Tsarist Russia before the 1905 Revolution
By Charlie McMillan Summons

RUSSIA UNDER TSARDOM

'The conditions in Russia around 1900 resembled those in pre-1789 France in that the country also lacked freedom of speech and representative institutions.' - Richard Pipes

The Players:

Tsar Alexander III:
- Although not related to the AoS, it is good to understand what this person was like compared to Nicholas II:
  - 'Looked like an autocrat'
  - Used ministers well
  - Centralized power
  - Keen drinker and died in 1894 from kidney disease (ha)
- What he thought of Nicholas II, his son:
  - Weakling
  - Imbecile
  - "Don't tell me you never noticed the Grand Duke was a dunce."

Tsar Nicholas II:
- Knew nothing about 'Russia'
- Bored at politics from a young age
- Incompetent
- Indecisive
- Family man
- Liked to divide power among ministers as he hated powerful ministers
- Truly believed he was chosen by God
- Did what was 'good' for Russia (vital point in his abdication)
- "I am not prepared to be a Tsar. I never wanted to become one." - Himself

'Possessed all the talents and charms of an English public schoolboy... It was no the 'weakness of will' that was the undoing of the last Tsar but, on the contrary a wilful determination to rule from the throne.' - Orlando Figes
'A man who lacked every quality required of an effective autocrat except sense of duty.' - Richard Pipes
'Tsarism was a deadlocked political system drifting helplessly towards destruction.' - Manning
'Nicholas II was no longer capable of holding back to tide of a possible future social revolution now that failure in war had brought the prospect considerably nearer... also stemmed from the anachronistic nature of Tsardom and Nicholas' personal stubbornness.' - Christopher Read
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Tsarina Alexandra:
- Saw the country as the private fiefdom of the crown
- Urged Nicholas to exercise his power
- Strong Orthodox, after converting
- "No one liked the Tsarina, her sharp face, beautiful, but ill-tempered and depressed, with them, tightly pressed lips that did not please; her German, angular height did not please." - Zinaida Gippus

'Her role was much more reminiscent of Marie Antoinette, the last queen of Ancien Regime France.' - Orlando Figes

Grigorii Rasputin:
- The 'holy man'
- Supposedly extremely sexually active (although some stories say otherwise)
- Mysteriously healed Tsarvich Alexis' tumour in the groin (or, as more contemporary stories say, helped ease his haemophilia)
- Shielded by the Tsar and Tsarina and enjoyed exercising his power in the court
- Murder on 16 December 1916 by Prince Yusupov
- "He is just a good, religious, simple-minded Russian." - Nicholas II

'In fact, the much exaggerated impact of Rasputin was less a cause of collapse than a symptom.' - Christopher Read
'He was no holy man but a charlatan whose doctrine of 'redemption by sin' was but a thin veil for crude depravity. No amount of censorship could quell public curiosity and disapproval.' - Edward Acton

Peter Stolypin:
- Minister of Interior in April 1906 and then chairman of the Council of Ministers on July 1907
- Considered one of the more important ministers (out of him and Witte)
- Reformed Russia's agriculture and peasantry

The entrenched powers of the court, together with the vested interests of the church and the provincial nobility were quite strong enough to prevent that program from ever being released...
'Long before Bogrov's bullet killed him, he was politically dead.' - Orlando Figes
'Stolypin stood head and shoulders above his immediate predecessors and successors in that he combined a vision of the desirable with a sense of the possible; he was a rare blend of statesmen and politician. Witte, his closest competitor, was a brilliant and realistic politician, but a follower rather than a leader and something of an opponent.' - Richard Pipes
'Stolypin was politically destroyed by the people whom he had served and tried to save.' - Richard Pipes

Lenin:
Became revolutionary after the death of his brother and the barring of him finishing his Law course at university due to participating in a demonstration.

"Lenin is a 'leader' and a Russian nobleman, not without certain psychological traits of this extinct class, and therefore considers himself justified in performing with the Russian people a cruel experiment which is doomed to failure." - Gorky

'In Lenin, the self did not exist...the doctrinal framework had completely replaced it.' - A. Besancon (liberal)

'Lenin's word was by no means accepted as holy writ.' - Robert Service

'One either agreed with him or fought him. Here lay the seeds of the whole totalitarian mentality...This was his strength as a revolutionary and his weakness as a statesman: formidable in combat, he lacked the human qualities necessary to govern. In the end, this flaw would defeat his efforts to create a new society, for he simply could not comprehend that ordinary people wanted nothing more than live in peace.' - Richard Pipes

Trotsky:
- Better read and more flamboyant, a superior speaker and writer
- Originally a Menshevik but later joined the Bolsheviks
- One of the masterminds behind the October Revolution commanding the MRC

