

The Russians decided the only way to overcome their defiance was to physically displace them and resettle their lands with immigrants. In the end, during the 1860s, between one and two million Circassians were deported in appalling conditions to the Ottoman Empire, in whose successor territories their descendants still live today. This was the first great mass deportation of modern times. Russians achieved the mastery over the Caucasus at which they had aimed, but at the cost of alienating and embittering most of the peoples who lived there – a legacy that still has its destructive effects today.

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Chapter 5

Reform and revolution

Reform

Defeat in the Crimean War removed the veto on radical change: it had become unavoidable. Russia had succumbed to two industrializing nation-states, and most reformers assumed that Russia must become one too, even though that required unsettling changes to its social structure. Westerners and Slavophiles had different conceptions of what was needed, but both felt it essential to give ordinary Russians a greater stake in the affairs of their country.

Above all, they both agreed on the need to abolish serfdom. Yet serfdom was the keystone of the empire's social and economic structure: removing it was extremely problematic. The dilemma was expressed by one landowner: 'To free the peasants without land is impossible, but to expropriate the landowners would be extremely unjust.' Not only unjust, but also unworkable, since one could scarcely deprive the ruling class of the principal source of its income. Yet peasants deprived of land would certainly not feel they had any stake in the system, and could easily become dangerously discontented.

The Emancipation Edict of 1861 was thus inevitably an unsatisfactory compromise. Landowners retained much of their

land, especially in the south, where it was fertile and valuable. Peasants were awarded holdings which were usually smaller than those they had previously held; moreover, they were required to pay for land they thought they already owned in instalments over half a century. Nor were they set free as full citizens, but till they had paid off their debt were tied to a land commune, where as before joint responsibility was the norm. Since the landowner's administrative and judicial powers were abolished, those communes, and the purely peasant institution above them, the *volost* (township), gained more powers than they had ever possessed before. The *volost* court was to apply not statute law, but local custom as interpreted by peasant elders. Peasants thus remained a segregated social estate.

It is remarkable that such a far-reaching measure could be carried out at all in opposition to the interests of the ruling class. It was a vindication of the power of the much-criticized autocratic state, which alone could rise above the interests of all social classes.

One of the main reasons for abolishing serfdom was to create a non-serf army, in which all adult males would have the duty to serve, and in which a reserve could be built up without endangering rural security. War Minister Dmitry Miliutin pushed through that reform in the Military Conscription Act (1874), and insisted that all new recruits should take literacy classes. He also stipulated that officers should be professionally trained: he abolished the Cadet Corps and introduced so-called Junker Schools where non-nobles could qualify. After Miliutin left the post, however, the Cadet Corps were revived and literacy training was dropped. The chance to reforge the army as a 'school of nationhood', which is what Miliutin intended, was lost. Only in the First World War was that aim suddenly revived, but far too late to effect the necessary changes of mentality and organization.

The abolition of serfdom necessitated further reforms, to redistribute the functions which had previously belonged to the nobility. Local government was now entrusted to *zemstvos* and municipalities, elected assemblies dominated by the nobility and property owners, but with some representation from other classes, including peasants.

Other reforms were intended to create civil society on a 'Western' model. Censorship was eased, to facilitate open discussion of social problems. Education at all levels was expanded, and was opened to all social estates. Most controversial of all, the judicial system was totally reformed. In criminal cases, trained lawyers were to represent the accused, while juries drawn from ordinary citizens and peasant officials would decide the verdict. Proceedings would be open to the public and the press, and judges were to be independent and irremovable. In a sense, this was the first serious limitation on autocracy, since it implied that law, as determined by courts, was the highest authority – that laws in fact were written for governments as well as for subjects. It was certainly difficult to combine it with autocracy, as a sensational case demonstrated in 1878. Vera Zasulich, a young revolutionary, shot and wounded General Trepov, Governor-General of St Petersburg. No one denied that she had attempted murder, but to applause in the courtroom, the jury acquitted her on the plea of her lawyer that she had 'no personal interest in her crime', but was 'fighting for an idea'.

