune; but even where land was held fixedly, peasants continued to comply with the decisions of the commune. A degree of egalitarianism existed. There was also a tradition of mutual responsibility, a tradition that had been fortified

by the Emancipation Edict of 1861 which levied taxes from the village commune as a whole rather than from particular households or individuals. Peasants were accustomed to acting collectively and to taking decisions among themselves about life in the village.[5]

But this did not mean that the peasantry's conditions were wholly equalized. A handful of households in a commune would typically be better off than the rest; and the affluent peasants became known as *kulaki* (which in Russian means 'fists'). They lent money, they hired labour; they rented and bought land. Poorer households, especially those which lacked an adult male and had to get by with youngsters doing the work, tended to decline into penury. Life was nasty, brutish and short for most peasants.

So long as the peasantry complied with the state's demands for taxes and conscripts, there was little governmental interference in rural affairs. Until the mid-nineteenth century, most peasants had been bonded to the noble owners of landed estates. Emperor Alexander II saw this to have been an important reason for the Russian Empire's débâcle in the Crimean War of 1854–6, and in 1861 he issued an Emancipation Edict freeing peasants from their bondage. The terms of their liberation were ungenerous to them. On average, peasants were left with thirteen per cent less land to cultivate than before the Edict.[6] Consequently despite being pleased to be relieved of the gentry's domineering administration of the villages, the peasantry was discontented. There was a belief among peasants that the Emperor ought to transfer all land, including their former masters' fields and woods, to them and that they themselves should appropriate this land whenever the opportunity might arise.

The Emancipation Edict, by removing the gentry's automatic authority over the peasantry, had to be accompanied by several reforms in local government, the judiciary, education and military training. Elective representative bodies known as the *zemstva* were set up in the localities to carry out administrative functions. Local courts, too, were established; and provision for popular education was increased: by the turn of the century it was reckoned that about a quarter of the rural population was literate – and in the largest cities the proportion was three quarters.[7] The armed forces reduced

the term of service from twenty-five years to six years at the most. Still the peasants were unsatisfied. They were annoyed that they had to pay for the land they received through the Emancipation Edict. They resented also that they, unlike the nobility, were liable to corporal punishment for misdemeanours. They remained a class apart.

Alexander II also insisted that they should have permission from their communes before taking up work in towns; for he and his ministers were fearful about the rapid creation of an unruly urban 'proletariat' such as existed in other countries. But this brake on industrial growth was insubstantial. In order to meet their fiscal obligations, communes found it convenient to allow able-bodied young men to seek jobs in factories and mines and remit some of their wages to the family they left behind them in the village. By 1913 there were about 2.4 million workers in large-scale industry.[8] The figure for the urban working class reached nearly eleven million when hired labourers in small-scale industry, building, transport, communications and domestic service were included. There were also about 4.5 million wage-labourers in agriculture. Thus the urban and rural working class quadrupled in the half-century after the Emancipation Edict.[9]

Change occurred, too, amidst the middle and upper classes. Owners of large estates in the more fertile regions adopted Western agricultural techniques and some of them made fortunes out of wheat, potatoes and sugar-beet. Elsewhere they increasingly sold or rented their land at prices kept high by the peasantry's land-hunger. The gentry took employment in the expanding state bureaucracy and joined banks and industrial companies. With the increase in the urban population there was a rise in the number of shopkeepers, clerks and providers of other products and services. The cities of the Russian Empire teemed with a new life that was bursting through the surface of the age-old customs.

The monarchy tried to hold on to its prerogatives by ensuring that the middle and upper classes should lack organizations independent from the government. There were a few exceptions. The Imperial Economic Society debated the great issues of industrialization. The

Imperial Academy, too, managed to elude excessive official restriction, and several great figures won international acclaim. The chemist Mendeleev and the behavioural biologist Pavlov were outstanding examples. But the various professional associations were subjected to constant surveillance and intimidation, and could never press their case in the Emperor's presence. The industrialists and bankers, too, were nervous and their organizations were confined to local activities; and tsarism kept them weak by favouring some at the expense of others. Imperial Russia put obstacles in the way of autonomous civic activity.

