

The Russian Constitutional Monarchy, 1907-17

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The defeat of the revolution of 1905 afforded the absolutist Tsarist monarchy an opportunity to reform the administration and to seek a new basis of support in place of the declining gentry class. Historians have been divided ever since over the constitutional system's chances of success. Had Tsardom advanced far along the path of Westernisation before 1914? Was the Great War the major cause of the February Revolution? Or was a new revolution in the process of gestation in the period 1912 to 1914? This pamphlet seeks to re-evaluate the constitutional monarchy in the light of recent research.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to the Radio Times Hulton Picture Library for permission to reproduce all the illustrations in this pamphlet and that of Tsar Nicholas II on the outside front cover.

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Filmset by Cox & Wyman Ltd.,
London, Fakenham and Reading
and Printed Offset Litho in Great Britain
by Hart-Talbot Printers Ltd.,
Saffron Walden, Essex.

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Glossary of Terms

All dates in this pamphlet are given in the Old Style. Until February 1918 the old (Julian) calendar remained in use in Russia. In the nineteenth century the Julian calendar was 12 days behind the new (Gregorian) calendar in use in the rest of Europe and 13 days behind in the twentieth century.

commune, an economic unit characterized by the common ownership of land.

Duma, the Russian parliament

factions, the parliamentary (Duma) groups of the political parties

guberniia, a province

pud, a measure of weight; 1 pud equalled 36.112 lb

Stavka, the General Headquarters of the Russian Army in the First World War

uezd, a district

ukaz, Imperial edict

zemstva, elective units of local self-government at the provincial and district level

Introduction

Until October 1905, Imperial Russia was in the formal sense an absolute monarchy in which the Emperor exercised supreme and unlimited executive, legislative and judicial powers. In practical terms the Empire was governed by ministerial despotism – by a centralized bureaucracy whose arbitrary authority was maintained by an omnipotent political police controlled by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In class terms the autocracy rested upon the land-owning gentry who furnished the upper echelons of the bureaucracy and the officer corps of the army. The nationwide strikes and disturbances which broke out after the shooting of workers demonstrating peacefully in St Petersburg on January 9th, 1905 compelled the Tsar, Nicholas II, to issue the Manifesto of October 17th pledging civil rights and popular representation in a national legislature.

This successful challenge to the monarchy's prerogatives issued from the two distinct elements of Russian society – the rural and the urban. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Imperial Russia remained – as Count Witte observed in a memorandum of March 22nd, 1899 – 'essentially an agrarian country . . . We are in some ways a colony, selling our raw materials abroad'.¹ Of a population of 125 million in 1897, a mere 12,870,000 could be classed as urban. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century deep-rooted causes increasingly impoverished the peasantry. First, population doubled from 73 million in 1861 to 140 million in 1905. Second, the Emancipation Statute of 1861 freed the serfs but instituted redemption payments for the strips allocated to them. The act failed to replace the prevalent communal systems of peasant farming by private land ownership. Periodic redistribution of holdings among the peasant households, in conjunction with the growth in population, resulted in a multiplicity of minute strips in open fields, and so retarded the adoption of modern farming techniques. Joint communal responsibility for redemption payments militated against an influx of peasants into

urban centres. The consequence of rural overpopulation, mass illiteracy and the increasing incidence of peasant impoverishment was the reappearance in 1902, 1905 and 1906 of a spontaneous peasant movement. Its goal embraced 'Land and Liberty' – freedom from the oppression of the local police officials and expropriation of the estates of the landowners.

Many of the landowning gentry were themselves enduring a decline in their fortunes. As a result of a shortage of capital, the abundance of cheap labour and a fall in world grain prices after 1870, the former serf owners failed to turn themselves into capitalist farmers. Instead of the direct farming of their estates for cash crops, most landowners managed their property for personal consumption by means of leases or sharecropping. Gentry indebtedness mounted. When the Government actively promoted industrial growth in the 1890s and accelerated peasant impoverishment by forced exports of grain, an opposition movement emerged among a minority of the gentry.

Rapid industrialization also fostered for the first time in Russia modern industrial urban centres. Although the urban working class remained numerically small (2,609,000 in 1908), it was concentrated in large plants in a few strategic areas – the Donbas in the Ukraine, Riga, Moscow and St. Petersburg. Low wages, wretched living conditions and the strangeness of city life fostered from 1895 a strike movement economic in motivation and spontaneous in character. The Russian Social Democratic Labour party, founded in 1898, was not the beneficiary of labour unrest. As a result of intellectual divisiveness and police repression, the socialists established at best tenuous links with the working class before 1905. The progress of industry and commerce was accompanied by the promotion by the zemstva of rural education, medical and veterinary services.² The outcome was the emergence of an industrial and professional middle class seeking the removal of limitations and restraints on its participation in the affairs of state. The foundation of the Union of Liberation in 1904 brought together representatives of the gentry, professional classes, and democratic intelligentsia into a nationwide organization dedicated to political emancipation. The drawing together of all these diverse sources of opposition into a united, if temporary, alliance during the national general strike of October 1905 proved sufficient to force Tsardom to yield.

As a result of the broad suffrage granted by the electoral law of December 1905, the First Duma (1906) and the

Second Duma (1907) were dominated by the liberal and socialist opposition which attempted to pass legislation expropriating the estates of the gentry. The President of the Council of Ministers, P. A. Stolypin, amended the electoral system by the law of June 3rd, 1907 in order to ensure a majority in the Third Duma for property owners and citizens of Great Russian nationality.³ Government and society were now confronted with a fundamental choice. 'The key question', asked the report of the Progressist faction in the Fourth Duma, 'is "is the peaceful renovation of the country possible?" Or is it possible only by internal revolution?'⁴ Either the monarchy would seek to foster political and social stability by the adoption of measures redressing the grievances of its subjects, or the diverse forces of the opposition would regroup for a new and perhaps fatal assault.

Historians have been sharply divided in their assessments of the purpose and probability of success of the policies pursued by Tsardom in the period of the '3rd of June system'. There have emerged two contradictory points of view: an evaluation emphasizing the evolutionary tendencies within Russian society after 1907 and attributing the downfall of the Romanovs to the impact of the Great War; and a contrary interpretation accepting the inevitability of revolution resulting from the deep fissures in the country's political and social framework and regarding the Great War as merely exacerbating social tensions.

The evolutionary argument is that the period 1907 to 1914 witnessed a process of political and social stabilization, rapid progress towards Western parliamentary government and an open society. H. Seton Watson, for example, argues in his *Decline of Imperial Russia* that the political and economic development of the Empire in this period supported the contemporary Menshevik contention that Russia was rapidly drawing nearer to Western Europe. In the realm of politics, Stolypin attempted to win the loyalties of the disaffected gentry and professional classes by collaboration with their representatives in parliament in a programme of modest renovation of the state structure. The counterpart to the Government's efforts to widen its basis of political support, was the agrarian reforms—the creation of an independent landowning peasantry. These trends were paralleled by the spread of universal primary education. The renewal of economic growth after 1909, it is contended, fostered social calm. The economic position of labour was improving and, as A. Gerschenkron asserts,

'the Russian labour movement of these years was slowly turning towards revisionism and trade union lines'. The Bolshevik party existed in a state of paralysis by 1914 – isolated within the Social Democratic movement, its illegal organization disrupted, its financial position perilous. The protagonists of the evolutionary thesis conclude with J. Walkin in his *The Rise of Democracy in Pre-Revolutionary Russia* that 'a revolutionary situation was remote in 1914 . . . the war was an essential prerequisite for the outbreak of the February revolution'.⁵

Soviet historians reject this interpretation. Following Lenin, they regard the constitutional concessions of 1905 as the adaptation of the feudal monarchy to a bourgeois era. They argue that Stolypin's political system began to collapse as early as 1910. The period after the massacre at the Lena goldfields in April 1912 was marked by strikes, political in character, revolutionary in temper. The revived labour movement was dominated by a mature, class-conscious, proletariat, directed by a reinvigorated and purified Bolshevik party. The St. Petersburg general strike in July 1914 indicated that an all-nation general strike had begun. But 'the onset of revolution', observed A. L. Sidorova, 'was broken off by the world war in which the Tsarist government . . . sought its salvation'.⁶

A number of Western historians also dissent from the optimistic evaluations of their colleagues. L. Haimson contends that a dual polarization occurred in Russian society between 1907 and 1917. On the one hand, a restless working class became estranged from the educated strata; on the other, the remaining bands were broken between liberal society and the regime. Although the latter process took place in isolation from the labour movement, it added 'decisive weight to the pressure against the dikes of existing authority'. T. von Laue argues that Imperial Russia found herself trapped in a contradiction precluding the establishment of liberal, constitutional government. As a member of the European state system and as a great power desirous of global pre-eminence, the autocracy was compelled to Westernize. But the rapidity of her industrialization – 'an inexorable process' – intensified existing social tensions.⁷

The Prospect of Political Stability, 1907–14

The Fundamental Laws of April 23rd, 1906, implementing the assurances of the October Manifesto, transformed the unlimited autocracy into a constitutional monarchy. The institution of civil liberties and an elected parliament with legislative, rather than consultative, functions promised at last to provide the educated public with a legal means to limit the bureaucracy's frequent contraventions of the law, and with an effective voice in the affairs of state. Although the political concessions stopped far short of a democratic, parliamentary regime (the franchise was severely limited and ministers, drawn from the bureaucracy, were responsible only to the Tsar who appointed them), the Duma enhanced the likelihood of further political evolution along a peaceful, non-revolutionary path. The probability of political stability, however, depended upon more than the mere existence of a parliament. The attitudes of the Tsar, the court and bureaucracy towards further political change; the ability of the administration to adopt coherent reforming policies; the character and programmes of the political parties formed after 1905 – all exerted a significant influence. An examination of these factors would suggest that the omens for further non-violent advance along the constitutional road were not auspicious.