Autocracy remained unchanged, however: as she left the courtroom, Zasulich was re-arrested. Furthermore, when Interior Minister Valuev proposed having elected *zemstvo* representatives in the State Council, the empire's highest advisory chamber, Alexander replied that he opposed a constitution, not because it would restrict his authority, but because it would lead to the dissolution of Russia. The recent Polish rising greatly troubled him; he feared giving non-Russian elites a serious voice in the empire's highest institutions.

A changing society

The effect of the reforms was to create a much more changeable and differentiated society. With the construction of railways (culminating in the Trans-Siberian, completed in 1903), communications improved greatly. Heavy industry, hitherto largely military, branched out into other fields, and consumer manufacture developed rapidly. Because of Russia's weak currency, though, its faltering rule of law, and its cumbersome procedure for setting up joint-stock companies, much industry was owned by foreigners. Russia was threatened with becoming economically colonized, like China or the Ottoman Empire.

The way was now open for peasants to become literate, to diversify their economy, to work in the towns, on the railways and rivers, to serve in the army, and then return to civilian life. A whole new class of professional people emerged (nearly all men), trained in higher or technical educational institutions, and working for the state, the *zemstvos*, or the armed forces as doctors, lawyers, teachers, accountants, and administrators. New newspapers and journals appeared, each trying to appeal to a broad and growing educated public; no longer was serious discussion confined to small circles of intellectuals. Public opinion (*obshchestvennost*) took shape for the first time as a force independent of direct state tutelage. Its members were now able to participate in local government and in the organization of their own professions, but they were still excluded from politics at the centre, nor could they be confident of the rule of law or the security of civil rights. The more frustrated and strident among them constituted a new sociocultural stratum, divorced from both state and people, the intelligentsia – a new concept which Russia gave to the world.

The result was a paradoxical state of affairs. Civil society and the state were both growing stronger simultaneously, but as opponents, not as partners. The state depended for its conduct of

local affairs largely on the Ministry of the Interior and on the provincial governors and police officials subordinate to it. Those officials had a wide range of ill-defined duties: it has been estimated that each provincial governor had an average of 300 to 400 official papers to deal with every day. Unable to cope with the flood, he tended to rely on personal links to trusted subordinates, to senior officials in St Petersburg, and on his right of personal report to the Emperor. District police chiefs faced the same situation in miniature, with the governor as their highest reference point, and exercised their responsibilities with minimal regard for strict legality, since they knew that administrative instructions always had priority.

The 1860s reforms made the political system even less coherent. The provincial and district *zemstvos* had no institutional links either upwards, to the government, nor sideways to provincial governors and district police chiefs, nor downwards, to the purely peasant *volost*. The chairman of each *zemstvo*, the noble marshal, would of course get to know these officials personally and negotiate some kind of *modus vivendi*. But he too had a plethora of functions, and no staff to support him; moreover, he was unpaid. It is not surprising that local affairs were managed by improvisation and personal contacts.

From 1881, after the assassination of Alexander II (see below, p. 82), states of emergency were introduced to give governors and police chiefs expanded powers: they could suspend law courts and newspapers, prohibit meetings and impose administrative exile, to deal with whatever they identified as posing a threat to orderly government. In the attempt to plug some of the gaps in the 'power vertical', a local noble was appointed as 'land commandant' with a wide range of powers over *volosti* and village communes. The political police was strengthened but was never large enough to deal with the growing opposition; nor were its links with society strong enough to enable it to gather information readily about really menacing threats to security.

In the late 19th century, then, Russia had two parallel and largely unconnected systems of governance. The vacuum which had always existed between state and population became even wider and more dangerous. Civil society became stronger, but so also did the instruments of state repression. In those potentially explosive circumstances, since there was no parliament, the press became especially important.

