

## **How far do you agree that the revolution of the 1905 was mainly the result of the repressive policies of Alexander III (1881-1894) and Nicholas II (1894-1917)?**

When considering the main causes of the 1905 revolution, it is hard to pinpoint just one factor as the main cause. It was not a planned revolution; it occurred due to a buildup of tension and unrest all across Russia. As well as the repressive policies, there are many other factors to take into account, such as the Russo Japanese war, political problems, economic and social problems, and the activities of the Reformist and revolutionary.

The Social and Economic state in Russia was a major cause of the 1905 revolution. Before 1905, most of the rapidly growing Russian population was in poverty - over 80% were peasants. In 1905, the population had increased by 27 million since 1885, which led to a serious problem; the growing demand for peasant landholdings could not be met. Although peasants could get by on good harvests, there was always the risk of a harvest failure, such as the ones in 1892, 1898 and 1901. These caused a famine which then led to a major period of unrest along the peasants, which was a serious problem as they made up most of the population. The unrest grew as taxes rose, and the agriculture was pretty much the only industry that wasn't thriving rapidly under Witte. Due to this, slums sprung up all over Russia as many peasants had moved to towns and cities hoping to find jobs. This widespread poverty among the peasants caused unrest the majority of the population who were willing to fight for change. Peasant revolts rose all across the country, showing everyone that the Tsardom was not working for most people.

Another major factor to take into account is the Russo-Japanese war, which significantly undermined support for the tsardom. Not only did Russia fail at expanding its empire, but it lost to Japan. Russia, being the massive country that it is, was very proud of its military. The fact that a tiny country like Japan managed to beat Russia in war caused a massive amount of humiliation; they were forced to hand over their Port Arthur naval base, they were defeated again in Manchuria by Japan, and their biggest defeat was at The Battle of Tsushima, where Russia lost 25 out of their 35 warships. This great humiliation caused significant unrest amongst Russians. Defeats carried on once the revolution had begun, which further encouraged people to revolt.

In addition to these factors, Bloody Sunday is another event that took place that crushed the support for the Tsar. However, Bloody Sunday is difficult to completely categorize as a 'disaster'. This is because although it was a protest, Father George Gapon, the leader, had many links with the government - he was a double agent for the Okhrana.

This meant that the government had some control over the protest; without Gapon leading it, it could have got a lot more out of hand. Bloody Sunday in a way could be seen as a puppet protest, where the people were made to feel like they were revolting but in reality what they were doing was monitored by the government. However, things didn't turn out like the government had hoped. Bloody Sunday did still undermine support for the Tsar, controlled or not. It was supposed to be peaceful, and many people thought that Nicholas II, who was often seen as the 'little father' of Russia, would listen to them. The march was stopped short by the Tsar's ministers, many of whom fired right into the crowds, and marchers were wiped out with sabres at the Troitsky bridge. By the end of it, two hundred people were killed with more than 800 wounded. Bloody Sunday was the start of the revolution, causing protests and strikes to pop up all around Russia which eventually led to Nicholas II issuing the October Manifesto.

However, some of these events would not have even occurred if it weren't for the repressive policies of Alexander III and Nicholas II. The Statute of State Security that Alexander III issued in 1881, described as a 'temporary measure' to help cope with an emergency. However, there was nothing temporary about it - it stayed in place until 1917. It was the first of the repressive policies enforced. Courts which worked around the legal system at the time were set up by the tsardom and all the more liberal judges who would be likely to sympathise with opponents to the tsardom were removed from office. This was the start of the revolution - people were beginning to be repressed and controlled to the point where the tension would become too much. The Okhrana were given more power, and the press was closely monitored. Russia became censored. The University Statute, 1887, was another repressive policy in which the government strictly controlled universities, meaning that the next generation to come out of higher education would only have learned a curriculum approved by the tsardom, most likely making them more loyal to the Tsar. The Zemstva Act, 1890, took power from local councils and allowed the government to get involved in their meetings and decisions.

Russification was one of the biggest repressive policies, issued by Alexander III, meant to restrict Russia's national minorities. Russian was officially made the first language of Russia, trying to enforce a more traditional Russia. There were a vast amount of minorities in Russia, and as it is such a massive country covering a wide range of the world, having one language for the whole stretch of the country caused huge problems. The Jewish people of Russia suffered the worst, with over six hundred measures introduced to restrict and repress them further. They were easy scapegoats for the government to pin their problems on, so anti-semitism rose around Russia. This caused racial tension, which was not a good mix to add to the already tense atmosphere in the

country. Large amounts of Jewish people were involved in the various revolutionary groups.

Overall, it is hard to say which single factor single handedly contributed to the revolution of 1905 the most. It was more a combination of different tensions, policies and events. However, if it wasn't for the repressive policies of the Tsar's in the first place, most of the tensions and events would not have occurred; if the Russian people didn't feel so restricted and so repressed, they would have had less means to revolt against the government.