'Through the Revolution and the Civil War, he was Lenin's alter ego, an indispensable companion-in-arms. Once victory had been won, he became an embarrassment.' - Richard Pipes

The Political Parties (After 1905):

The Populists:
- Group that believed in:
  - Primacy of liberty and democracy
  - Idealization of the peasantry
  - Russia's path to socialism was autochthonous
  - Peasants were the leaders in transforming Russia
- Originally 'going to the people' to spread their values, they gave up when it failed and changed their name to 'Land and Liberty' and returned to terrorism (Jacobin measures)
- Gradually lost influence due to in-fighting and arrests

Social Revolutionaries:
- Came from the Populist movement and followed their ideals but widened their scope of 'people' to include workers
- Had the support of most peasants due to their land policy in regard to returning all land to the people
- Largely disorganized due to the Left (Terror) and Right (moderate) Social Revolutionaries

Social Democrats:
- Followed the Marxist idea of a class struggle
- Believed that the proletariat would triumph in the end
- Split into the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks in 1903
- Mensheviks:
Bourgeois revolution HAD to happen
Open to all revolutionaries and more disorganized
Democratic system of voting
Cooperated with other parties

Bolsheviks:
Both the bourgeois and proletarian revolution could be telescoped into one
Organized hierarchy for members
Central Committee to make all decisions
No cooperation with other parties
Workers into revolutionaries

'The driving force behind their intervention, their organizational activity and the shifts in their political allegiance was essentially autonomous and rational pursuit of their own goals.' - Edward Acton
'The prime source of the party's leverage lay quite simply in the popularity of its policies.' - Edward Acton
'For them, political and social change resulted from fundamental changes in economic relations...trade unions spelled accommodation with the status quo.' - Richard Pipes
'Leadership of their cause had to fall on the shoulders of the socialist intelligentsia...this led to the creation of a party that, both before and after the seizure of power, acted in the name of the workers but without their mandate.' - Richard Pipes

Octobrists:
Loyal to Tsar and government
Believed that dumas had paved the way for constitutional advances

'If for the liberals the highest good was liberty and for the socialists, equality, for the Octobrists it was legality.' - Richard Pipes

Kadets:
Constitutional Monarchy
Party of the intelligentsia

Union of the Russian People:
Early version of a Fascist movement
Consisted of 'The Black Hundreds' that went about through the streets killing revolutionists and Jews
Killed over 3000 Jews during two weeks after the October Manifesto
Patronized and funded by Tsar Nicholas II

Russia Under Tsarist Regime:

'The root causes of the revolution lay in the everyday working of Russian society, particularly its harsh and growing level of exploitation of peasants and workers and the rigid barriers erected against political change.' - Christopher Read
‘This kind of patrimonial regime represented the most extreme type of autocracy...It isolated the civil service from society at large, and deprived it of the talents of those who were not career bureaucrats.’ - Richard Pipes

'Capitalism was developing not only in the towns but also in the countryside. The peasantry, the most numerous class in pre-revolutionary Russia, was undergoing a process of disintegration, of cleavage.' - Communist Party

Demographics:
- Peasantry made up 85% of the population with 65% under 30 by 1897
- For every 1000 inhabitants there were 4 state officials whereas there were 7.3 in England, 12.6 in Germany and 17.6 in France
- With over 100 million peasants in 1900 there were less than 1852 police sergeants and 6875 police constables where the 40000 peasant constables were useless

Orthodox Church:
- Traditional supporter of the Tsar
- Acted as a propaganda tool in a way to bolster support from rural areas
- 'Industrial cities didn't care about religion, while peasants were uneducated about it.'

‘In a vast peasant country like Russia, where most of the population was illiterate, the church was an essential propaganda weapon and a means of social control.' - Orlando Figes

Secret Police:
- Okhrana from 1881 with overwhelming powers to intercept and read mail, arrest suspicious individuals and plant spies and informers
- All political prisoners were sent to the Peter and Paul Fortress which was:
  - The symbol of despotism
  - The 'Russian Bastille'

‘They made late tsarist Russia in many respects the prototype of a modern police state...behind this attitude lay the conviction that society - that is, everyone not in government service-was in a very real sense an enemy of the state.' - Richard Pipes

Military:
- Soldiers sworn to defend the dynasty rather than the state
- Defeats in war (Crimean, Turkey, Russo-Japanese) led to dissatisfaction among the armies
- Between 1881-1902 the budget dropped from 30% -> 18% and when WWI came along, soldiers were worse trained, equipped and serviced
- As most soldiers were drafted as a punishment, life as a soldier was on with limited rights and is often named ‘army serfdom’
- Officers from noble backgrounds were favoured over those from army school