Russian nationalism

In the press, the relationship between the state and the population was now the subject of relatively open discussion. The fundamental question was 'What is Russia?' The successful European countries were nation-states with a high degree of industrial and commercial development. Should Russia emulate them, and, if so, how?

The energetic and enterprising editor of *Moskovskie vedomosti*, Mikhail Katkov, had one answer. He had been a Westerner, an admirer of the British political system. But the 1863 Polish rising persuaded him that in a multi-ethnic society, a freedom-loving gentry could be a force for sedition. 'To give up Poland would deprive Russia of its political significance in Europe', and the Russian people of 'its world-historical mission'. Katkov's answer was to convert the Russian Empire into a Russian nation, all of whose peoples, whatever their ethnic identity, would acknowledge the Emperor as their sovereign, as the Welsh, Scots, and Irish did the British monarch. Alternative nation-building projects, like the Poles', would have to be crushed.

The problem with restricting the rights of non-Russians was that they aroused the resentment of many hitherto loyal non-Russian subjects without increasing Russians' sense of empowerment. In fact, Russians were beginning to feel that their nation was also being systematically disadvantaged in favour of foreigners – especially,

as many of them saw it, Jews. This feeling culminated in 1905 in the formation of the Union of Russian People.

In some ways, Russian nationhood was strongly developed. Most Russians, including the uneducated, had a concept of 'Russia', which involved the Tsar, the Orthodox Church, Russian language and literature, and they shared a rich subculture of folklore, music, dances, woodcuts, and other entertainments. They celebrated saints' days and Russian military victories. But this cultural understanding of Russia had not taken shape in nationwide political institutions.

Russian culture

Russia's high culture was assuming some of the functions of those missing political institutions. Far-reaching, disruptive change was being introduced, to all appearances from outside, from a Europe to which Russia did not feel it fully belonged. The rule of law, capitalist economics, rationalism, technical progress, and the urban, bourgeois way of life all seemed alien to most non-Westernized Russians, especially to peasants and the church. In this respect, Russia was the first modern nation that reacted against Western-driven modernization to reaffirm the values of inherited communal and religious life.

Faced with these challenges, and with state and church censorship which obstructed open discussion of how to cope with them, prominent writers felt obliged to assume the role of oblique political commentators and even prophets. Nikolai Gogol first made his name in the 1830s with sketches of Ukrainian provincial life and folklore, but to advance his career he decided to move to St Petersburg. There, the frosty formality and pretentious hierarchy of imperial Russia repelled him, and he satirized it in a series of works. In his novel *Dead Souls* (1842), he manipulates the term 'soul', used officially to designate a poll-tax payer, and the

administrative fiction that deceased taxpayers were considered alive till the next census. His main character creates fraudulent social status for himself by purchasing such 'dead souls' from impoverished landowners.

Dead Souls was intended to be merely the first part of a work in which Gogol would show how Russia could be redeemed by its innate virtues. He found the rest impossible to complete and secretly burnt the manuscript. Instead, he issued a series of epistles preaching repentance and submission to the will of God. His admirers were bitterly disappointed.

Fedor Dostoevsky was similarly obsessed with the loss of community and of moral consciousness in modern urban civilization. He reacted against the project of understanding human beings as wholly a product of scientifically ascertainable biological and psychological laws. His 'Underground Man' (1864) sticks out his tongue at the Crystal Palace and proclaims 'I dislike the fact that two times two makes four'. The St Petersburg Dostoevsky describes in his novels is a hive of Western rationality, bureaucracy, and avarice, where a lonely, rootless individual like Raskolnikov can decide it is legitimate to murder an elderly moneylender because her life is useless and without her money he cannot finance his studies. Against this nightmare morality Dostoevsky counterposed that of the village community, bound by joint responsibility and Orthodox Christianity: Russian peasants might be drunken and blasphemous, but they had preserved the humble faith and spirit of community which the West had long ago lost. He believed that by asserting their unassuming and pious morality, Russia would save humanity. He issued a regular newspaper column, in which he preached war for the conquest of Constantinople from the Ottoman Empire and the rebirth of the Second Rome as a Russian capital city.