And so the transformation of society was in its early stages before the Great War and the bulk of economic relationships in the Russian Empire were of a traditional kind: shopkeepers, domestic servants, carriage-drivers and waiters lived as they had done for decades. The *khodoki* – those peasants who travelled vast distances to do seasonal work in other regions – were a mass phenomenon in central and northern Russia.

Even those factories which used the most up-to-date, imported machinery continued to rely heavily upon manual labour. Living conditions in the industrial districts were atrocious. Moscow textile-factory owners had a paternalist attitude to their work-force; but most of them failed to supply their workers with adequate housing, education and other amenities. Russian workers lived in squalor and were poorly paid by the standards of contemporary industrial capitalism. Like the peasants, they felt excluded from the rest of society. A chasm of sentiment separated them from their employers, their foremen and the police. They were forbidden to form trade unions; they were subordinated to an arbitrarily-applied code of labour discipline at their places of work. The Ministry of Internal Affairs in the late nineteenth century showed sympathy with their plight. But the interests of the owners were usually given official protection against the demands of the workers.

The established working class which had existed in Moscow, St Petersburg and Tula grew rapidly under Nicholas II. But the precariousness of their conditions encouraged workers to maintain their ties with the countryside. Relatives cultivated the communal

allotments of land for them; and, in the event of strikes, workers could last out by returning to the villages. This was a system of mutual assistance. Peasant households expected the workers not only to help them financially but also to come back to help with the harvest.

The linkage between countryside and town helped to sustain traditional ideas. Religious belief was prevalent across the empire, and Christmas, Easter and the great festivals were celebrated with gusto by Russians and other Christian nationalities. The priest was a central figure, accompanying the peasants into the fields to bless the sowing and pray for a good crop. But pagan vestiges, too, survived in the peasant world-view and the ill-educated, poorly-paid parish priest rarely counteracted the prejudices of his parishioners. Both the Russian peasant and the Russian worker could be crude in the extreme. Heavy drinking was common. Syphilis was widespread. Fists and knives were used to settle disagreements. And the peasantry ferociously enforced its own forms of order. It was not uncommon for miscreants to undergo vicious beating and mutilation. The sophistication of St Petersburg salons was not matched in the grubby, ill-kempt villages.

Thus the Russian Empire was deeply fissured between the government and the tsar's subjects; between the capital and the provinces; between the educated and the uneducated; between Western and Russian ideas; between the rich and the poor; between privilege and oppression; between contemporary fashion and centuries-old custom. Most people (and ninety per cent of the Emperor's subjects had been born and bred in the countryside)[10] felt that a chasm divided them from the world inhabited by the ruling élites.

Ostensibly the Russian nation was the pre-eminent beneficiary of the empire; but national consciousness among Russians was only patchily developed and local traditions and loyalties retained much influence. This was evident in a number of ways. One example is the way that migrants, as they moved into the towns for work, tended to stay together with people from the same area. The man from Saratov found the man from Arkhangelsk almost as alien as someone from Poland or even Portugal. Remarkable differences of

dialect and accent prevailed. Despite the current economic transformation, furthermore, most Russians did not move to the nearest town: many did not even visit the neighbouring village. The lifestyles of Russian peasant communities were so strongly rooted in particular localities that when peasants migrated to areas of non-Russian population they sometimes abandoned these lifestyles and identified themselves with their new neighbours.

There had nevertheless been times when the peasants had rallied to the government's side. Patriotic sentiments were roused by the Napoleonic invasion in 1812 and the Russo-Turkish war of 1877–8;[11] and a deep dislike of foreign traders, mercenaries and advisers had existed in previous centuries.[12] The general processes of industrialization and education, too, had an effect on popular sentiments. Russians were moving to towns; they were becoming literate; they could travel from one part of the country to another; they had chances of changing their type of occupation. As they met and talked and worked together, they started to feel that they had much in common with each other.