The legislative record of the Third Duma (1907–12) testified the genuine desire to refurbish the structure of Imperial Russia and the possibility of successful participation, at least by the privileged sectors of society, in the governance of the realm. Parliament passed agrarian reforms. By the law of May 3rd, 1908 it enacted universal, compulsory, free elementary education. The Insurance Law of June 23rd, 1912 for the first time instituted payments to workers for injuries or illness at work. The Empire was developing into a more open, pluralistic society in which the state found itself compelled in policy-making to take note of and to be influenced by specific interest groups now permitted to organize themselves at a public, national level. The Council of Congresses of the Representatives of Industry and

Trade, for example, united industrial, financial and commercial circles in vigorous promotion of their views which suffered neglect, it was believed, by a parliament dominated by landowners. The more conservative large landowners formed in 1906 the Congress of Representatives of Nobles' Associations (or the United Nobility) to defend private property against the radical majority of the First Duma, with its programme of compulsory expropriation of landed properties. As a forum for the gentry estate, the United Nobility frequently utilized the easy access to court and official circles derived from familial and service ties to strengthen reactionary tendencies in many aspects of state policy.

There existed, however, a multiplicity of obstacles to the complete and permanent implementation of the promises of political change held out by the October Manifesto.

The Court and the Bureaucracy

The Tsar himself constituted a significant impediment to the expectations of constitutional progress. Nicholas II had conceded the October Manifesto only with the greatest reluctance and was determined to prevent any further diminution of imperial prerogatives. His notorious inconsistency was immeasurably strengthened by the Empress Alexandra who was a staunch defender of absolutism. At court and in the upper echelons of the bureaucracy, many officials considered that the dilution of the autocratic system in 1905 posed a threat to the state; their aim was the emasculation of the Duma and the re-establishment of the Tsar's personal powers. The political system created in 1906 afforded opportunities to such reactionaries. As the Duma was a bicameral legislature, the upper house – the State Council – enjoyed an equal share in legislation. Half the membership of the latter was appointed by the Tsar and half elected by the privileged classes. Thus the State Council became the preserve of extremely conservative former ministers and bureaucrats, and an instrument to check 'excessive' reform measures emanating from the lower house. The ability of reactionary ministers to force through their policies was enhanced by the institutional weaknesses of the Council of Ministers. This body bore no resemblance to a cabinet of a West European type and the President of the Council was not a prime minister. As ministers were responsible individually to the Tsar and not to the President, there could be no collective cabinet



Piotr Arkadievitch Stolypin

responsibility. Ministers, therefore, were able to pursue their own programmes within the competence of their departments without reference to their colleagues. Until 1911 the Council retained a relative measure of cohesion in decision-making because the President of the Council, Stolypin, exerted a dominating personality and retained the portfolio of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. After Stolypin's murder in September 1911, his successors V. N. Kokovtsov (1911-January 1914) and I. L. Goremykin (January 1914-January 1916) possessed neither the personal authority nor the political power (both were denied the Ministry of Internal Affairs at the Tsar's insistence) to impose unity upon the Council. Both Presidents proved unable to establish any uniform political direction upon the government; their cabinets were rent by bitter personal intrigues and genuine divisions over a return to complete reaction. Moreover the switch from autocracy to constitutionalism had been so abrupt that the centuries-old habits of suspicion of public initiative and of administrative arbitrariness could scarcely be eradicated from the bureaucracy in a short space of time.

Almost alone within the administration after it had recovered its nerve by 1907, Stolypin continued to argue that the monarchy's survival depended upon further political and social reform. He sought to reconcile educated opinion to the Government by co-operation with the Duma in the implementation of moderate improvements. In the years 1907 to 1909, the President of the Council had relied upon the Octobrists in parliament. The largest party in the Third Duma, their support rested upon the landowners of European Russia.⁸ As the 154 Octobrists fell short of the requisite Duma majority of 222, they and Stolypin were dependent upon the votes of right-wing groups. The strength of reaction in the highest spheres meant that Stolypin's 'system' was far from secure. His weak position was revealed as early as the spring of 1909. Although he had supported the legislative measure, the President concurred in the Tsar's refusal to assent to a Duma bill instituting a Naval General Staff. The revelation of his exposed position at court dictated Stolypin's adoption of policies more amenable to the right and the formation of a right-wing bloc in the Duma. The fortuitous formation of the Nationalist party in October 1909 held out the promise of a new point d'appui in conjunction with a possible split among Octobrists. The Nationalists were an amalgamation of the Duma factions of the Moderate Right and Nationalists. Their 91

deputies were for the most part Great Russian gentry landowners from the western border provinces. These landowners and the Government had been terrified by the threat to the Empire's unity posed by the nationalist movements of 1905 in Poland, the Baltic provinces and the Ukraine. Both wished to uphold the indivisibility of the Empire by an active promotion of Great Russian predominance in the western borderlands over the Polish gentry and Belorussian and Ukrainian peasantry. Therefore in order to secure his position and as a matter of considered Imperial strategy, Stolypin embarked upon an avowedly nationalist course in domestic policy after 1909. The measures comprised bills to restrict Finnish autonomy; the separation of the province of Chelm (Kholm) from Poland; the introduction of municipal government in Poland; the creation of elected zemstva in the six western provinces. The last-named measure, which was the *raison d'être* of the Nationalist party, proved to be a major factor in the disintegration of his 'system'. When the State Council rejected the clause that the ethnic groups inhabiting the western zemstva should vote in separate electoral districts on March 4th, 1911, Stolypin persuaded the Tsar by threat of resignation to pass the measure under Article 87.⁹ This intemperate political action ended his authority at court and in the Duma. His subsequent murder merely forestalled his political demise.

The Disorganization of the Government, 1911-14

The deficiencies of the Council of Ministers as an organ of administration were quickly revealed under Kokovtsov. For the reasons outlined earlier the new President of the Council failed to establish his authority over his colleagues. Lacking a grasp of court and Duma politics, he pursued his predecessor's nationalist policies in order to retain his position. Believing with some justification that political groups in parliament were fragmented, he discontinued Stolypin's efforts to create a definite government majority in the Duma. He abandoned any pretence of a reform programme, thereby undermining the moderates' hopes for collaboration with the Government. Deprived of the post of Minister of Internal Affairs, Kokovtsov fought unsuccessful rearguard actions against its reactionary incumbents - A. A. Makarov and N. A. Maklakov. Although the President had desired to help the Octobrists in the elections to the Fourth Duma in the autumn of 1912, Makarov had

intervened on a massive scale in an unsuccessful effort to manufacture a purely right-wing majority and had disenfranchised many leading Octobrist deputies. Maklakov increased subsidies to the right-wing press which Kokovtsov had curtailed and attempted to impose a reactionary mayor upon the city council of Moscow. Kokovtsov's dismissal in January 1914 was the outcome of a sustained campaign by reactionary elements at court and in officialdom, led by Prince Meshcherskii, Maklakov and I. G. Sheheglovitov (Minister of Justice). As the President of the Council respected the existing functions of the Duma, he was considered by the right to be a major obstacle to a more active policy of curtailing parliament's powers and to turning it into a purely consultative assembly. Kokovtsov also came under fire for his lack of 'aggressiveness' in his foreign policy, in particular his failure to offer a firm rebuff to German 'expansionism' in the Near East. The appointment of Goremykin – aged seventy-four and indolent by nature – ensured unprecedented freedom of action to the right. Conservative ministers now embarked upon a campaign to reinterpret the Fundamental Laws in a sense unfavourable to the Duma's authority. Challenges were mounted to parliament's rights of interpellation (i.e. the right to demand explanations of ministerial conduct) and legislative initiative. In April 1914 Maklakov threatened deputies' privilege of freedom of speech by arraigning the Social Democrat Chkheidze for an inflammatory address. It is probable that the minister hoped to utilize the Duma's resistance to his provocation to secure its dissolution.

Goremykin's 'new course' bore witness to the increasing strength of reaction in the highest spheres on the eve of the war and the unlikelihood of a compromise on a constitutional basis between Government and liberal opposition. But the extreme right encountered difficulties in the immediate realization of its objectives. In general terms the Russian right lacked cohesiveness. Many conservative landowners and officials opposed further political and social advance but refused to countenance a return to complete absolutism. As numerous deputies in the factions of the Right and Nationalists adopted such a position, the partisans of the autocratic principle failed to secure a majority in the Duma.¹⁰ Even higher officials hesitated to embark upon a further revision of the electoral law. In June 1914 the Council of Ministers rejected the Tsar's project for making the Duma consultative. Ministerial vacillation

derived in part from fear of provoking a new revolutionary wave and in part – at least in the spring of 1914 – from the necessity of securing a majority in the Duma for a massive programme of military and naval rearmament. If the outbreak of war found the Government as disunited as ever concerning the course of domestic policy, the extreme conservatives at least had recovered much ground since their rout in 1905.