Like Dostoevsky, Lev Tolstoy was a Russian patriot, but an idiosyncratic one. In *War and Peace* (1869), he maintained that

Russia managed to defeat Napoleon not because of its skilful generals, but because of the moral superiority of ordinary Russian peasants and soldiers, who in their villages and regiments had succeeded in preserving a primitive sense of community and morality which the sophisticated, atheist French had lost. He endeavoured himself to live a life close to that of the peasants, at one stage making his own boots and joining in the scything of hay. In later life, Tolstoy founded a religion based on the ethic of mutual cooperation and asserted that this was the central message of Jesus. He rejected both state and church, on the grounds that (whatever they preached) they practised materialism, domination, coercion, and latent violence. He advocated abstention from all war and the abolition of the death penalty, money, and private property.

In music, Modest Mussorgsky insisted that Russian opera should reflect the Russian way of life and that its melodies should derive from folksong, the liturgy, or the rhythms and intonation of Russian speech. In his operas *Boris Godunov* (1874) and *Khovanshchina* (1880), he put his ideas into practice. Both portray turning points in Russian history when Western and Russian culture clash, and when trust between rulers and ruled is at issue. At the end of *Khovanshchina*, Old Believers immolate themselves in their church, singing the native *znamenny* chant, while offstage Peter I's army approaches playing Western military music.

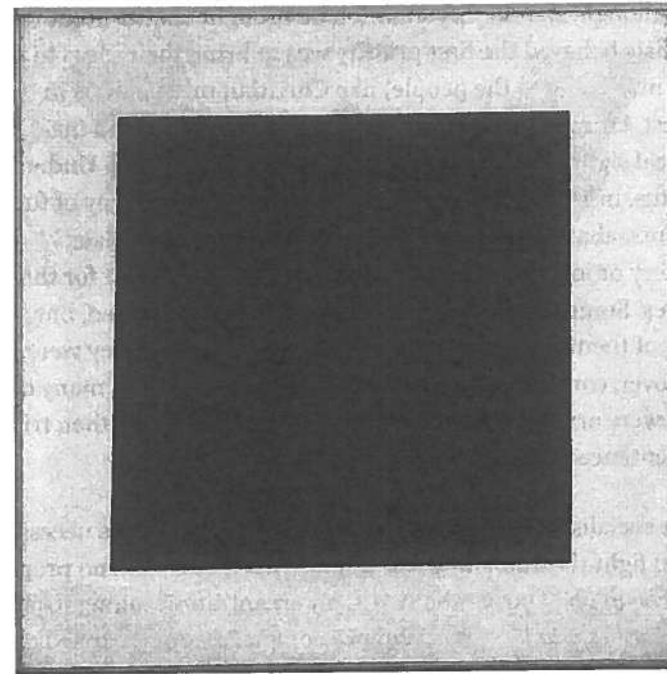
By the early 20th century, Russia's challenge to traditional forms and genres, especially in music and painting, was more radical than in any other European country, probably because the challenge to Russian society itself from urbanization and industrialization was more abrupt and testing than elsewhere. Russia led the way in formulating the techniques and aspirations of modernism, which usually claimed deeper insight into a spiritual or underlying reality not apparent to routine perception.

In *The Rite of Spring* (1913), Igor Stravinsky disclosed more primitive and pagan layers of peasant culture than any of the folklore revivalists of England, Hungary, or Romania. Drawing on ancient Russian folk dances, he portrayed fertility rites and human sacrifice through brutal rhythms and static, non-progressive harmonies, implying a cyclical view of time. *The Rite's* first performance by the Ballets Russes in Paris scandalized audiences and signalled that a new kind of modernism had arrived in European art.