Yet national consciousness was not a dominant sentiment among Russians. Most of them at the beginning of the twentieth century were motivated by Christian belief, peasant customs, village loyalties and reverence for the tsar rather than by feelings of Russian nationhood. Christianity itself was a divisive phenomenon. The Russian Orthodox Church had been torn apart by a reform in ritual imposed by Patriarch Nikon from 1653. Those who refused to accept Nikon's dispensations fled to the south, the south-east and the north and became known as the Old Believers. Other sects also sprang up among Russians. Some of these were strange in the extreme, such as the *Khlysty* who practised castration of their adherents. Others were pacifists; notable among them were the Dukhobors. There was also a growth of foreign Christian denominations such as the Baptists. What was common to such sects was their disenchantment not only with the Russian Orthodox Church but also with the government in St Petersburg.

This situation limited the Russian Orthodox Church's ability to act as the unifying promoter of Russian national values. Compelled

to act as a spiritual arm of the tsarist state, the Church conducted a campaign of harassment against the Russian sects. The kind of intellectual effervescence characteristic of 'national' churches in other countries was discouraged in Russia. The tsar and his ecclesiastical hierarchy wanted an obedient, obscurantist traditionalism from the Russian Orthodox Church, and had the authority to secure just that.

Nor did a clear sense of national purpose emanate from the intelligentsia even though the leading cultural figures in the nineteenth century explored how best the human and natural resources of Russia might be organized. The poems of Alexander Pushkin; the novels of Lev Tolstoy, Fëdor Dostoevski and Ivan Turgenev; the paintings of Ivan Repin; the music of Modest Musorgski and Pëtr Chaikovski: all such works stressed that Russia had a great potential which had yet to be effectively tapped. Among creative artists, the musicians were exceptional in displaying allegiance to the monarchy. Most of the intellectuals in their various ways hated tsarism and this attitude was shared by students, teachers, doctors, lawyers and other professional groups.[13] It was a commonplace amidst the intelligentsia that the autocratic monarchy was stifling the development of the Russian national spirit.

And yet the intellectuals were remote from agreeing what they meant by Russianness. Indeed many of them abhorred the discourse of national distinctness. While criticizing the imperial nature of the state, they disliked the thought of breaking it up into several nation-states; instead they pondered how to create a multinational state which would deny privileges to any particular nation. Anti-nationalism was especially characteristic of the socialists; but several leading liberals, too, refused to invoke ideas of Russian nationalism.

It was left to far-right public figures, including some bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church, to argue for the interests of ethnic Russians at the expense of the other peoples of the Russian Empire. Several monarchist organizations came into existence after 1905 which sought to promote this case. The most influential of them was the Union of the Russian People, which had the undisguised

support of Nicholas and his family.[14] Such organizations called for the unconditional restoration of autocracy. They lauded the tsar, the Russian Orthodox Church and 'the simple people'. They hated the Jews, whom they blamed for all the recent disturbances in the empire. They helped to form gangs, usually known as the Black Hundreds, which carried out bloody pogroms against Jewish communities in the western borderlands. By stirring up a xenophobic hysteria, they aimed to reunite the tsar and the Russian people.

After his initial declaration of sympathy for the Union of the Russian people, Nicholas took a more measured public stance. He left it to the Union to do what it could. But he was a tsar. He was far too austere to become a rabble-rouser, and his wish to be respected by fellow monarchs abroad was undiminished. Nothing done by Nicholas had an entirely clear purpose or consistent implementation.

Among Nicholas's inhibitions was the fact that he could not feel confident about the loyalty of his Russian subjects. The Imperial state oppressed Russian peasants, soldiers and workers as well as their non-Russian counterparts. What is more, the Russians constituted only forty-four per cent of the Imperial population in the two decades before 1917.[15] The empire was a patchwork quilt of nationalities, and the Russians were inferior to several of the other nations in educational and occupational accomplishment. Nicholas II's German, Jewish and Polish subjects had a much higher average level of literacy than his Russian ones;[16] and Germans from the Baltic region held a disproportionately large number of high posts in the armed forces and the bureaucracy. Moreover, the Poles, Finns, Armenians, Georgians had a clearer sense of nationhood than Russians: their resentment of imperial interference was strong. It would not have made sense to alienate such nationalities from the regime more than was necessary.[17]

Thus the tsarist state in the nineteenth century was primarily a supranational state; it was not one of those several nation-states that had simply acquired an empire. Loyalty to the tsar and his dynasty was the supreme requirement made by the Russian Empire.