The Impotence of the Liberal Opposition

By the spring of 1913 Russia's progressive public was convinced a new political crisis had emerged. It believed that the Government's conduct during the Fourth Duma elections and its reaction to the Lena goldstrike afforded eloquent proof of the abandonment by the authorities of collaboration with society in the achievement of reform. The moderates agreed that 'the government is leaving society, just as society is leaving it'.¹¹ The 'middle-classes' had been shut out of political life. The spectre of another revolution arising out of the impasse in relations between Government and Duma began to haunt the opposition. A series of public congresses in the autumn of 1913 permitted open expression of the moderates' anxieties. The resolution of the Congress of Municipal Councillors attacked 'the paralysis of all state organism, the stagnation of legislative work, the disorganization of government . . . future delay [of reform] threatens the country with conflict and fateful consequences'.¹² The progressives' inability to evolve a coherent and effective response to the gathering forces of reaction underlined liberal society's relative impotence and the frailty of the Duma as a vehicle of non-revolutionary progress.

At one level the deficiencies of the liberal movement can be explained by the peculiarities of its largest component – the Octobrist party. As the Octobrists were the largest party in the Third and Fourth Dumas, they alone offered the hope that the new political system would work.¹³ Led by A. Guchkov, the party believed that constructive collaboration between Government and Duma on the basis of the October Manifesto would achieve the social stability essential to a Russian imperialism regarded as the antidote to revolution. The expectations placed upon the party were vitiated by its ideological, organizational and social fragility. Octobrists were disparate in character and aims. Although the party leadership was drawn at first from liberal

commercial circles, the majority of its members were provincial gentry of conservative beliefs for whom the party's programme meant little. The breakdown of Stolypin's system, 1909-11, produced a prolonged crisis of identity within the party. The defection of former supporters in commercial and industrial circles to the new Progressist party in the 1912 elections and the electoral defeat of Guchkov left the leadership in the control of the conservative gentry led by M. V. Rodzianko, President of the Fourth Duma. Indeed the attempt of Guchkov at the Octobrist congress in November 1913 to compel his party to adopt a firm oppositional stance produced instead its complete disintegration. A majority of members joined the Zemstvo-Octobrists, an amorphous group of 60 deputies, noted for its paralysis of will. Their absurd indecisiveness and bitter hostility to the Kadets ensured that the possibility of an opposition majority in the Duma had vanished, as the Progressists, Left Octobrists and Kadets could muster only 121 votes.

The limitations of the opposition were also the product of historic political divisions which rendered impossible the proper utilization of the Duma's legal powers. Although the Octobrists, Kadets and Progressists all eschewed the weapon of revolution and sought a legal parliamentary solution to the political crisis of 1913/1914, they failed to reach any agreement on a common programme or on the use of the budget as a weapon of struggle. To a majority of Octobrists the Kadets remained a 'revolutionary' party and throughout the period they withheld their assent to all voting alliances with them. The Octobrists refused to reject any ministerial estimates out of fear of dissolution of the Duma. Co-operation among the opposition groups in 1913 and 1914 remained limited to the ritual verbal invective of the budget debates against the arbitrary activities of individual ministries.

But the continued Octobrist distrust of the Kadets after 1907 had little basis. The Constitutional Democrats or Kadets represented the radical section of the urban professional and intellectual classes. In 1905 and 1906 the party had flirted with the revolutionary left and adopted an uncompromising stance in the First Duma. In contrast to the Octobrists' acceptance of the new political *status quo*, the Kadets were committed to the attainment of genuine parliamentary government and universal suffrage. In the Third of June period, however, the Kadet leader, P. N. Miliukov, argued that the party's lack of a mass base and



Paul Nikolaievitch Miliukov

the dangerous consequences of its erstwhile revolutionary inclinations dictated the parliamentary route towards implementation of Kadet goals. Miliukov's strategy aimed at inducing the Government to make further concessions by proving the loyalty of the opposition and the value of co-operation between Duma and Government. Despite its more radical programme, Kadet policy as much as Octobrist expressed in essence the venerable Russian political tradition of realizing reform from above – that is from the Tsar.

The logic of Miliukov's course and the threatening political storm by 1913 dictated collaboration with the Octobrists. This desirable goal was never attained – due to Octobrist disintegration; to the Kadets' inveterate distrust of the Octobrists as supporters of the law of June 3rd, 1907; and to the fear that such co-operation would alienate the Kadets' left wing and split the party.

The Duma parties also suffered from severe defects of organization. Although they claimed to represent the interests of social groups throughout the Empire, the Duma parties lacked truly national structures. Continual governmental restrictions upon political activities (all parties to the left of the Octobrists were refused legalization) and the indifference of the educated public to party politics after 1907 promoted the atrophy of the parties' provincial branches.¹⁴ By 1913 the Octobrist party structure was almost defunct. The Kadets possessed a mere nine branches in the provinces and the Progressists none. In effect the Duma parties and politics were confined to the educated society of St. Petersburg and Moscow. The nature of the electoral system and the class composition of the liberal parties meant that the opposition lacked any organic ties with the peasantry and the working class. With the exception of the Left Kadets, who urged the moderates to admit the Duma's powerlessness and to develop extra Duma pressure by seeking the support of labour, the liberals rejected the aid of the uneducated masses. As P. N. Durnovo observed, 'between the intelligentsia and the people there is a profound gulf of mutual misunderstanding and mistrust'.¹⁵ Through fear of provoking mass anarchy, the moderates restricted their appeal to the relatively narrow circle of Russia's urban and rural elite and pursued political rather than economic and social reform. The Duma and its parties remained out of touch with the masses.

The liberals also failed to secure the active support of the industrial class. Although the Progressist party was formed in 1912 by prominent Moscow textile manufacturers with

the explicit aim of securing a greater political role for Russia's industrial class at the expense of a declining gentry, Progressists never succeeded in winning the allegiance of either the entire Moscow business world or of significant banking and heavy industry circles. The latter preferred to work through the 'apolitical' Council of Congresses of the Representatives of Industry and Trade. In a sense Russian liberalism lacked a solid bourgeois core. Heavy industry (metallurgy, engineering) and the banks were – in contrast to Moscow textiles – strongly penetrated by foreign capital and much more dependent upon the state for lucrative contracts. They did not wish to alienate the administration or to seek political power for the bourgeoisie.

By 1912/14, moreover, liberal public opinion had come to share the view of the Government that Germany rather than Austro-Hungary represented the major threat to Russian interests in the Balkans. A majority of Octobrists, Progressists and even Kadets were as influenced by Great Russian nationalist sentiments as the right. For this reason these parties could not contemplate the rejection of the 1914 military and naval estimates. The mere existence of this community of views on the conduct of foreign policy bridged the gulf between state and society and deprived the Duma of its one real weapon of parliamentary struggle – the threat of rejection of the budget.

Although the Stolypin system had collapsed and the forces of reaction had taken the offensive in 1914, the gravity of the political situation can be overestimated. The inability of the moderates to discover a mutually acceptable and peaceful solution to the deterioration in Government-Duma relations rendered their resistance pathetically feeble. By 1914 the Kadets and Progressists had joined the Octobrists in tacitly accepting a position within the Third of June system. All three parties were dependent in effect upon the Government for the implementation of their programmes. They rejected the call of the Left Kadets and the Progressist leader A. I. Konovalov to mobilize all sectors of society against Tsardom through the recreation of the Union of Liberation. In the circumstances analysed above, the opposition's decision doomed it to futility.

The Prospect of Social Stability, 1907-14

The Countryside

The progressive exhaustion of the tax-paying capacity of the peasantry – as revealed by the increasing arrears in redemption payments – and the peasant revolts in the spring of 1902 fostered within sections of the administration before the revolution of 1905 the gradual realization that the peasant commune had become a basic factor in the acceleration of agricultural decline and the promotion of agrarian unrest. The widespread rural jacquerie of 1905/1906 and the large peasant vote for the Kadets and socialist parties in the elections to the First Duma convinced even the most ardent partisans of communal tenure of the necessity of radical changes in rural relations. The manifesto of November 3rd, 1905 took the first crucial step; the abolition of redemption payments dissolved the legal ties binding the commune together. The fundamental principles of the agrarian legislation bearing Stolypin's name had been determined in fact before his accession to power.

In Stolypin's opinion political considerations constituted a major aspect of the agrarian reform. The complement to his efforts to restructure the monarchy politically was his attempt to reorientate its social base from a declining gentry estate to the peasantry. He sought to strengthen the existing order by creating a new class of independent, medium-sized landowners – prosperous, conservative in political sympathies, loyal to the regime. As he observed in his report to the Tsar in 1904, 'the natural counterbalance to the communal principle is individual ownership of property. It serves also as a guarantee of order, since the small property owner is the cornerstone of any durable political structure'.¹⁶ Stolypin's purpose was as much political as economic – to bolster Tsardom in its struggle against the forces of revolution by widening the basis of its social support.