Visual artists inherited the ambition to transform the world. Vasily Kandinsky began from a fascination with Russian folk art and produced highly coloured pastiches of familiar popular motifs. He moved on from there to equally highly coloured abstract paintings, believing that by renouncing any attempt to depict objects realistically, he was liberating art from its imprisonment in the material environment, and creating 'moments of sudden illumination' which 'reveal with blinding clarity new perspectives, new truths'. In short, he held that abstract art enabled the viewer to penetrate the secrets of the spiritual world underlying perceived reality.

Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square* (1915) was the shape of an icon, but placed in a void where the iconic image should have been. It substituted for church dogma a realm of pure potentiality, opening the way in his view to an ideal cosmos where creative possibilities were endless. He followed it up with a whole series of paintings consisting of simple geometrical forms pierced by lines, planes, or other simple shapes. He chose the term 'Suprematism' for his kind of art. 'I have conquered the lining of the heavenly... Sail forth! The white free chasm, infinity is before us!'

Thus, before 1917, Russia's art forms portended radical change even more all-embracing than was envisaged by modernists in other European countries.



8. The vacant icon: Malevich's *Black Square*

Socialism

The intelligentsia had its own views of 'Russia'. Alienated from the state, many of them idealized the *narod* (people), even though their links with it were tenuous; hence they became known as *narodniki*. They adopted some Slavophile views, but gave them a much sharper anti-state orientation. The essence of Russia, they declared, lay in its peasant communes, with their democratic self-government, mutual aid, and periodic redistribution of assets. The peasants should now be given all the land, and Russia should become a federation of such communes, with minimal coordination and control from the centre. Endowed with 'land and freedom', the peasants' spirit of equality and resource-sharing would generate social harmony and release the productive forces of the people.

How, though, should this situation be brought about? Some socialists believed the first priority was to bring their ideas to the peasants, 'going to the people', like Christian missionaries in darkest Africa, to live among them and awaken them to the political significance of their own communal practices. Under this impetus, in 1873–4 several hundred young people, many of them students, abandoned their studies, learned a trade such as cobblery or joinery, donned rustic clothing, and set out for the villages. Some were heartened by what they experienced, but many of them felt out of place and misunderstood. They were, moreover, conspicuous figures in the rural milieu, and many of them were arrested, imprisoned, sometimes for years, then tried and sentenced for 'sedition'.

Other socialists thought such self-sacrifice futile: it was necessary first to fight the autocratic state, since while it existed, no progress could be made. During the 1870s, an organization calling itself *Narodnaia volia* (People's Will or People's Freedom) carried out a series of assassinations of senior officials. In March 1881, they succeeded in their ultimate goal, and murdered Alexander II himself as he was proceeding in his carriage through the streets of St Petersburg.

After his death, police repression dispersed the surviving members of the organization, but it revived in the late 1890s, now as the Socialist Revolutionary Party (SRs). It reacted to the growth of an industrial working class by postulating that the *artel* would play in the towns the same role as the commune in the countryside, as a forum for revolutionary activity. Workers and peasants would act together to overthrow the Tsarist regime.

By now, the SRs had a rival, in the form of a socialist party which was not interested in the peasant community, but proclaimed that Russia's revolutionary future lay in the hands of the urban working class. Inspired by the theories of Marx, the Social Democrats (SDs) asserted that capitalism, as it came from Europe



9. Patriarch Alexii sanctifies the monument to Tsar Alexander II, erected only after the fall of the Soviet Union

to Russia, would create an alienated proletariat which would ultimately rise and seize power. The party split at an early stage. One faction, the Mensheviks, believed in a mass working-class party which would form a parliamentary opposition during the 'bourgeois' stage of history. The other, the Bolsheviks, believed that parliaments were a sham, and advocated a small party of 'professional revolutionaries' which would lead the workers in a decisive uprising to prevent the bourgeoisie ever taking power. Vladimir Lenin, their leader, took over the *narodnik* notion that the peasants were a potentially revolutionary class. Given appropriate leadership, he asserted, they would join the workers and enable them to defeat the bourgeoisie.