Not that the tsars were averse to brutal repression. The Polish Revolt of 1863 had been savagely quelled; and in the North Caucasus,

which had been conquered only in the 1820s, the rebel leader Shamil raised a Muslim banner of revolt against tsarism and was not defeated until 1859. The autonomy granted to Finnish administration and education was trimmed on the instructions of Emperor Nicholas II. The Uniate Church in Ukraine and Belorussia; the Armenian and Georgian Orthodox Churches; the Lutheran Churches among Estonians and Latvians; the Catholic Church in Lithuania and 'Russian' Poland: all resented the official interference in their practices of worship and became crucibles of anti-tsarist discontent. Meanwhile most Jews were constrained to live within the Pale of Settlement in the empire's western borderlands – and Nicholas crudely believed them to be responsible for subverting the entire empire.

In his more reflective moments, however, he recognized that the regime's security was endangered less by the 'national question' than by the 'labour question' – and most factory workers were ethnic Russians. The illegal labour movement had come to life intermittently in the 1890s, but strikes were more the exception than the rule. Peasant disturbances also occurred. Until after the turn of the century, however, tsarism was strongly in place. Rumblings against the monarchy were only intermittent. Liberals, being forbidden to form a political party, held grand banquets to celebrate anniversaries of past events that had embarrassed the monarchy. Peasants whose harvests were twice ruined by bad weather after 1900 were intensely discontented. Workers, too, were disgruntled. The government, acting on the advice of Moscow police chief Sergei Zubatov, had allowed the setting up of politically-controlled local trade unions; and this gave rise to a legal labour movement determined to take on the authorities.

On Sunday, 9 January 1905 a revolutionary emergency occurred when a peaceful procession of demonstrators, led by Father Georgi Gapon, was fired upon outside the Winter Palace in St Petersburg. Innocent civilians, including women and children, were slaughtered. The event became known as Bloody Sunday. Immediately across the Russian Empire there were strikes and marches in protest. Poland and Georgia became ungovernable over the following weeks. In Russia there was revulsion against the Emperor among factory

workers, and their demonstrations were initially given approval by industrialists.

As the press began to criticize the authorities, Nicholas II set up an enquiry into the reasons for popular discontent. The news from the Far East brought further discredit to the monarchy. In February 1905 Russian land forces were crushed at Mukden; in May the Baltic fleet was annihilated in the battle of Tsushima. The myth of the regime's invincibility was dissipated and the illegal political parties emerged from clandestinity. The two largest of them were the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party and the Party of Socialist-Revolutionaries. The former were Marxists who wanted the urban working class to lead the struggle against the monarchy; the latter were agrarian socialists who, while also trying to appeal to workers, put greater faith in the revolutionary potential of the peasantry. Both sought the overthrow of the Romanov dynasty. Liberals, too, organized themselves by establishing the Constitutional-Democratic Party in October 1905. On all sides the autocracy was under siege.

Workers formed strike committees; peasants began to make illegal use of the gentry's timber and pastures and to take over arable land. A mutiny took place in the Black Sea fleet and the battleship *Potëmkin* steamed off towards Romania. Troops returning from the Far East rebelled along the Trans-Siberian railway. In September 1905 the St Petersburg Marxists founded a Soviet (or Council) of Workers' Deputies. It was elected by local factory workers and employees and became an organ of revolutionary local self-government. Nicholas II at last took the advice from Sergei Witte to issue an October Manifesto which promised 'civil liberty on principles of true inviolability of person, freedom of conscience, speech, assembly and association'. There would also be an elected Duma and adult males in all classes of the population would be enfranchised. Without the Duma, no law could be put into effect. It seemed that autocracy was announcing its demise.