Under the terms of the ukaz of November 9th, 1906 and the laws of June 14th, 1910 and May 29th, 1911, most restrictions upon peasant withdrawal from the commune were repealed. Peasants were permitted either to sell their plots (to other peasants or the Peasant Land Bank) or to request consolidation of their strips into individual holdings which became the private property of the head of the peasant household. The ultimate goal of the legislation encompassed the creation of compact, enclosed farms, separated from the villages, and owned by a new class of medium-sized independent peasant farmers. As the operation of the legislation was suspended at the outbreak of war in July 1914, a definitive assessment of its implementation is almost impossible. But there exists sufficient evidence to raise doubts about the reforms' probable success.

It has to be admitted that the laws achieved certain improvements. In comparison with the trickle seceding from the commune between 1861 and 1905, the seven years preceding the war witnessed a flood of departures. By 1915 30% of all heads of peasant households had applied for separation from the commune and private title to their strips, whilst 22% of peasant householders had succeeded in withdrawing from the commune. The frequency of peasant land purchases also increased after 1905. Stolypin used the Peasant Land Bank to relieve land hunger by transferring to it millions of acres of state land for sale to peasants at low rates of interest. The Government also actively promoted peasant migration from the overpopulated provinces of European Russia to Siberia, where almost five million peasants were effectively resettled between 1904 and 1913, and where dairy farming and so a prosperous free peasantry were fostered.

A more detailed examination, however, of the actual execution of the legislation tends to suggest that even before 1914 the incidence of the reform was most uneven. After the first explosive rush to leave the commune between 1908 and 1910, the rate of applications declined continuously. By 1915 only 11% of all households (1.25 million) had consolidated their strips and a mere 103,364 peasant households had set up individual farms outside the commune. Contrary to official expectations the commune failed to disintegrate after 1906 – despite all the pressures and blandishments of the bureaucracy. Three-quarters of all consolidations of scattered strips into enclosed plots of land were implemented by entire villages (i.e. communes) rather than individual peasants. The effects of the reform also

least affected the poorest and most densely populated regions, viz., the south-west and central agrarian provinces. And the enclosure of allotments by itself merely represented a first step towards the promotion of the crucial technical changes alone capable of raising the abysmally low productivity of peasant farming.

Indeed it is probable that the entire premises underlying the Stolypin reforms were false. The promotion of capitalist techniques in peasant farming presumed the rapid development of classes within the peasantry and class struggle between an emerging rural bourgeoisie (kulaks) and rural proletariat. The researches of T. Shanin have demonstrated that a process of continuous levelling within the villages checked the crystallization of rural socio-economic strata into distinct classes. The result was a cohesiveness in peasant life and the absence of class conflict within the peasantry.¹⁷ Nor did the peasantry understand Western concepts of private property. Their traditional life style moulded peasant perceptions. As the age-old forms of agriculture placed prime emphasis upon co-operation, collective work and the production of basic necessities of consumption, the peasantry assumed that the land was the collective possession of all tilling the soil with their own hands. They ardently desired the estates of the gentry but sought their redistribution to the communes rather than to individual peasant proprietors. In a word the peasantry was not 'petty-bourgeois' in the Marxist sense and detested those who quit the commune after 1906 to set up separate farmsteads. Stolypin had formulated his agrarian policies on a complete misunderstanding of the realities of the Russian countryside and the peasant psyche.

In the short-term perspective, Stolypin's reforms had contributed towards the pacification of the non-urban areas. The abolition of legal restrictions upon departure from the commune and the greater availability of reasonably priced land reduced immediate tensions in rural regions. There is little evidence that the peasant movement was other than moribund in the pre-war years. Peasant life remained centred around their own villages. The peasantry voted in elections after 1907 according to the dictates of the local landowner or priest or police official. Yet the return of rural calm was deceptive. In political terms, it was most improbable that the Stolypin reforms would succeed in creating a conservative, capitalist peasantry on the model of the Third French Republic. In economic terms, the reforms failed to raise significantly the output of Russian agriculture

– a major drawback in view of the continued upward swing of the rural demographic curve (there were 25 million births in the nine years after 1905). The pressure of this ever-expanding peasant population upon a relatively stagnant system of production – in the absence of agrarian revolution or rapid industrial growth to absorb the surplus rural masses – was liable to revive peasant unrest and longing for the properties of the gentry.

The Urban Centres

In contrast to the relative somnolence of the localities, the prospects for greater urban social stability on the eve of the war were bleak. The resurgence of heavy industry after 1909 aggravated the social problems and tensions of the cities. The consequence was the emergence in the spring of 1912 of a strike movement which proved to be neither revisionist nor moderate. The labour unrest of the years 1912 to 1914 was an expression of the political awakening of the working class and the latter's growing awareness of the inadequacy of its political rights.

It is still a matter of considerable controversy among economic historians whether the new industrial spurt after 1909 was the product of a resumption by the state of its previous role as active promoter of heavy industry or reflected the formation of an autonomous internal market. It does seem that the boom in metallurgy, engineering and shipbuilding owed much to the enormous programme of military and naval rearmament, 1911-14, a response to the military and naval disasters of the Russo-Japanese War and the expansion of the German army and fleet. In their highly successful efforts to procure and fulfil profitable government orders, St. Petersburg's large firms augmented their capital and modernized their plant. The total number of factory workers in the city grew from 158,152 in 1908 to 216,008 in 1913, 40% of whom found employment in mechanical engineering. This demand for labour was met by the migration into the capital of young peasants and by the children of workers who had settled in the city before 1905. The St. Petersburg labour force after 1910 was noted for its youth, its literacy and its single status.¹⁸ It was an explosive compound of the embittered children of hereditary proletarians whose literacy and family experience enabled them to intellectualize their situation and the new inexperienced peasant recruits disorientated by the cultural shock of the urban environment. This rapid growth of the

working class took place in a city enjoying the unenviable reputation, as a British visitor remarked, 'of being the unhealthiest and most expensive capital in Europe'.¹⁹ The consequence was extreme pressure on the city's facilities. The peasant migration was absorbed within the city rather than the suburbs with consequent severe pressure upon an already inadequate supply of working-class housing leading to a sharp rise in urban rents. The city lacked a pure water supply and proper drainage. The genuine economic and social grievances produced by the industrial growth fuelled the revival of labour unrest. The capital had become a microcosm of urban class antagonisms.

From 1907 to 1912 the labour movement had appeared moribund. But the shooting of strikers at the Lena goldfields on April 4th, 1912 sparked off strikes whose dimensions and character posed a severe threat. The number of strikers increased from 105,110 in 1911 to 725,491 in 1912 to 861,289 in 1913, reaching a peak of 1,448,684 in the first seven months of 1914.²⁰ The incidence of stoppages of a political character was remarkable; 7.9% of the total number of strikers participated in labour disputes classified as political in 1911 but 75.7% in 1912; 56.3% in 1913; and 72.1%, January to July 1914 (1,044,898 strikers, a figure directly comparable to the revolutionary year of 1905). Moreover many ostensibly economic strikes concealed a political character. The frequent occurrence of stoppages in protest against reprisals by the police or factory-owners against strike leaders; the common demand for strike pay and the cessation of fines levied on strikers; the growing aid offered by fellow-workers to factory hands on strike; the growth of sympathy stoppages; the widespread hostility towards strikebreakers, all indicated a burgeoning sense of working-class solidarity and detestation of the employers. The brunt of industrial unrest was borne by St. Petersburg province, which provided 40% of all strikers in 1912 and 1913 and 54% in 1914. And the most noticeable feature of labour protests in the capital was the preponderance of politically inspired stoppages in its metal working industries with their better educated and skilled workforce. On the other hand, economic strikes accounted for the vast majority of working days lost, 1912/1914, as politically inspired strikes normally lasted only a day.²¹ Despite the increasing length on average of economic stoppages, and the favourable circumstances of the market upsurge, workers participating in economic disputes suffered unprecedented defeats. The fierce resistance

offered by industrialists to economic strikes perhaps impelled labour to turn towards more political and revolutionary channels.

In contrast to the labour struggles of the period before 1906, the working class now possessed legal means to improve its conditions. The Temporary Regulations of March 4th, 1906 permitted the formation of trade unions. Yet unlike the experience of the factory movement in Western Europe, the battle of Russian labour for higher wages and broader political rights did not lead to the strengthening of the trade unions and the revived labour movement soon forsook the legal path. The explanation must be sought in the ambivalent attitude of the Government and the employers towards labour organizations and the debilitating restrictions placed upon them.

On the one hand the Ministry of Trade and Industry regarded strikes as a natural phenomenon in a period of economic growth. It believed that the working class could be enticed from the socialist utopias of the revolutionaries through the creation of legal labour organs – unions, a press, the medical funds, educational societies. On the other, the Ministry of Internal Affairs regarded repression as the most effective weapon of control; legal labour institutions would become merely the illegal instruments of the revolutionary parties. Although the former view had prevailed to the extent of legalizing trade unions in 1906, the latter triumphed in that the Temporary Regulations so circumscribed the unions' legal powers (they were forbidden to form strike funds or participate in collective bargaining) as to deprive them of the resources for effective functioning. The industrialists always refused to negotiate with the unions or pay wages to strikers. As a consequence the unions were emasculated. In 1913 there existed a mere 114 unions with a membership of 31,266 out of a factory work force of two and a quarter million. Outside of the two capitals and Riga, the union movement declined. The inadequacies of the professional organizations and the impotence of a minute working-class representation in a parliament dominated by property owners impelled labour to support avowedly revolutionary parties and abandon the confines of the legal method of struggle.