The 1905 revolution

Ever since the early 17th century, popular rebellions had periodically shown that Russia's communities of joint responsibility, which the regime exploited for its own purposes, could also act as a forum for social unrest. Cossacks, non-Russians, and peasants were imperfectly reconciled with their status, and there were no intermediate institutions through which they could articulate their grievances. From time to time, they resisted discreetly, or even rebelled openly when they sniffed an opportunity.

With the rapid development of industry in the final decades of the 19th century, the conditions of popular unrest changed radically. During the second half of the 19th century, the various nationalities and social classes had been gradually drawn into an empire-wide social and political culture through the development of railways, military conscription, the spread of primary education and of newspapers. Many younger male peasants were now literate and had the experience of army life, factory labour, and travel on the rivers and railways. Some of them had come into contact with political ideas, on their journeys, through reading

newspapers, or through the efforts of activists to reach them at their workplace. They had a fuller sense of how their own grievances and humiliations were experienced by others and of how they might act together to assert themselves as citizens and gain greater control over their own lives.

An urban working class appeared, concentrated in the largest cities. Many of them were peasants seeking new sources of income. When they came into the city, they would seek to create for themselves forms of social life familiar from the village. Many of them lived in *zemliachestva* (groups of workers from the same province) and worked in *arteli*, each with its own *starosta* (elder). They agitated to be treated politely by managers, that is, not as 'serfs', and to be allowed to elect worker representatives to mediate in disputes. SRs and SDs organized study circles, to teach workers the elements of socialism and give them experience of acting together to defend their interests. The government, however, regarded their demands, and the accompanying strikes and demonstrations, as political subversion.

The first mass workers' movement was mobilized by an activist priest, Gapon, with the tacit support of the Metropolitan of St Petersburg. Gapon believed it would be best if the workers achieved their aspirations to civil freedoms and political participation through the action of the Tsar. He organized a workers' demonstration in St Petersburg in January 1905 to present a loyal petition. The demonstrators requested the right to strike and to have a permanent committee of elected worker representatives in the factories. They also made political demands, for a constituent assembly and the rule of law. Unaccustomed to facing this kind of mass protest movement, the government got cold feet and at the last moment tried to ban the march, which went ahead anyway. Poorly briefed troops panicked, fired on the procession, and killed at least a hundred people.

News of the massacre, immediately dubbed 'Bloody Sunday', spread rapidly throughout Russia. Its resonance was especially powerful because most Russians, whatever they thought of their local bosses, regarded the Tsar as a benign 'little father'. It prompted a surge of violent discontent among most social classes and ethnic groups. The socialist parties became involved in many of the protests, helping to organize them and give them political direction, but the demands being put forward were similar everywhere and derived from the universal desire for civil freedoms, greater self-government, and participation in politics both locally and at the centre. Peasants met in their village assemblies, and discussed national politics, sometimes with the assistance of a schoolteacher or political activist. Then they drew up petitions, still mostly couched in terms of loyalty to the Tsar. At the top of their list was the demand for an end to private landed property and the transfer to them of all non-peasant land, to be administered by their own communities. As a village in Vladimir province declared, 'Land must not be a thing that can be traded. It must belong to the people, so that everyone has access to it and everyone can apply his labour and live off it.' Then came demands for fairer taxation, universal free primary education, full civil rights, and a legislative assembly elected by all the people. What this amounted to was completing the agenda of the 1860s reforms.

The demands of workers were very similar, since, after all, many of them were peasants working away from home, and even those who were not felt a common sense of oppression. Understandably, they showed greater concern for political rights and somewhat less for questions of land tenure; and they had specific demands, such as the eight-hour working day, the right to strike, 'normal' wages, and the right to participate in factory management.