The Manifesto drew off the steam of the urban middle-class hostility and permitted Nicholas II to suppress open rebellion. Many liberals urged that the Emperor should be supported. The Petersburg Soviet leaders – including its young deputy chairman Lev Trotski –

were arrested. An armed uprising was attempted by the Moscow Soviet under the Social-Democrats and Socialist-Revolutionaries in December 1905. But the rising was quelled. Loyal military units were then deployed elsewhere against other organizations and social groups in revolt. And, as order was restored in the towns and on the railways, Nicholas II published a Basic Law and ordered elections for the State Duma. By then he had introduced qualifications to his apparent willingness to give up autocratic authority. In particular, he could appoint the government of his unrestricted choice; the Duma could be dissolved at his whim; and he could rule by emergency decree. Not only Social-Democrats and Socialist-Revolutionaries but also the Constitutional-Democrats (or Kadets) denounced these manoeuvres.

The peasantry had not been much slower to move against the authorities than the workers: most rural districts in European Russia were categorized as 'disorderly' in summer 1905.[18] Illegal sawing of timber and pasturing of livestock on landlords' land took place. Threats were made on gentry who lived in the countryside. Often a cockerel with its neck slit would be laid on the doorstep of their houses to warn them to get out of the locality. The Russian peasant households organized their activities within their communes – and frequently it was the better-off households which took the leading role in the expression of the peasantry's demands. In 1905–6 the countryside across the empire was in revolt. Only the fact that Nicholas II could continue to rely upon a large number of the regiments which had not been sent to the Far East saved him his throne. It was a very close-run thing.

And so the First State Duma met in April 1906. The largest group of deputies within it was constituted by peasants belonging to no party. Contrary to Nicholas II's expectation, however, these same deputies stoutly demanded the transfer of the land from the gentry. He reacted by dissolving the Duma. The party with the greatest number of places in the Duma was the Constitutional-Democratic Party and its leaders were so angered by the Duma's dispersal that they decamped to the Finnish town of Vyborg and called upon their fellow subjects to withhold taxes and conscripts until a fuller

parliamentary order was established. Nicholas faced them down and held a further set of elections. To his annoyance, the Second Duma, too, which assembled in March 1907, turned out to be a radical assembly. Consequently Nicholas turned to his Minister of Internal Affairs, Pëtr Stolypin, to form a government and to rewrite the electoral rules so as to produce a Third Duma which would increase the importance of the gentry at the expense of the peasantry.

Stolypin was a reforming conservative. He saw the necessity of agrarian reform, and perceived the peasant land commune as the cardinal obstacle to the economy's efficiency and society's stability. He therefore resolved to dissolve the commune by encouraging 'strong and sober' peasant households to set themselves up as independent farming families. When the Second Duma had opposed him for his failure to grant the land itself to the peasantry, Stolypin had used the emergency powers of Article 87 of the Basic Law to push through his measures. When Russian peasants subsequently showed themselves deeply attached to their communes, he used a degree of compulsion to get his way. Nevertheless his success was very limited. By 1916 only a tenth of the households in the European parts of the empire had broken away from the commune to set up consolidated farms – and such farms in an area of great fertility such as west-bank Ukraine were on average only fifteen acres each.[19]

It was also recognized by Stolypin that the Imperial government would work better if co-operation were forthcoming from the Duma. To this end he sought agreements with Alexander Guchkov and the so-called Octobrist Party (which, unlike the Kadets, had welcomed the October Manifesto). Guchkov's Octobrists were monarchist conservatives who thought roughly along the same lines as Stolypin, but insisted that all legislation should be vetted by the Duma.[20] At the same time Stolypin wanted to strengthen a popular sense of civic responsibility; he therefore persuaded the Emperor to increase the peasantry's weight in the elections to the zemstva. Peasants, he argued, had to have a stake in public life. The political, social and cultural integration of society was vital and Stolypin became convinced that Russian nationalists were right in arguing that Russia should be treated as the heartland of the tsarist empire. Further

curtailments were made on the already narrow autonomy of Poles, Finns and other nations of the Russian Empire; and Stolypin strengthened the existing emphasis on Russian-language schooling and administration.

