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### Tsarist Russia: Conditions and Reform

“**Fundamental Laws**” issued by Nicholas I in 1832 begins “The Emperor of all the Russians is an autocratic and unlimited monarch: God himself ordains that all must bow to his supreme power”, The Laws were designed to remove any doubt regarding the total power of the Tsars. The way in which the Tsar comes to power is by ‘divine appointment’.

By 1815, Russia was not only the largest, most populated nation in Europe, but also a great world power. Through steady expansion and policies of westernization, Peter the Great and Catherine the Great had added lands in the Baltic region, creating an empire spanning both Europe and Asia. Despite efforts by Peter and Catherine to westernize Russia, it remained economically undeveloped. By the 1800’s, tsars were just beginning to see the need to modernize, but resisted reform that would undermine their **absolute rule**.

Define **Absolutism**-

#### Russia’s Social Structure

A great obstacle to progress was the rigid social structure. Landowning nobles dominated society and rejected any change that would threaten their privileges. The middle class was too small to have much influence. The majority of Russians were **serfs**, or laborers bound to land and to the masters who controlled them.

Most **Serfs** were peasants. Others were servants, artisans, or soldiers forced into the Tsar’s military. As Russia began to industrialize, some masters sent serfs to work in factories, and took most of their pay.

Many enlightened Russians knew that serfdom was inefficient. As long as most people had to serve masters, Russia’s economy would remain backwards. Landowning nobles had little interest in improving agriculture and industry.

Tsar Nicholas I (1825-1855)



#### Absolute Rule

For centuries Tsars had ruled with absolute power, imposing their will on their subjects. On occasion, the Tsars made limited attempts at liberal reforms, such as easing censorship or making legal and economic reforms to improve the lives of the serfs. Tsars worried about losing the support of the wealthy, landowning nobles and often would reverse their reforms in order to maintain relations with the wealthy elite.

The liberal and nationalistic changes brought about by the Enlightenment and French Revolution had little effect on **Autocratic Russia**.

Define **Autocratic**:

## Russia's Social Hierarchy

**The Nobility– 1.1%**

**Priests– 1.1%**

**The Officials– 3.7%**

**The Military– 5.0%**

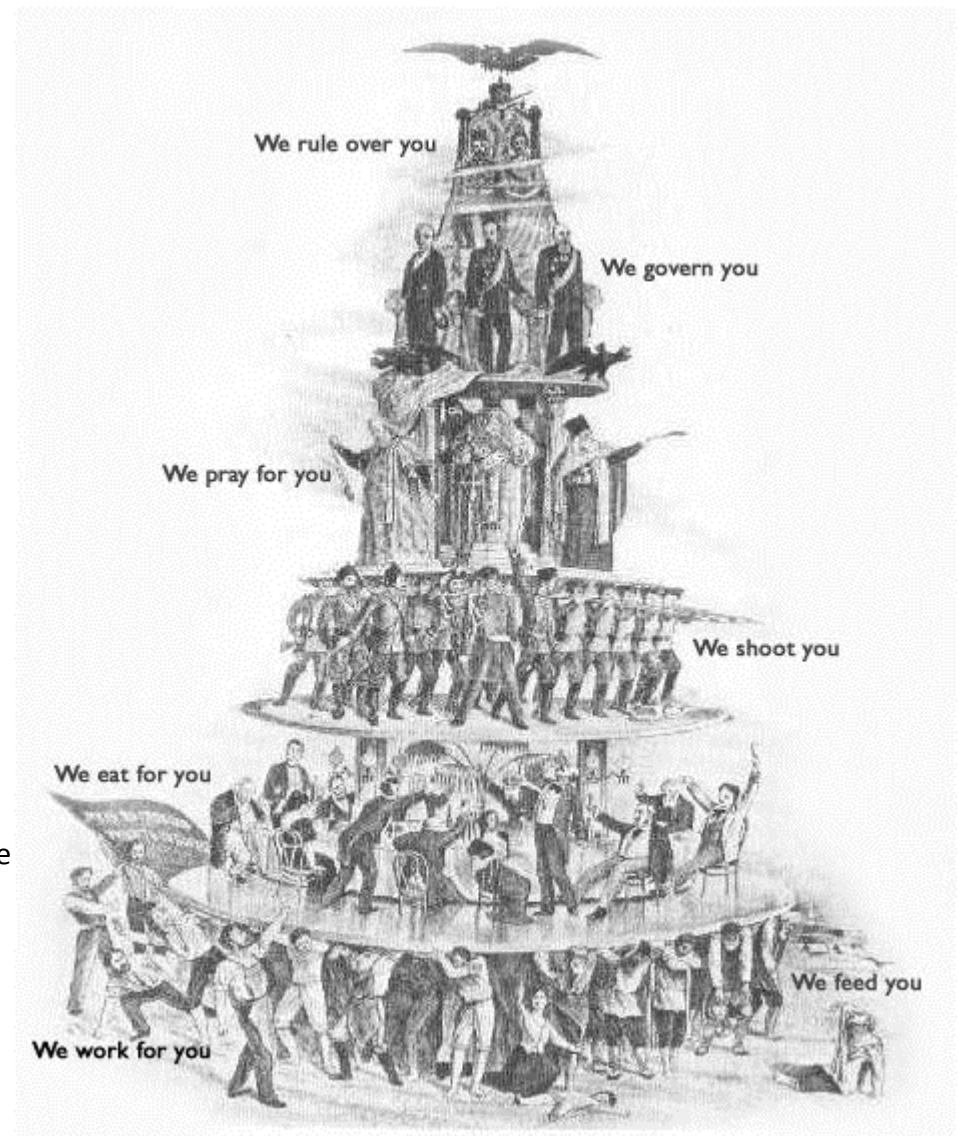
**Merchants– 0.5%**

**Urban Workers– 3.7%**

**The Serfs–84.9%**

Which population of Russians is the largest?

Based on this political cartoon, what can you determine is the purpose of this social group? Why are they so important to Russian society?



What conclusions can you draw about Russia's social structure from this political cartoon?

## Reform in Tsarist Russia under Alexander II

**Alexander II** came to the throne in 1855 during the **Crimean War**. His reign represents the pattern of reform and repression used by his father and grandfather, Alexander I and Nicholas I. Britain, France, and the Kingdom of Piedmont (Italian Kingdom) stepped in to help the Ottoman Empire fend off Russian and Slavik forces on the Crimean Peninsula. Russia was defeated, and this revealed the **backwardness of Russia**. Russia only had a few miles of railroads, and the military bureaucracy was inefficient. Many Russians believed dramatic changes were needed.

### Freeing the Serfs

Liberals in Russia demanded changes, and student demonstrations aimed to pursue **reform**. Alexander II, pressured from the many different Russian groups seeking change finally agreed to reform. In 1863, he issued a royal decree that required *emancipation*, or the freeing of the serfs.

Freedom brought forth many problems. Former serfs had to buy the land that they had worked, but many were too poor to do so. Landowners were compensated for the land that they had to allot to the peasants. The land was also quite difficult to pay off, so many peasants became stuck in a cycle of debt that would be passed onto their children. Also, the lands allotted to peasants were often too small to farm efficiently or to support a family. Peasants remained poor, discontent festered amongst this peasant population.

However, *emancipation* can still be seen as a turning point. Many peasants moved into urban areas and cities, taking jobs in factories, leading to the creation of Russian industry. Also, the freeing of the serfs opened the door for future reforms.

### **Explain Serfdom:**

**How did the emancipation of the serfs benefit Russia?**

**How did the emancipation of the serfs negatively impact Russia?**

## Reform in Tsarist Russia under Alexander II Continued

Along with the emancipation of the serfs, Alexander II set up a system of local government called **zemstvos**. These local governments were made responsible for matters such as road repair, schools, and agriculture. Through the **zemstvos**, Russians gained some experience in self-governance at the local level. The Tsar also introduced legal reforms based on the ideas of **trial by jury** and the easing of censorship. In the military, service terms were reduced and brutal discipline was limited. Alexander also aimed to encourage the growth of industry, trying to move Russia away from the heavily agricultural society that has kept the nation so far behind the western nations.