The defects of the trade unions as well as the dynamics of the strike movement itself between 1912 and 1914 were instrumental in the formation of the political attitudes of the working class. Until the Lena massacre, the Menshevik wing of Russian Social Democracy – with its emphasis

upon the creation of a legal labour movement on the basis of the new political freedoms won in 1905 – had enjoyed support inside Russia. It controlled the trade unions of the capital. The strikes arising from the Lena tragedy dispelled Menshevik illusions and provided the Bolsheviks with the opportunity to rebuild their shattered illegal party structure. After Lenin had seized control of the party at the Prague Conference in January 1912, the Bolsheviks set out to wrest dominance of the labour movement from the Mensheviks (in the process executing a partial retreat from their previous hostility to legal activity and from their emphasis upon the retention of the underground party of professional revolutionaries) and to implant their party cells in the legal associations, utilizing them as bases for the preparation of an armed uprising. The Bolsheviks succeeded. In the elections to the Fourth Duma, Bolshevik deputies were returned from the six major industrial centres. Although the six Bolsheviks were predisposed to act in concert with the seven Menshevik deputies and the one representative of the Polish Socialist Left party, Lenin forced a schism in the hitherto united Social Democratic parliamentary group in the autumn of 1913. The local Bolsheviks in St. Petersburg launched in April 1912 the first legal daily working-class newspaper – *Pravda* (*The Truth*). Despite its conciliatory tendencies towards the Mensheviks, the paper achieved a national (if uneven) circulation of 40,000 copies per issue by 1914, whereas its Menshevik rival, *Luch* (*The Ray*), seldom rose above 17,000 copies per issue. By the summer of 1914 the party had secured the allegiance of fourteen unions in St. Petersburg; only three remained loyal to the Mensheviks. It won the elections of labour representatives to the Insurance Council and St. Petersburg Insurance Board, established by the 1912 insurance law.

In contrast to his party's capture of the capital's legal working-class institutions, Lenin had failed by 1914 to rebuild a national illegal party organization. With the exception of St. Petersburg, in which Bolshevik ward committees were re-established, the party underground enjoyed a precarious existence in Moscow and the provinces where its branches were isolated from one another. Facing an acute shortage of cash, the party lacked effectively functioning national, regional and municipal committees. The party structure remained cellular, i.e. an existence only at the factory level. The Bolsheviks' success in St. Petersburg derived from the interpenetration of the personnel of legal



Vladimir Ilyich Lenin

and illegal labour organizations. The absence of a strong underground meant that Lenin (isolated abroad) and the party could exercise no really effective political leadership or control over the direction of the labour movement. The majority of economic strikes were characterized by a lack of organization and leadership; they were conducted by amorphous, temporary strike committees. The Bolsheviks had triumphed over the Mensheviks in that they had won over to the revolutionary path the new influx of young, literate, more politically aware workers, particularly in heavy industry. Indeed the Bolsheviks had become a more genuinely mass working-class party than ever before. But the defects of party structure, the nature of urban discontent, the radicalism and inexperience of the new recruits posed great dangers for the Bolsheviks. As Lenin perspicaciously observed to the Duma deputy Petrovskii in the spring of 1914, 'the labour movement is escaping the party's sway and striking out in an anarchic, diffuse manner'.²²

The general strike which broke out in St. Petersburg as a spontaneous reaction to the shooting of workers at the Putilov factory on July 3rd, 1914 soon validated Lenin's warning. After 100,000 workers had downed tools on July 4th, the Bolshevik Petersburg Committee, apprehending labour's mood of determination, advocated a three-day strike. The course of events, however, after July 7th sharply illuminated the Bolsheviks' lack of aspiration to convert the general cessation of employment into an armed revolt and their complete inability to restrain the impetuosity of their radical followers. The appeal of the committee, distributed by leaflet on July 10th, for a return to work met with little response. By July 12th there were still 136,000 out on strike. Youthful Bolsheviks urged a mass uprising and barricades were erected in the Vyborg district.

Developments in the labour movement between 1912 and 1914 seemed to foreshadow a prolonged period of social instability in the cities. The workers had abandoned any pretence at moderation and taken the revolutionary road. The working class was awakening politically; it had begun to look to its own efforts for salvation. The Bolshevik party had revived and won many new adherents. Yet one cannot deduce that the pre-war strike movement threatened the Empire with a new revolution. The limitations of the Bolshevik party's success were severe. As the St. Petersburg general strike bore witness, the absence of a national network of cells prevented the Bolsheviks from

converting a localized stoppage into a national general strike. The 'July Days' remained a phenomenon peculiar to the capital, evoking little response in other towns. There is no evidence that the Bolsheviks had penetrated the army; the St. Petersburg garrison loyally suppressed the disorders. As the February revolution showed, the discontent of the capital's troops would prove fatal to the monarchy. In direct contrast to 1905, both the Bolshevik party and the workers completely failed to find support among the intelligentsia and the professional classes. The eloquent silence with which educated society reacted to the St. Petersburg strike reflected the ever widening gulf between the masses and the privileged elite and the liberals' fear of mass anarchy.

In the years between the defeat of the revolution of 1905 and the outbreak of war, the regime had initiated a series of reforms which had not removed the long-term causes of urban and rural unrest. The agrarian legislation failed to raise on the requisite scale the low output of agriculture which – in the conditions of a rapid growth in population – remained the major source of potential peasant disturbances. The state had also proved unable to evolve effective policies to deal with the political awakening of the working class and the spread of revolutionary socialist doctrines. If the long-term outlook for the monarchy was bleak, it did not in the immediate pre-war years face the prospect of imminent revolution. The opposition, liberal and socialist, had proved unable to regroup for a new assault on Tsardom. The liberals were destined to be ineffectual as they refused to seek the extra-parliamentary support of the masses in the alliance of all classes and political groups which alone could overthrow Tsardom. The success of the revived Bolshevik party was confined to St. Petersburg. It was the Great War, which – by exacerbating existing social tensions to breaking-point and undermining the loyalty of the army – was instrumental in ensuring the outbreak of revolution within three years.

The Great War, August 1914–February 1917

The Military Debacle

From the point of view of the monarchy, the impact of the war upon the Imperial army was the most disastrous consequence of the three years' hostilities. Despite the defeats in the Far East, the efforts of the revolutionary parties to establish links with the troops and the attraction of looting the gentry estates, the peasant-soldiers had kept their oath in the revolution of 1905 and 1906 and suppressed all workers' and peasants' disturbances. In a variety of ways, the Great War gradually broke the army's loyalty.

The vast expansion of the army – by January 1917 14 million men had been mobilized – ensured that the miseries of the war afflicted millions more than during the Russo-Japanese hostilities. Casualties were exceedingly high. By June 1917, according to one estimate, 1.2 million had been killed, 4.2 million wounded and 3 million taken prisoner. The appalling human suffering behind these statistics and the demoralization induced by the spiral of poor hospital treatment, shortages, defeats and retreats fostered polarization between officers and men, the growth of war weariness and the desire for peace among the ordinary soldiers.

An assessment of the pace of disintegration of the Imperial army before February 1917 must distinguish between the army at the front and in the rear. In many ways the army in the field was in a much better condition by the close of 1916 than it had been for two years. The terrible deficiencies in munitions, responsible in part for the rout of the spring of 1915 and the loss of Poland, had been repaired. Indeed late in 1916 the Russian army had achieved superiority in matériel as well as men over the Central Powers. Desertions from the front remained low, although malingering, passive resistance to orders and dumb insolence were widespread. As the events of the February revolution revealed, the dynasty's greatest danger came from the vastly swollen garrisons in the urban centres in

the rear. By June 1916 over half the total number of soldiers under arms were concentrated in urban barracks. The garrisons were composed of young, raw reservists (most were between seventeen and twenty-five years old) who had just commenced their military training. On the point of dispatch to the slaughter at the front, these undisciplined soldiers became the focal point of extreme disloyalty. The threat in Petrograd (the capital was renamed at the start of the war) was compounded by the fact that the elite regiments of the Imperial Guard were decimated in the battles of the summer of 1916.

The war also undermined the fealty of the officer corps. The rate of casualties engendered a fundamental change in its largely aristocratic composition. The corps' rapid expansion in size entailed the mass promotion to the commissioned ranks of ensigns of peasant and lower middle-class extraction.²³ The new social heterogeneity of the officer corps destroyed its former loyalty. A deep political and social cleavage arose between the new junior officers (who tended to be liberal or socialist in political belief and who were unused to exerting authority) and the senior officers of gentle birth and conservative opinions.

Economic Dislocation

The efforts of the Government to tackle the problems of waging mass warfare met with greater success than many historians have been willing to admit. On the one hand, the war disrupted the normal workings of the economy and promoted the progressive deterioration of the processes of production and exchange between the producing and the consuming regions. On the other, the partnership forged in the middle of 1915 between the state and large private industry in the Special Conference on Defence promoted very rapid industrial advance in the heavy goods sector at the expense of consumer industries. But the consequences of this spurt immeasurably increased existing social tensions in urban and rural areas.