At court, however, he was regarded as a self-interested politician bent upon undermining the powers of the Emperor. Eventually Nicholas, too, saw things in this light, and he steadily withdrew his favour from Stolypin. In September 1911, Stolypin was assassinated by the Socialist-Revolutionary Dmitri Bogrov in Kiev. There were rumours that the *Okhrana*, the political police of the Ministry for the Interior, had facilitated Bogrov's proximity to the premier – and even that the Emperor may have connived in this. Whatever the truth of the matter, the Emperor resumed policies involving the minimum of co-operation with the State Duma. Intelligent conservatism passed away with the death of Pëtr Stolypin.

Yet it was no longer possible for tsarism to rule the country in quite the old fashion. In the eighteenth century it had been exclusively the nobility which had knowledge of general political affairs. The possession of this knowledge served to distance the upper classes from the rest of society. At home the families of the aristocracy took to speaking French among themselves; they imbibed European learning and adopted European tastes. A line of exceptional noblemen – from Alexander Radishchev in the 1780s through to an anti-tsarist conspiracy known as the Decembrists in 1825 – questioned the whole basis of the old regime's legitimacy. But vigorous suppression did not eliminate the problem of dissent. Some of the greatest exponents of Russian literature and intellectual thought – including Alexander Herzen, Nikolai Chernyshevski, Ivan Turgenev and Lev Tolstoy – made it their life's work to call for a drastic change in conditions.

Permanent opposition had taken organized form from the 1860s despite the prohibition on the formation of political parties, on the holding of political meetings and on public demands for political freedom. Most of the rebels were believers in agrarian socialism. Called the *narodniki* (or populists), they argued that the egalitarian and collectivist spirit of the peasant land commune should be applied

to the whole society. At first they had gathered in little secret circles. But by 1876 they had founded a substantial party, Land and Freedom, which conducted propaganda among intellectuals and workers as well as among peasants, and also carried out acts of terror upon officials. When Land and Freedom fell apart, a group of terrorists calling themselves People's Will was formed. It succeeded in assassinating Emperor Alexander II in 1881. Political repression was intensified; but as quickly as one group might be arrested another would be formed. Not only narodniki but also Marxists and liberals founded tenacious organizations in the 1890s.

The culture of opposition was not confined to the revolutionary activists. In the nineteenth century there was a remarkable expansion of education: secondary schools and universities proliferated and students were remarkably antagonistic to the regime. The methods of instruction and discipline grated upon young people. Nor did their unease disappear in adulthood. The tsarist order was regarded by them as a humiliating peculiarity that Russia should quickly remove.

Their feelings were strengthened by journalists and creative writers who informed public opinion with a freedom that increased after 1905.[21] Previously, most legal newspapers had been conservative or very cautiously liberal; afterwards they spanned a range of thought from proto-fascist on the far right to Bolshevik on the far left. Although the Okhrana closed publications that openly advocated sedition, the excitement of opinion against the authorities was constant. Not only newspapers but also trade unions, sickness-insurance groups and even Sunday schools were instruments of agitation. The regime stipulated that trade unions should be locally based and that their leaderships should be drawn from the working class. But this served to give workers an experience of collective self-organization. By thrusting people on to their own resources, tsarism built up the antidote to itself. The rationale of the old monarchy was further undermined.

Even so, the Okhrana was very efficient at its tasks. The revolutionary leaders had been suppressed in 1907; their various organizations in the Russian Empire were penetrated by police informers, and

the arrest of second-rank activists continued. Contact between the *émigrés* and their followers was patchy.