**Alexander II's reforms aimed to create a industrialized and advanced Russian nation; however, the people of Russia were still unhappy. What do you believe the people of Russia want the most?**



№ 7 Полтава. Будинок Губерського Земства. Головна зала зі столами для земських гласних

**The interior of the Poltava Zemstvo building.**

The five Tsars that ruled Russia from 1801 to 1917 all followed a similar pattern of autocratic rule: at times they appeared open to liberal ideas and enacted reforms to satisfy the groups demanding change. In every case, however the tsars **pulled back on these reforms** and launched a battery of repressive measures designed to preserve their absolute power and the support of the **nobles**. **Reforming Russia becomes a game of Tug-of-War.**

**Why would the Tsars aim to please the Russian Nobles rather than the lower classes of Russian society?**

<p><b><u>The Tsars Resist– Repression and Crackdown</u></b></p>	<p><b><u>The Tsars Give In– Reforms</u></b></p>
<p><b><u>Tsars</u></b></p>	<p><b><u>Opposing the Tsars</u></b></p>

## Revolutionary Currents flow through Russia

Tsar Alexander II's reforms failed to satisfy many Russians. Liberals wanted a **constitution and elected legislature**. Radicals, who had adopted many socialist ideas from the west, demanded even more revolutionary changes. The Tsar began to move away from reform towards repression.

In 1870, groups of socialists went to live and work among the peasants, preaching reform and rebellion. They had little success, as the peasants didn't understand them and often turned them in to the police. The failure of this movement, combined with renewed government repression, sparked anger amongst radicals. On March 13, 1881 Alexander II was assassinated by terrorists.

Alexander III responded to his father's assassination by reviving the harsh methods of his predecessors. To wipe out liberals and revolutionaries, he increased the power of the **Secret Police**, restored strict censorship, and exiled critics to Siberia.

The Tsar also launched a program of **Russification**. This program aimed to suppress the cultures of non-Russian peoples within Russia.

Alexander insisted on:

-One Language, Russian

-One Church, the Russian Orthodox Church

This program would lead to the persecution of Poles, Ukrainians, Finns, Armenians, Muslims, Jews, and many other minority groups living throughout the Russian empire.

Alexander III, placed many restrictions on Jews. For example, only a specific number of Jews can study or practice certain professions. The Russian government would officially support the persecution of Jews through the encouragement of **Pogroms**. Pogroms encouraged mobs to violently attack Jewish people, many would leave Russia, entering other nations as refugees.

Define **Russification**:

**How did the assassination of Alexander II impact the social and political climate of Russia?**

Define **Pogrom**:

## Tsar Alexander III and his son Nicholas II lead Russia into the Industrial Age

Tsar Alexander III and his son Nicholas II saw the importance of industrializing the Russian Empire. With a focus on economic and industrial development, these two Tsars encouraged the construction of railroads to connect iron and coal mines with factories and to transport goods across Russia. Foreign investors saw the benefit of loaning money to the Russians to construct the Trans-Siberian Railroad, which would link Russia to the west, as well as to the Pacific ocean.

### The Negative Effects of Russian Industrialization

Government officials and business leaders encourage industrial growth, while nobles and peasants opposed the changes that would come with it.

Peasants flocked to cities to find work in factories. Cities became overcrowded, and slums developed throughout major cities. These slums led to the spread of disease, increased poverty, and growing discontent. The needs of the people were not being met.

Radicals sought supporters among the new industrial leaders. At factory gates, **Socialists** would often hand out pamphlets that preached the revolutionary ideas of **Karl Marx**.



## The Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905)

Tsar Nicholas II calls for his people to fight for “the Faith, the Tsar, and the Fatherland!” However, Russia suffers continuous defeats, losing every battle to the Japanese.

### **Key Points:**

- 1) In 1904 Russia and Japan went to war over territory and colonial rights in Asia, particularly Manchuria and Korea.**
- 2) Japan sought a negotiated settlement, while Russia underestimated Japan’s capacity and willingness for war.**
- 3) Russia was forced to negotiate peace terms, which resulted in the Treaty of Portsmouth in September 1905. The war worsened Russia’s already recessed economy and its disastrous management further discredit the tsar and his advisors.**
- 4) This was the first time a Western power was defeated by a non-western power. This shows a shift in the dynamic of world powers. The west was not invincible.**

**What do you believe is the probably impact of the failure of the Russian military in the Russo-Japanese war on the people of Russia? What do you believe this event will lead to?**