The most important single factor in impairing the normal workings of the economy was the inadequacy of the railway system. The retreat from Poland and the western provinces entailed the loss of one of the two main railway lines from northern to southern Russia. As the trunk system east of Moscow possessed only one-third of the capacity of the abandoned western track and all military freight moved from east to west, the result was the perpetual con-

gestion of the eastern routes and the blockage of the north-south axis, with enormous bottlenecks at Moscow. Due to the low priority assigned to the delivery of food-stuffs and civilian supplies, the congestion on the lines, the divided responsibility for traffic between the military and civilian authorities and poor maintenance, the scheduled delivery of food and fuel to the urban centres fell behind – 48% of total requirements in supplies actually reached the towns between January and July 1916.

The immediate effects of the war upon agriculture were not as severe as had been feared. Despite the call to the colours (as high as half all able-bodied males in many provinces) and the requisitioning of two million horses, the foundations of peasant agriculture survived intact. The large pre-war surplus of labour, horses and oxen greatly diminished the significance of the losses of animals and hands. Peasant landsowing and the output of cereals increased during the war – by as much as 10%. As a result of compensation for requisitions and the payment of allowances to dependants, peasant incomes actually rose. At the same time the introduction of prohibition reduced expenditure upon alcohol. But the breakdown of the railway network and the conversion of much industrial capacity to the production of armaments ensured a steady decline in the rural areas of the availability of articles of mass consumption, the prices of which rose faster than grain prices. In the course of 1915 and 1916 the peasants more and more retaliated by refusing to sell their grain and withdrew into a subsistence economy. Large-scale gentry farming underwent a severe contraction. The gentry estates had to contend with the loss of hired labour, the cessation of the import of farm machinery and fertilizers and the closure of foreign grain markets. The sown area of gentry farms fell by a half, thereby rendering food supply all the more dependent upon the peasantry.

Industry, too, was compelled to overcome tremendous handicaps. It lost important imports – for example, foreign cotton and coal. Native sources of supply failed to keep pace with demand. Domestic output of coal scarcely rose at all, whilst production of iron ore and consequently pig iron actually declined.²⁴ Both extractive industries suffered from the mobilization of their miners and a fall in productivity. The disruption of the railways entailed irregular deliveries of raw materials to manufacturers. In an effort to overcome these severe problems the state was compelled to intervene in the realm of private enterprise on an unparalleled scale.

In August 1915 the Government formed Special Councils on Defence, Fuel, Transport and Food Supply. These were consultative organs composed of representatives of the bureaucracy, the legislative chambers and the voluntary organizations. They were attached to the appropriate ministries with wide powers to regulate prices, distribute raw materials, control production. There remains much doubt about the impact of the ensuing flood of regulatory measures. A single central agency (the equivalent of Lloyd George's war cabinet) was never instituted to co-ordinate all aspects of supply (fuel, transport, distribution) and to allocate scarce resources between the requirements of defence and the civilian market. State intervention, moreover, took place only after prices had already risen and the distribution system had begun to collapse. The large private firms and monopolies, however, in heavy industry proved capable of adaptation to the requirements of modern warfare. With their direct links to the Special Conference on Defence, these firms overcame the supply bottlenecks. The consequence was rapid expansion in the engineering and chemicals industries and a greatly increased output of munitions. But growth was uneven and was achieved at the price of the contraction of all consumer industries.

The Urban Crisis

The cities of the Empire proved most vulnerable to the failings of the economy. Even before the war, the northern areas of European Russia – in particular St. Petersburg and Moscow – were dependent upon the grain-producing regions of the south to satisfy their requirements in food. The disruption of this normal pattern of supply and demand consequent upon the congestion of the railway system brought about in the urban centres by 1916 acute shortages of prime necessities and escalating prices. The policies pursued by the authorities and the Special Conference on Food Supply exacerbated the situation. Both concentrated their attention solely upon guaranteeing the requirements of the army and the fixed prices for grain introduced in March 1915 applied only to state purchases for the forces. Until September 1916 the municipal councils were left to feed their civilian populations as best they could. They were compelled to purchase grain, flour, sugar, meat, etc. on the unregulated open market in which the banks and traders indulged in massive speculation. The state also

rejected rationing as technically impossible. In September 1916 the authorities at last agreed to meet three-quarters of Petrograd's civilian food supplies. The result of shortages, the absence of rationing and speculation was a progressive rise in prices. If the consumer price index for Petrograd stood at 100 in December 1914, it had increased to 157 in May 1915 and 192 by December 1916.

This inadequacy of supply occurred in cities the number of whose inhabitants was growing rapidly. The urban population rose by a quarter between 1914 and 1916 – from 22 to 28 million. The reasons for this dramatic increase were the influx of refugees and the expansion of industry. In its retreat from Poland the Stavka adopted a deluded scorched-earth policy in imitation of Kutuzov's tactics against Napoleon in 1812. Some two million people were deported into the interior of the Empire. The pace of the armaments drive brought about an enlargement of the labour force of heavy industry and a contraction in textiles. In Petrograd, the total of employees in the former category quadrupled – from 61,663 in 1914 to 248,423 in 1917. The new urban inhabitants (who were mostly peasants driven out of the countryside by the collapse of the cottage industries) strained the woefully inadequate housing facilities. Inflation – the produce of a method of war finance which relied far more upon the printing press than direct taxation – struck at the real incomes of all classes. Although money wages rose significantly, particularly in the engineering sector, real wages started to decline in 1916.²⁵ For the first time middle-class incomes suffered a similar fate. The February revolution did not occur by accident in the two capitals. The urban areas endured in the acutest form all the difficulties of Tsardom's attempt to fight total war with less than total foresight or resources. Their loyalty sapped by deprivation, declining income, the irregular appearance of food and fuel and the endless queues, the cities revolted.

The Myth of Patriotic Union

The events of the July crisis 1914 confirmed the pre-war emergence of a consensus between Government and society concerning the manner and purpose of Russian foreign policy. Liberal circles were unanimous in their endorsement of the decision to go to war. They believed the Empire had embarked on a crusade to deliver from the Teutonic yoke the Slav races of the Balkans and regain Constantinople. The challenge to Russian independence posed by the out-

break of the war; the excitement aroused by fervently nationalist speeches and demonstrations; the impression of a spontaneous fervour of patriotism affecting all classes convinced the moderate liberals of the miraculous advent of a 'union sacrée', healing the divisions of political and class conflict. This attitude was clearly expressed at the Duma sitting on July 26th, 1914 when the opposition refused to extract from the administration a promise of political change as the price of its votes for war credits. The liberal parties failed to understand that their impression of a patriotic union was tantamount to self-deception. The nationalist demonstrations had concerned only the privileged classes. The lack of overt opposition by the working class to the war and the complete disappearance of strikes was in reality a reflection of its demoralization after the defeat of the St. Petersburg general strike and the police disruption of the Bolshevik underground. Nor had the Government changed its domestic course. It had accepted the recall of the Duma for one day for its propaganda value and intended to conduct the war effort without recourse to parliament.

The breakdown of the Patriotic Union was the result of an interlocking series of factors – the military disasters of the spring of 1915, the growth of voluntary organizations managed by the public, the liberals' belief in the incompetence of the administration to solve the problems of production and supply, the state's continuing distrust of public initiative.

The war immeasurably speeded up the disorganization of the Government which found itself divested of its powers by three contradictory forces – Stavka, the Tsar and the public. In the first place the law of July 29th, 1914 placed all civilian offices at the front and all military institutions in the rear under the control of Stavka. By the summer of 1915 almost half of European Russia, including Petrograd, had fallen under its competence. In many major matters (e.g. the refugees, the Jews), the generals pursued their own policies irrespective of the wishes of the civilian authorities. The consequent bifurcation of functions rendered impossible any sensible or coherent strategy in the fields of transport and supply. The decision of the Tsar to assume personal command of the army in August 1915 – taken against the advice of most ministers – hastened the decomposition of the Government. The Tsar's departure for Mogilev, which was tantamount to his abdication of the burdens of political leadership, meant a greater political

role for the Empress Alexandra in Petrograd. A confirmed partisan of complete autocracy, she was convinced there should be no further weakening of the autocratic power. Her central position, her naïvety concerning the personnel of public life, her psychological dependence upon Rasputin opened the path of advancement to ambitious careerists. As a consequence, from September 1915 to the revolution, a continuous and rapid succession of ministers took place.²⁶ This 'ministerial leapfrog', in conjunction with a complete absence of leadership from the premier B. Stürmer (aged sixty-eight, ill, and appointed in January 1916 by the clique surrounding the Empress as a replacement for Goremykin) and the institutional defects of the Council of Ministers, dealt a fatal blow at any semblance of cabinet unity or pretence of continuity in most fields of policy. Personal intrigues and the advancement of careers became a major preoccupation of high officials. Although a few capable ministers remained after September 1915, the cabinet as a whole implemented the Empress's desire for a bureaucratic counter-attack against the Duma and the public organizations. The Government abandoned any pretence at seeking constructive collaboration with the Duma in the war effort. The visible disintegration of the administration, its ineffectiveness in the management of the economy, the scandals surrounding Rasputin, the overt swing towards reaction, the unfounded rumours of feelers for a separate peace, dealt a severe moral blow to the dynasty. By late 1916, even the most conservative circles of the State Council, the United Nobility and the Imperial family itself had come to accept the necessity of a complete reversal in domestic policy, including the appointment of a responsible ministry. The Imperial couple remained deaf to all such appeals.