The repression secured more time for the dynasty; it also strengthened the determination of the revolutionaries to avoid any dilution of their ideas. At the turn of the century it had been the Marxists who had been most popular with political intellectuals. A party had been formed, the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, in 1899. But it quickly dissolved into factionalism, especially among the *émigrés*. One of the factions, the Bolsheviks (or Majoritarians), was led by Vladimir Lenin. His booklet of 1902, *What Is To Be Done?*, described the need for the party to act as the vanguard of the working class. He laid down that party members should be disciplined in organization and loyal in doctrine. The party in his opinion should be highly centralized. His theories and his divisive activity disrupted the Second Party Congress in 1903. And Lenin compounded his controversial reputation in 1905 by proposing that the projected overthrow of the Romanov monarchy should be followed by a 'provisional revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry' – and he anticipated the use of terror in order to establish the dictatorship.[22]

These specifications alarmed his opponents – the so-called Mensheviks (or Minoritarians) – in the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party who had always contended that Russia should undergo a 'bourgeois' revolution and complete her development of a capitalist economy before undertaking the 'transition to socialism'. They denounced the projected dictatorship as having nothing in common with genuinely socialist politics. And they wanted a more loosely-organized party than the Bolsheviks had devised.

The other great revolutionary party was the Party of Socialist-Revolutionaries, which inherited the traditions of the narodniki of the nineteenth century. Their leading theorist was Viktor Chernov. Unlike the narodniki, the Socialist-Revolutionaries did not think that Russia could move straight into socialism without a capitalist stage of economic development. But whereas the Marxists, be they Bolsheviks or Mensheviks, saw the urban workers as the great revolutionary class, the Socialist-Revolutionaries held the peasantry

in higher regard and believed that peasants embodied, however residually, the egalitarian and communal values at the heart of socialism. But the Socialist-Revolutionaries recruited among the working class, and in many cities, were rivals to the Russian Social-Democratic Party. In many ways there were differing emphases rather than totally sharp distinctions between Marxists and Socialist-Revolutionaries in their ideas at lower organizational levels of their respective parties; and they suffered equally at the hands of the Okhrana.

The events of 1905–6 had already shown that if ever the people were allowed free elections, it would be these three parties that would vie for victory. The Kadets recognized the limitations of their own popularity and responded by adopting a policy of radical agrarian reform. They proposed to transfer the land of the gentry to the peasantry with suitable monetary compensation for the gentry. But this would never be sufficient to outmatch the appeal of the Socialist-Revolutionaries, Mensheviks and Bolsheviks unless that franchise was formulated in such a way as to give advantage to the middle classes.

Truly this was already a creaky structure of power. Matters were not helped by the fact that the Emperor was not respected. He was a monarch whose capacity for hard work was not matched by outstanding intelligence. He had no clear vision for Russia's future and wore himself out with day-to-day political administration. He found contentment only in the company of his family and was thought to be hen-pecked by his spouse Alexandra. In fact he was more independent from her than the rumours suggested, but the rumours were believed. Furthermore, he surrounded himself with advisers who included a variety of mystics and quacks. His favouritism towards the Siberian 'holy man' Grigori Rasputin became notorious. Rasputin had an uncanny ability to staunch the bleeding of the haemophiliac heir to the throne, Aleksei; but, protected by the Imperial couple, Rasputin gambled and wenched and intrigued in St Petersburg. The Romanovs sank further into infamy.

It was not that Nicholas entirely isolated himself from the people. He attended religious ceremonies; he met groups of peasants. In

1913 the tercentenary of the Romanov dynasty was celebrated with acclaim, and the Emperor was filmed for the benefit of cinema-goers. But he seems to have had a horror of his urban subjects: intellectuals, politicians and workers were distrusted by him.[23] Nicholas was out of joint with his times.

Yet the immediate danger to the regime had receded. The empire's subjects settled back into acceptance that the Okhrana and the armed forces were too strong to be challenged. Peasant disturbances were few. Stolypin had been ruthless ordering the execution of 2796 peasant rebel leaders after field courts-martial.[24] The hangman's noose was known as 'Stolypin's necktie'. Student demonstrations ceased. National resistance in the non-Russian regions virtually disappeared. Professional associations behaved circumspectly so as to avoid being closed down by the authorities. The labour movement, too, was disrupted by police intervention. Strikes ceased for a while. But as the economy experienced an upturn and mass unemployment fell, workers regained their militant confidence. Sporadic industrial conflicts returned, and a single event could spark off trouble across the empire.