Altogether, the demands of workers and peasants showed how far ordinary Russians had advanced towards an understanding of general political problems and felt entitled to participate in their solution. No less remarkable were their modes of self-organization

and action in 1905–6. They based themselves on their traditional collectivities to devise new forms of association and direct – sometimes violent – action. Peasants met in their village assemblies to consult on the most appropriate steps: some decided to harvest the landowner's crops, fell his timber for their own use, or graze their cattle on his meadows; some refused to provide labour for his estate; some went further and raided the manor house, taking everything they could use and expelling the owner, then in many cases burning down the house so that he could not return. Usually they insisted on acting unanimously and together, so that if the authorities re-established control, they could not single out ringleaders.

Industrial workers called meetings first of all at factory level, but then in many cases elected delegates to a city-wide 'Council of Workers' Deputies' – a soviet – to decide whether a general strike was needed, to organize it if so, and to take over municipal government while it lasted. Here, at enthusiastic but stormy meetings, held in a large hall or even on a river bank, workers thrashed out a common policy together. This was the closest to direct democracy that could be implemented in practice: all workers usually had the right to attend soviet meetings, to speak if not to vote, and to recall their delegates if they proved unsatisfactory. The largest soviet, that of St Petersburg, chaired by SD Lev Trotsky, ordained a general strike in October 1905 which quickly spread to other cities. It was decisive in forcing the Tsar to make serious political concessions.

Soviets were effective, then, in channelling workers' desire for resolute action. But they had a serious downside. Village assemblies worked well because they were reasonably compact. Urban soviets were huge and chaotic affairs, products of improvised organization in a crisis, and difficult to convert into stable institutions. That made it easy for demagogues or well-organized political parties to take them over – a fateful weakness, as we shall see, in 1917. Here the absence of in-between associations mediating between people and government made itself painfully felt.

The State Duma

Under pressure from the revolution, in October 1905 Nicholas II launched much the most ambitious attempt yet to create an institutional link with ordinary people. In the October Manifesto, he announced the creation of a State Duma, a legislative assembly to be elected by a multi-stage procedure which included most of the adult male population but gave more direct representation to urban and rural elites. In future, the Manifesto pledged, no law would take effect without the Duma's consent. This promise patently limited the Tsar's powers, but nevertheless in the fundamental laws which gave shape to the new politics, he was still referred to as the 'autocrat'. Besides, an upper house, the State Council, was placed alongside the Duma; half of it was to be appointed by the Tsar, while the other half was dominated by the nobility. An air of ambiguity surrounded the new politics from the outset: was this an autocracy or a constitutional monarchy?

The appearance of the Duma stimulated the formation of political parties as a link between the population and their representatives. Socialist parties were able to leave the underground and organize legally to contest elections. Professional people were best represented by the Constitutional Democratic (Kadet) party, which favoured a parliamentary government, radical land reform, and far-reaching autonomy for the nationalities.

The Duma might have become an effective intermediary between government and people if the workers, peasants, and non-Russian nationalities had felt that it gave them a reliable means of feeding their views into the political arena. They tried to treat it as such: mass participation in the first elections in 1906 was very high. The result was a Duma whose majority put forward the kind of programme one would expect from peasant petitions, with the demand for radical land reform in pride of place. The government set its face against this demand, and dissolved the Duma before it had lasted three months. A Second Duma, elected in the same

way, gave similar results. It seemed as if the outcome of the abrupt experiment with a popular legislative assembly was to be a fruitless confrontation between it and the regime.

The government dissolved the Second Duma too. That might have been the end of the Duma as an institution. But government had also been strengthened by the creation of the post of prime minister. Its holder, Petr Stolypin, had a broader political vision: he insisted the Duma should continue, though with a reduced franchise, which gave the dominant position to landowners, urban elites, and Russians; some non-Russians lost their voting rights altogether. His intention was to strengthen the monarchy by providing it with an institutional base among the empire's elites and thus create a political Russian nation.