The bureaucracy's monopoly of the business of state was also challenged by the public organizations established at the outset of the war. The Union of Zemstva and the Union of Towns provided the greater part of all medical aid for sick and wounded soldiers, as well as relief to the families of mobilized men and refugees. Although the larger part of the funds of these institutions derived from the Treasury and their efforts met with less than success in some quarters (Zemgor, founded in June 1915 to allocate defence contracts to small factories and rural artisans, encountered insuperable economic obstacles to its operations), the voluntary organizations strengthened the belief of their leadership (mostly prominent liberal politicians) in

the efficiency and superiority of public activity over the incompetence of an arbitrary administration. This trust in the merits of public initiative was strengthened by the revelations of munitions shortages in the spring of 1915 which threw into doubt the expertise of the bureaucracy. Public opinion condemned the Government both as incapable of securing victory and as hindering the contribution of society to the war effort. The demand grew for a 'government of confidence' – a cabinet composed of representatives of the bureaucracy and the public, responsible to the Tsar, and, by free collaboration with the Duma and the voluntary organizations, better able to prosecute the war.

As in the pre-war period, the collapse of the 'social peace' left the liberal opposition with the problem of deciding its strategy. All the previous considerations influencing the course of liberal policy still applied. The Kadet leader Miliukov formulated the moderates' course. He sought to achieve a ministry of confidence by parliamentary means – by securing the recall of the Duma (on July 19th, 1915) and the creation of a right-centre majority in parliament, such a visibly patriotic and moderate majority that the Government would readily concede the opposition's claims. The exigencies of war and the patently non-revolutionary stance now adopted by the Kadets removed the former objections of the Octobrists to the establishment of inter-party coalition. The Progressive Bloc, constituted on August 24th, 1915, was an electoral alliance of Octobrists, Progressists, Kadets and Nationalists, mustering 300 votes. The Bloc's programme was deliberately reasonable and imprecise.²⁷ Its rejection of Progressist and Left Kadet demands for a responsible ministry and universal suffrage was the price paid for its very existence, and committed the liberals to acceptance of the political *status quo*. Miliukov calculated that the liberal ministers appointed in June 1915 would be prepared to grant such a mild request. The Bloc's calculations, however, went awry. The Tsar refused to make any concessions and Goremykin, ignoring the wishes of his colleagues for an accommodation with the Bloc, prorogued the Duma on September 3rd, 1915.

Despite the reactionary course pursued by the administration from the autumn of 1915 and the deepening distrust of the regime on the part of educated society, the liberal circles and the Duma proved unable to recognize the sterility of their parliamentary tactics. Adhering to their pre-war distrust of the masses and their fear of inciting mass revolt, the liberal parties of the Bloc rejected any attempt to create

an extra-parliamentary mass base. They believed the adoption of such tactics could only disrupt the war effort. The Bloc refused to bring pressure to bear upon the Government by threatening the withdrawal of the services of the Unions of Zemstvas and Towns or the legislature's representatives from the Special Conferences or a veto upon certain war credits. Indeed the Bloc was trapped by its artificial character – any attempt to have adopted any one of these courses would have split the coalition. Throughout 1916 the Bloc merely sought to persuade the Council of Ministers to accept its programme by means of parliamentary speeches and resolutions. It even ceased to exist between Duma sessions. Within the liberal camp only the Left Kadets and Progressist industrialists continued to press for less feeble tactics. Admitting the impotence of the Duma as a constructive force for change, both groups vainly urged their liberal colleagues to compel the regime to grant a responsible ministry by establishing ties with the revolutionary left and the working class. Although the Progressist textile industrialists such as A. Konovalov and P. P. Riabushinskii, controlling the Central War Industries Committee, attempted to secure working-class support through the formation of Labour Groups, the latter Menshevik-dominated bodies failed to win a mass following and the majority of industrialists completely opposed Konovalov's plans to create a legal labour movement.²⁸ As far as the liberals were concerned, the industrial bourgeoisie remained a politically inert force, preferring active co-operation with the authorities.

The spectacular development of the urban areas during the war and the decline in the workers' real standard of living stretched to breaking-point the already fragile social stability of the cities. In 1915 there were 1,034 stoppages of work and 1,410 in 1916 with 650,000 strikers. The vast majority of strikes were purely economic in character. The precise relationship between the Social Democratic parties and the revived strike movement is contentious. On the one hand, after the war's outbreak, the Bolsheviks' main sources of contact with the workers were destroyed – *Pravda* was suppressed and the six Bolshevik deputies arrested. On the other, substitutes were found in the insurance journal *Voprosy Strakhovaniia* (*Insurance Questions*) and the medical funds which sustained party cells in the factories. As in the period 1912 to 1914 a majority of strikes were probably conducted by *ad hoc* committees.

Conclusion

The overthrow of the Romanov monarchy, like all great historical events, had both long-term and more immediate causes. The latent strains and tensions within Tsarist society well antedated 1914. As von Laue has stressed, Tsardom's position within the European great power system compelled it in the 1890s to embark upon a rapid industrialization. Its armed forces had to be provided with the modern sinews of warfare in order to afford effective protection for Russian interests in the rivalries among the great powers in the 'Age of Imperialism'. But the regime had sought to preserve its antiquated political and social structure whilst introducing a modern capitalist economy. The absolutist monarchy had refused to admit to political power the industrial and professional classes created in the process of Westernization or remedy the grievances of the new working-class or an impoverished peasantry. The consequent revolutionary explosion in 1905 and the granting of the October Manifesto offered Tsardom a new opportunity to foster political and social stability.

The undoubted progress made in many spheres after 1906 gave rise to the illusion that Russia was drawing nearer to Western Europe. In contrast to the decades preceding 1905, absolutism had given way to the outward trappings of a constitutional monarchy – a national legislature, political parties, elections, a relatively free press, a restricted right of association. Sincere efforts were made to improve the condition of the peasantry and the first significant steps taken towards the eradication of mass illiteracy. But considerable doubt must exist whether the monarchy had succeeded in removing the primary causes of tension before 1914 and in creating a wider basis of support among the middle class and the peasantry as a replacement for a gentry in decline.

The agrarian reforms stood little chance of developing a conservative capitalist peasantry. In the absence of class struggle in the Marxist sense in the countryside and in the face of peasant belief in collective ownership of the

land, the premises of the Stolypin legislation were false. Most enclosures before 1914 were by village communes not individual peasants. Moreover, the failure of the Government to invest large sums in improving farming methods ensured that the productivity of agriculture remained low. With the continuous rise in the rural population, however, the peasantry could only feed the extra mouths by acquiring new lands – the gentry estates. The countryside in 1914 was still comparatively overpopulated, backward and impoverished.

The social stability of the urban areas was as much threatened by labour unrest as in the past. The unwillingness on the part of industrialists and the Ministry of Internal Affairs to permit the unfettered development of genuine trade unions and the futility of pursuing the legal method of struggle drove the working class, at least in St. Petersburg, to support the Bolshevik party which revived after 1911 and offered the prospect of a direct revolutionary assault on Tsardom. The maturation of working-class political consciousness in the pre-war years widened the gulf between the masses and the privileged elite. By 1914 the prospects for social calm in the cities were bleak – the resurgent labour movement was indeed a potent revolutionary force.

The attempt, moreover, to secure the allegiance of moderate, privileged elements of society through Stolypin's political system had broken down before 1914. Liberals had abandoned hope of the Government's support for further reform and feared another revolution arising from the political impasse in the relations between ministers and parliament. The growing strength of reaction in the highest spheres and the limitations of liberal strategy indicated the improbability of further constitutional advance.

Yet it would be incorrect to deduce from the political crisis and the wave of strikes in 1912–14 that the Empire faced an immediate revolutionary threat. The Duma proved to be a broken reed as a legal instrument for achieving further reform or for preventing a reactionary course on the part of ultra-right ministers. The liberal opposition found itself doomed to impotence by its political divisions, its dependence upon the Government for accomplishing its aims, and its distrust of the weapon of mass pressure from below to force the regime to grant concessions. The immediate threat, moreover, from the revolutionary movement was far less than it appeared. The failure of the Bolsheviks to develop an effective national underground

organization denied them proper direction of labour protest. The elemental nature of the pre-war wave of strikes deprived the workers' struggle of any central purpose. The army remained loyal and suppressed all labour disturbances. In complete contrast to 1905 or February 1917 there was no possibility in 1913/14 that the heterogeneous forces opposed to Tsardom would form the united coalition alone capable of compelling the monarchy to capitulate. The Great War intensified to breaking-point the existing stresses in the political and social framework which pre-war policies had temporarily mitigated without providing lasting solutions.