Workers:
- 'Exploited'
- Desired better working and living conditions
- The 'proletariat' and the crux of Marxist dogma
'Some have argued that it was the most urbanized workers, those with the highest levels of skill and literacy, who became the foot soldiers of the Revolution.' - Orlando Figes on the Soviet historians (Bonnell, Koenker, Smith and McKean)

'Others have argued that the recent immigrants - those who had been 'snatched' from the plough and hurled straight into the 'factory furnace', as Trotsky put it - tended to be the most violent, often adapting the spontaneous forms of revolution associated with the countryside to the new and hostile industrial environment in which they found themselves' - Orlando Figes

'The wretched conditions in which workers lived, the drudgery of their work, and their pitiful wages heightened their sense of separateness not only from the government but from privileged society in general.' - Steve Smith

Nationalism and Russification:
- Minorities who sought independence before 1905
  - Finnish (self-rule) in 1899
  - Baltic (Social Democrats)
  - Polish (Socialist Party)
  - The Ukraine (National Party and Social Democrats)
  - Georgia (Social Democrats)
  - Armenians (dissent in 1903 but no independence)
  - Jewish (full national autonomy with Yiddish as language)
- The pyramid of ethnic groups in Russia! (imagine one):
  - Russians (44%)
  - Baltic Germans
  - Poles
  - The Ukraines
  - Georgians
  - Armenians etc.
    - Jewish
- Russification:
  - Banning of non-Russian language from schools etc. after 1881
    - Persecution of non-Russian cultures and religion
    - Effect?
    - Dissent and support for the Bolsheviks when they promised autonomy for the minorities

'A heavy-handed policy of Russification tended to push even relatively mild cultural movements, such as that in the Ukraine, in the direction of political protest.' - Edward Acton

The Social Pyramid:

'Society became almost an appendage to the state.' - Geoffrey Hosking

I just love this image:
The Rural Russia:

'Icons and cockroaches.' - Trotsky

The Peasants Modernizing:
- Inhabited 3/4 of a million rural settlements in Russia supported by the Mir
  - The Mir was a village community governed by village elders and the land commune (obschina)
- Began to break away from large families to start their own farms with partitions rising from 82,000 -> 140,000 households from 1861-84
- Literacy rates rose from 21% to 40% from 1897 to pre WWI with primary schools quadrupling from 25,000 -> 100,000 from 1878-1911
  - English, French and Russian Revolutions occurred when literacy rates were approaching 50%

The Peasants Failing:
- By 1900. 7% of peasant households had no land
- Peasant population boomed from 50 -> 79 million from 1861-97
- One in five had a plot of land less than 2.7 acres by 1900
- One in three had no horse by 1900
- 'Capitalist' peasants (those employing permanent labour) made up less than 1% of the peasants population
- 'In the small family everyone works for himself, everyone earns for himself; but if the family is large, then he doesn't end up with anything for himself.' - Razdel

Kulaks:
- Originally a term used to define exploitative peasants to the farming ones
- Bolsheviks defined it as a 'wealthy peasant'
- Stalin defined it as smallholding peasantry as a whole

The Radicalizing Peasants:
- Most peasants wanted 'volia', a concept of 'freedom and autonomy without restraints from the powers that be'

'The peasants were reduced to destitution by overpopulation, inefficient farming methods and increases in indirect taxation.' - Gerschenkron (classic view)
'The rise in government receipts from indirect taxation reflected the growing spending power of the peasants, resulting from their greater productivity.' - Simms (revisionist view)
'These arrangements entrenched a distinctive land-owning pattern among the peasantry and perpetuated the peasantry's distance from other social estates.' - Edward Acton
'Peasant revolt was sustained by rising expectations, an increasing sophistication and, in the central agricultural provinces, by the ordeal of acute land hunger shared by traditional family farmers.' - Edward Acton
'The principal legacy of serfdom, which had lasted for over 250 years, was to estrange the peasant from society at large and imbue him with the feeling that the world was a lawless place in which one survived by force and cunning. This mentality made it very difficult to mould him into a citizen...the peasant was too poor and too set in his ways to shift from extensive to intensive agriculture' - Richard Pipes

'The Russian peasant was neither socialized nor politicized. He remained an outside.' - Richard Pipes

'In spite of clear signs that agriculture was beginning to commercialize then, the agrarian system as a whole remained backward and the peasantry deeply alienated.' - Steve Smith

The Modernizing Russia (Early):

Why?:
- By the 19th Century it was clear that there was a general decline in expertise to meet the demands of a modern state:
  - Ruling elite wouldn't give way to new industrial middle classes
  - Government didn't have the resources to control or reform
  - Structure of ministries and overlapping laws
- Alexander II was keen on reforming Russia (at the beginning)