As part of his plan, Stolypin endeavoured to release peasants from the village commune and make them full citizens, in order to promote modern commercial farming and create a politically loyal class of small landed property owners. The Third Duma passed his reform. But the distance between the state and the people was revealed yet again. Stolypin's vision foundered on a complex and many-faceted rural reality. Most peasants, even if they wished for more freedom to engage in the market, still needed to participate in the decisions of their village community, and still wanted the security provided by the communal safety-net. Many villagers passively or actively resisted the claims of those who wished to separate their land from the commune's, usually because separation disrupted communal arrangements (for crop cycles or pasturing livestock, for example) and threatened to restrict the freedom the commune still enjoyed to redistribute land periodically according to its own criteria. Even where wholesale retitling and enclosure of the land was carried out, officials discovered that communes continued to govern many aspects of land use as before.

Stolypin soon found himself in a hard place between the Duma and the Tsar. Nicholas had granted the October Manifesto

reluctantly and hankered after downgrading the Duma once the revolutionary movement had subsided. He was supported by many courtiers. At the same time, the nobility, using their bastion in the State Council, resisted Stolypin's other proposed reforms, which would have weakened their hold on local government and justice, the education system, and the armed forces. Stolypin, for his part, was murdered in 1911, in circumstances that have remained obscure.

The First World War

The engaged and articulate political public had greatly increased as a result of 1905. The number of newspapers and journals grew exponentially, and they attracted readers from social classes which the press had hitherto scarcely reached. Censorship was much weaker, so that considerably more information was now available, and controversial issues were discussed in a lively and accessible language. The result was that, when war broke out in 1914, politics had become much more raucous and confrontational than before 1905.

War nevertheless offered a last chance to create national unity. When it broke out, massive crowds flooded on to the streets to cheer the Tsar. The Duma voted war credits and then prorogued. *Zemstvos* and municipalities offered to take over medical care and other services for the army. 'Civil society' was being created in emergency mode.

The effect was not durable, however. Military defeat, notably the loss of Poland in 1915, faltering ammunition supplies at the front, food shortages, profiteering, and inflation in the rear all revived the pre-war confrontational mood, intensified now that so much was at stake. One result was the abrupt desacralization of the image of the monarchy. Nicholas's reputation, sullied by Bloody Sunday, was further damaged by military defeat – a crucial matter for a Tsar. Further damage was done by the disreputable antics of

Grigorii Rasputin, a Siberian sectarian 'holy man' who had wormed himself into the Empress's confidence by being able to staunch the bleeding of her long-awaited son, Alexei, who had haemophilia. Increasingly, Rasputin influenced court and even government appointments, exploiting his power to make sexual conquests among high society ladies. To the newspapers, the mixture of heresy and debauchery in high places proved irresistible, and the public was entertained with lurid tales about his behaviour. The fact that the Empress was German (a perfectly normal situation in royal families) compounded the widespread suspicion, even amongst the most loyal, that corruption and treachery were infecting the court.

In February 1917, demonstrations over food shortages combined with workers' grievances to bring hundreds of thousands on to the streets of Petrograd (as the capital had been renamed). Placards appeared demanding an end to the war and to autocracy. Politicians decided the time had come to demand Nicholas's abdication and sent a delegation to him at military headquarters. Most of the generals, whose priority was a united nation backing the army, concurred that Nicholas had become a liability. He duly abdicated in favour of his brother, Grand Duke Mikhail. The latter, dismayed by the anti-monarchical feeling in the capital, declined the throne.

The 1917 revolution

Russia was suddenly without a monarch, for the first time for three hundred years. Duma politicians set up a Provisional Government to head the war effort and plan reforms pending a Constituent Assembly, which would be elected to decide the future form of Russia's government. Immediately at its side appeared another institution, designed to represent the masses rather than the elites: encouraged by the political vacuum, the workers and peasants, now reinforced by soldiers and sailors, hastened to resuscitate their most effective political weapon of 1905, the