The war deepened the gulf between educated society and the bureaucracy, the peasantry and the gentry, the workers and the professional classes. Defeats in the field and the apparent inability of the Government to solve the problems of mobilizing the economy for total war fostered the belief in the liberal leadership that a genuinely liberal regime – a government of public confidence – would be more capable of releasing popular energies and prosecuting the war to a victorious conclusion. The war accelerated the economic ruin of the gentry. The tremendous rise in the output of heavy industry – the regime's greatest success in the war effort – paradoxically hastened its demise through the swift growth of an urban labour force which, because of the shortages, housing conditions and inflation, was driven in desperation to revolt. The war also created one new challenge to the monarchy. The loyalty of the army, hitherto the bulwark of Tsardom, was undermined by changes in its social composition and the rate of casualties. The pattern of the national strike of October 1905 was repeated in the last week of February 1917 – Russia's various social and political groups united in a temporary coalition to overthrow Tsardom. The peculiarity of the February revolution and an explanation of the October revolution was that these allies sought mutually incompatible objectives. The liberals desired moderate political reforms for a more efficient prosecution of the war without significant social change. But the peasantry coveted the gentry estates and the working class demanded a share of political power, as well as radical improvements in economic and social conditions. The soldiers longed for peace. Although the monarchy was in a state of gradual disintegration before 1914, the Great War acted as the spark which set the combustible material of mass discontent alight.

Notes on the Text

- 1 Theodore H. von Laue, 'A Secret Memorandum of Sergei Witte on the Industrialization of Imperial Russia', *Journal of Modern History*, XXVI (March 1954), pp. 64-73.
- 2 The zemstva were elected organs of local self-government created in 1864 at the provincial (guberniia) and district (uezd) level. Due to the restrictions on the franchise and the indirect method of voting, the zemstva were dominated by the local gentry. The zemstva had been reluctant before the 1890s to spend large sums of money on local welfare. The massive disbursements after that date created the so-called 'third element' of elementary schoolteachers, doctors, and veterinary surgeons, who were of non-noble birth. Noted for its radical sentiments, the 'third element' formed the rural vanguard of the Socialist Revolutionary party after its foundation in 1900.
- 3 The origins of the law of June 3rd, 1907 lay in the bureaucracy's miscalculation that the peasantry, enfranchised by the law of December 11th, 1905, would act as a conservative force in parliament. In fact the peasant deputies in the First and Second Dumas, 1906-7, had supported the most radical agrarian legislation. The electoral system was based upon a weighted, indirect class franchise. The law of June 3rd reduced the peasantry's electoral weight and increased the gentry's by raising the percentage of electors from the gentry class in the provincial electoral assemblies from 34 to 50%, with a decrease in the percentage of electors from the peasantry from 42 to 22%. The other, third class, was the urban element. The complications of the electoral system are well explained in A. Levin, *The Third Duma, Election and Profile* (Connecticut, 1973).
- 4 *Fraktsiia Progressistov v IVoi Gos. Dume. Sessia I. 1912-1913 gg.* (St. Petersburg, 1914). I, 14.
- 5 H. Seton Watson, *The Decline of Imperial Russia, 1855-1914* (London, 1960), p. 299; A. Gerschenkron, 'Patterns of Economic Development', in C. Black (ed.), *The Transformation of Russian Society* (Cambridge, 1960), p. 60; J. Walkin, *The Rise of Democracy in Pre-Revolutionary Russia* (London, 1963), pp. 232-33. Perhaps the best introduction in English to the various conflicting interpretations on the evolution of Russian society after 1905 is T. G. Stravrou (ed.), *Russia Under the Last Tsar* (Minneapolis, 1969). Another collection of essays, informative rather than interpretative, is G. Katkov (ed.), *Russia Enters the 20th Century* (London, 1971).
- 6 A. L. Sidorova (ed.), *Ocherkii po istorii SSSR, 1907-mart 1917* (Moscow, 1954), pp. 239-40.
- 7 L. Haimson, 'The Problem of Social Stability in Urban Russia, 1905-1917', *Slavic Review*, XXIII (December 1964), pp. 619-42, and XXIV (March 1965), 1-22; T. von Laue, *Why Lenin? Why Stalin? A Reappraisal of the Russian Revolution* (London, 1964); T. von Laue, 'Of the Crises in the Russian Polity', in J. S. Curtis (ed.), *Essays in Russian and Soviet History* (Leiden, 1963), pp. 304-8.
- 8 The distribution of seats among parties in the first session of the Third Duma was: Right, 51; Nationalists, 26; Moderate Right, 69; Octobrists, 154; Kadets, 54; Trudoviks, 14; Social Democrats, 19; Kolo, 11; Polish/Lithuanian Group, 7; Progressists, 25; Moslems, 8.
- 9 Article 87 of the Fundamental Laws granted the Tsar authority, under special circumstances, to make laws while the Duma was in recess. But in this case, although the law did not apply, the Duma was prorogued for two days and the Western Zemstva law issued by the Tsar.
- 10 In the Third Duma, the right wing (Right, Nationalists, Moderate Right) controlled 146 votes and in the Fourth Duma 185, well below the requisite majority of 222.
- 11 S. Elpat'evskii, 'Zhizn' idet', *Russkoe Bogatstvo*, I (January 1914), pp. 276-99.
- 12 *Novoe Vremia*, September 21st, 1913, No. 13480.
- 13 Although the Octobrist vote fell heavily in the elections to the Fourth Duma, the party remained the largest. The distribution of seats in the Fourth Duma was: Right, 64; Nationalists, 88; Centre, 33; Octobrists, 98; Progressists, 47; Kadets, 59; Trudoviks, 10; Social Democrats, 14. *Pervii God Zhizni IVoi Gos. Dume* (St. Petersburg, 1913) pp. 10-12.
- 14 In 1907, 65% of the peasant electorate voted; 42% of the landowners' curia; 37% of electors in the 2nd curia of the cities.
- 15 The memorandum of P. N. Durnovo, February 1914; F. A. Golder, *Documents of Russian History, 1914-1917* (New York, 1927), pp. 3-23.
- 16 Stolypin's report is printed in G. Vernadsky (ed.), *A Source Book for Russian History from Early Times to 1917, Volume III, Alexander II to the February Revolution* (London, 1972), pp. 801-2. In 1904 Stolypin was governor of Saratov province.
- 17 T. Shanin, *The Awkward Class. Political Sociology of Peasantry in a Developing Society: Russia, 1910-1925* (Oxford, 1972); T. Shanin, 'Socio-economic mobility and the rural history of Russia, 1905-1930', *Soviet Studies*, XXIII (October 1971), pp. 222-35.
- 18 The city census of 1910 recorded that 44% of the working class was under thirty-five years of age; 93% of males in the age group sixteen to twenty-five were literate and 80.9% of

- the same group were unmarried. *Petrograd po Perepisi Naseleniia 15 dekabria 1910 goda. Naselenie*. 2 vols (Petrograd, n.d.), I, pp. 85-149.
- 19 G. Dobson, *St Petersburg* (London, 1910), p. 84.
- 20 All statistics concerning the strike movement have been calculated from the original unpublished reports of the factory inspectorate of the Ministry of Trade and Industry contained in the *Central State Historical Archives in Leningrad: fond 23, opis' 16, delo 118*, pages 1, 8, 11, 22-3, 48-9, 54 and opis' 17, delo 671, pages 19, 27, 33, 43-7, and 79. The Ministry's figures undoubtedly underestimated the dimension of the strike movement, as the competence of its factory-inspectorate did not extend to the factories owned by the Treasury and the Ministry of War, artisan industries and the distributive trades.
- 21 Out of a total of 2,375, 606 lost working days in 1912, 1,863,113 were the result of economic strikes. A similar ratio prevailed in 1913; of 3,591,376 lost working days, 3,027,005 were the product of economic disputes.
- 22 A. M. Volodarskaia, 'Podgotovka S'ezda Bolshevistskoi Partii v 1914.g.', *Istoricheskii Arkhiv*, VI (1958), p. 11.
- 23 The officer corps grew from 40,590 in July 1914 to 145,916 in January 1917. 62,847 officers died in battle in the same period.
- 24 Production of iron ore fell from 460.5 million puds in 1914 to 331.4 million in 1915.
- 25 In Petrograd, average monthly money wages in metal working industries increased from 32.4 roubles in December 1914 to 71.39 roubles in December 1916, but real wages in the same sector fell from 31.8 roubles in December 1914 to 29.8 roubles in December 1916. Workers in the city's textile factories were less fortunate; their average monthly money wages rose only from 17.8 roubles to 28.3 roubles, December 1914 to December 1916, and their real wages declined in the same period from 17.4 to 13.9 roubles.
- 26 From July 1914 to February 1917 there were four Presidents of the Council of Ministers; 6 Ministers of Internal Affairs; 4 Ministers of Justice; 4 Ministers of War; 4 Ministers of Agriculture; even 4 Procurators of the Holy Synod.
- 27 The Programme demanded 'the formation of a united government, consisting of persons who enjoy the confidence of the country and are in agreement with the legislative institutions'. Vernadsky, loc. cit., pp. 846-7.
- 28 The Central War Industries Committee was created by industrialists in June 1915 to liaise with the Ministry of War in the securing and distribution of defence contracts and the improvement of factories' technical efficiency. The Committee became the preserve of small and medium sized companies, as the large mining and metallurgical concerns preferred to deal directly with the War Department through the Special Conference on Defence.

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