What?:
- Serfs emancipated from landlords in 1861
  - Influx of peasants looking for land and the shortage of available land was apparent
- Zemstvos established in 1864, a form of local government in the provincial and district levels
  - Weighted towards the nobles but nonetheless gave more autonomy to the rural areas
- Independent legal system with public jury trials in 1864
  - Peasants were excepted and given another form
- Censorship relaxed in 1805
- Autonomy to universities 1863
- Reform to primary schools 1864
- Military modernized 1863-75
- Plans for limited Constitution started in 1881
- However, Alexander II changed his mind for fear that he was destroying his own hold on autocracy and started to reverse the reforms
  - Alexander II was assassinated in 1881 and Alexander III continued his reversal of reforms

Effect?:
- What had begun as the beginnings of a constitutional democracy/monarchy was shattered
  - However the radicals had their first taste of freedom and demanded more

The General Change in Civil Society:

'Russia's industrial working class grew out of the peasantry.' - Richard Pipes
General:
- New middle stratum between aristocracy and the peasants and working class
  - Some historians call it the 'middle class' but others deny it and state that it was too fragile to be named
- Educated liberals started to talk about serving society rather than the tsarist state
- Higher education and knowledge (between 1860-1914):
  - 6900 university students
  - 856 public newspapers
  - 1600 public bodies

The Russian Intelligentsia:
- Those who thought of themselves as intelligentry and were set apart as a sort of sub culture
- Parallels with the citizen-nobles in the French Revolution, those who wanted to go out and serve the 'people'
- Nevertheless it was these people that started most political parties and voiced their demands for reforms
- Lenin: 'The intelligentsia is called the intelligentsia because it most consciously, most decisively and most precisely expresses the development of the new class interests and political groupings in society as a whole.'

'It meant by definition a stance of radical and uncompromising opposition to the Tsarist regime.' - Orlando Figes

'A radical minority of the intelligentsia took their criticism beyond intellectual dissent, broke their ties with conventional society and made a conscious commitment to the revolutionary overthrow of the tsarist order.' - Edward Acton

'The lofty and democratic values with which some of the intelligentsia began became overlaid by a ruthless devotion to revolution for revolution's sake.' - Richard Pipes

'Intelligentsia initiative was successful only when it reflected basic popular impulse.' - L. Engelstein (libertarian/revisionist)

'The existence of such an intelligentsia created, in itself, a high risk of social upheaval...the fact that the intelligentsia rejected any accommodation with those who governed Russia, that it exacerbated discontent and opposed reform, made it unlikely that Russia's problems would be resolved peacefully.' - Richard Pipes

The Rise of Marxism in Russia:
- Marx's 'Capital' released in Russia in 1872
- Until 1890 the Marxists and Populists shared ideas (until the Populists reverted to terrorism)
- Adapted Plekanov's theory to bring a post-capitalist society into a pre-capitalist one whilst using 'mass agitation' among groups of workers as propaganda in the 1890's and onwards
- "With the optimism of youth we had been searching for a formula that offered hope, and we found it in Marxism. We were also attributed by its European nature." - Valentinov

'Where Populism offered an archaic vision of peasant Russia - a land of pogroms and discrimination against Jews - Marxism offered a modern and Western vision.' - Orlando Figes

'Without knowing it, the populists acted as the expression of the bourgeois-democratic aspiration of the peasantry.' - R.V Filippov (Soviet)

'No class in Russian history has had a more momentous impact on the destinies of that nation of indeed of the modern world.' - M. Malia (liberal)
'They established a tradition of terroristic conspiracy by dedicated and disciplined intellectuals who would seize power in the name of the masses.' - R. V Daniels (liberal)

The Famine of 1891 Onwards:

Why?:
- Lack of rain (none in Tsaritsyn for 96 days)
- Lack of snow to protect plants
- Crops were small and burnt by the sun

What?:
- By autumn the famine had spread to 17 provinces, from the Urals to the Black Sea
- Where Cholera and Typhus struck as well and killed over 500,000 by 1892
- Government held back food deliveries until it had 'statistical proof' and had postponed the ban on cereal exports until several weeks into the famine
- In the end the government issues an order for the public to form a voluntary organization to help with famine relief

Effect?:
- People lost hope in the government
- Debates in the causes of the famine and on reform needed to prevent its reoccurrence sparked in 1901 the establishment of the Socialist Revolutionary Party and Neo-Populism
- Reaffirmed Marx's economic laws

'The moment when Russian society first became politically aware of itself and its powers, of its duties to 'the people', and of the potential it had to govern itself. It was the moment, in a sense, when Russia first became a nation.' - Orlando Figes

'Politically this was to prove a historic moment, for it opened the door to a powerful new wave of public activity and debate which the government could not control and which quickly turned from philanthropic to political.' - Orlando Figes