This eventually occurred in April 1912 when police fired upon striking miners in the gold-fields near the river Lena in Siberia. Demonstrations took place in sympathy elsewhere. A second upsurge of opposition took place in June 1914 in St Petersburg. Wages and living conditions were a basic cause of grievance; so, too, was the resentment against the current political restrictions.[25]

The recurrence of strikes and demonstrations was an index of the liability of the tsarist political and economic order to intense strain. The Emperor, however, chose to strengthen his monarchical powers rather than seek a deal with the elected deputies in the State Duma. Not only he but also his government and his provincial governors could act without reference to legal procedures. The Duma could be and was dispersed by him without consultation; electoral rules were redrawn on his orders. Opponents could be sentenced to 'administrative exile' by the Ministry of Internal Affairs without reference to the courts – and this could involve banishment to the harshest regions of Siberia. In 1912, 2.3 million people lived under

martial law and 63.3 million under 'reinforced protection'; provincial governors increasingly issued their own regulations and enforced them by administrative order.[26] The 'police state' of the Romanovs was very far from complete and there were signs that civil society could make further advances at the state's expense. Yet in many aspects there was little end to the arbitrary governance.

Nicholas would have made things easier for himself if he had allowed himself to be restrained constitutionally by the State Duma. Then the upper and middle classes, through their political parties, would have incurred the hostility that was aimed at the Emperor. Oppressive rule could have been reduced at a stroke. The decadence and idiocy of Nicholas's court would have ceased to invite critical scrutiny; and by constitutionalizing his position, he might even have saved his dynasty from destruction. As things stood, some kind of revolutionary clash was practically inevitable. Even the Octobrists were unsympathetic to their sovereign after his humiliation of Stolypin.

But Nicholas also had reason to doubt that the Duma would have been any better at solving the difficulties of the Russian Empire. Whoever was to rule Russia would face enormous tasks in transforming its economic, cultural and administrative arrangements if it was not to fall victim to rival Great Powers. The growth in industrial capacity was encouraging; the creation of an indigenous base of research and development was less so. Agriculture was changing only at a slow pace. And the social consequences of the transformation in town and countryside were tremendous. Even the economic successes caused problems. High expectations were generated by the increased knowledge about the West among not only the intelligentsia but also the workers.The alienated segment of society grew in number and hostility.

Yet the empire suffered as much from traditionalism as from modernity. For example, the possession of land in the village commune or the ability to return to the village for assistance was a powerful factor in enabling Russian workers to go on strike. Russian and Ukrainian peasants identified more with their village than with any imperial, dynastic or national idea. Furthermore, those inhabitants of the empire who had developed a national consciousness, such as the Poles, were deeply discontented at their treatment and would always cause trouble. The religious variety of the empire only added to the regime's problems, problems which were likely to increase as urbanization and education proceeded.

Yet if the empire was ever to fall apart, it would not even be clear to which area Russia might easily be confined. Russians lived everywhere in the Russian Empire. Large pockets of them existed in Baku, in Ukraine and in the Baltic provinces. Migrations of land-hungry Russian peasants had been encouraged by Stolypin, to Siberia and to Russia's possessions in central Asia. No strict notion of 'Russia' was readily to hand, and the St Petersburg authorities had always inhibited investigation of this matter. The Russian-ruled region of Poland was described as 'the Vistula provinces'; 'Ukraine', 'Latvia' and 'Estonia' did not appear as such on official maps. So where was Russia? This sprawling giant of a country was as big or as small as anyone liked to think of it as being. Few Russians would deny that it included Siberia. But westwards was it to include Ukraine and Belorussia? National demography and geography were extremely ill-defined, and the vagueness might in the wrong circumstances lead to violence.

After the turn of the century it was getting ever likelier that the wrong circumstances would occur. Social strife was continual. National resentments among the non-Russians were on the rise. Political opposition remained strident and determined. The monarchy was ever more widely regarded as an oppressive, obsolescent institution which failed to correspond to the country's needs. Nicholas II had nearly been overthown in 1905. He had recovered his position, but the basic tensions in state and society had not been alleviated.