

## The Revolution of 1905

Nicholas II never fully accepted the view that his will was not above the law. This autocratic notion was out of tune with the times and helps to explain much of what happened after 1905. He had bad advisors, of course. There was the sinister influence of a journalist by the name of Meshchevsky, the dominating influence of a certain M. Philippe and the notorious monk Rasputin. The latter two worked through the tsarina, especially after 1911. Nicholas also retained the ministers of the reactionary Alexander III, particularly Pobedonostsev and Witte.

### I. Revival of Opposition to the Tsar

#### A. Russian Marxism

The revival of opposition to the tsar came with the famine of 1891-1892. The Marxists, the populists and the liberals were the main forces at work against the monarchy. Plekhanov, the grand daddy of Russian Marxism, had founded the "Liberation of Labor" back in 1883. Lenin and Martov organized the "Fighting Union for the Liberation of the Working Class" in 1895. These groups adopted new tactics: agitation among the ranks of the proletariat. In part the result this agitation was a wave major strikes in the late 1890s, like the St. Petersburg textile strike of 1896-1897. A new coalition of Marxists took place in 1898 when the Russian Social Democratic Party was founded in Minsk. Lenin had little to do with this since he was in exile in Siberia between 1895 and 1900.

But Russian Marxism was still full of strife and as a result ineffectual. Its newspaper, *Iskra*, founded in 1900, pushed for unity among the various factions. At the famous Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Party in 1903 there was a fight for control of the newspaper and hence the main organ of propaganda and ideology. Whoever controlled the newspaper could more or less determine the ideological slant of the movement. At the 1903 Congress Lenin's group for a short time managed to get a majority in the Central Committee and on the board of directors of *Iskra*. They called themselves Bolsheviks, which means majority. "In this inconspicuous manner Bolshevism...slipped almost unnoticed into a hostile world."

A group led by Leon Trotsky had lost the fight in 1903 and thus received the name of Mensheviks, meaning minority. But in 1904 the Mensheviks had captured control of the Central Committee and hence *Iskra*. Lenin then resigned and began to publish his own newspaper called *Forward* (1906). The conflict between these two major marxist groups went on. A perfunctory reconciliation at the 4th Congress in 1906 at Stockholm soon broke apart. At the Prague Congress in 1912 the Bolsheviks expelled the Mensheviks from the party. So the Mensheviks convened in Vienna under Trotsky's leadership.

The Bolsheviks and Mensheviks disagreed on two main points:

1. the philosophy of history which involved the attitude toward bourgeois liberalism;
2. the nature of party organization.

The Mensheviks believe there must be bourgeois democratic republic as a necessary first stage toward revolution. So the party should align itself with regular liberal parties to help destroy monarchy and build a democratic republic. The Bolsheviks insisted that they should set up a dictatorship of the proletariat immediately. There could therefore be no alliance with the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie could be used as a tool to help achieve this aim, but never as an ally. The Mensheviks are in favor of democratic administration of the party, while the Bolsheviks insist on authoritarian centralism.

## The Revolution of 1905

### B. Social Revolutionaries

The populists transformed themselves into the Social Revolutionaries during the 1890s. Formally the Social Revolutionary Party was founded at Kharkov in 1900 with a program of social democracy. Gershuni, Goetz, Breshko-Breshkovsky and Victor Chernov were its leaders. At the first congress of the party in Finland in 1905-1906 the following program was announced:

- A. The fall of the monarchy would lead inevitably to socialism since Russian capitalism was weak. So the party was going to cooperate with the liberal bourgeoisie.
- B. The peasants were the most important class. The land should be socialized, i.e., taken from the landlords and given to the peasants. What they had in mind was quite similar to old idea of the village commune.
- C. They were against centralization and bureaucratism. They also would have nothing to do with state socialism.
- D. They believed in the efficiency of political terror and propaganda (unlike the "People's Will").

The "Terrorist Organization" of the Social Revolutionaries had been founded in 1901. It was purely an instrument of the leadership since it took orders directly from the Central Committee of the party. Between 1902 and 1907 this organization launched a virtual wave of assassinations. While the Central Committee of the Social Revolutionaries never fully accepted the idea, a series of "expropriations" nevertheless supplied the funds to keep the terror campaign and the party going. The organizers of the terror were Gershuni, Azef and Savinkov. Azef interestingly enough was also an agent of the tsarist secret police until he was discovered in 1908. After this the terror campaign slowly subsided.

By comparison with the Social Revolutionaries, the Bolsheviks appeared to be quite insignificant in 1905. The Bolsheviks were not a closely knit party; nor had they worked out as yet what their revolutionary tactics were to be. They only had about 8,000 members, although numbers and theory matter little in those days. The country was seething with discontent and any unique form of propaganda got a hearing--might even say eager hearing.

### C. Liberalism

The third element in the anti-tsarist movement was the liberals. Liberalism got invigorated by the relief work of 1891-1892. As you would expect, the liberals rejected socialism, revolutionary methods, and also bureaucratic arbitrariness practiced by the tsar's government with abandon. The liberals longed for economic and social reforms. The standard bearers of liberalism in the 1890s were the zemstvos. The liberals working within the zemstvo institutions called for a representative assembly. The attempt to form a central zemstvo organization was prohibited by government minister Goremykin in 1896, but they keep pushing to have one. A union of zemstvo employees was finally created, but the government frequently refused to confirm elected zemstvo officials. So, the government contributed to its problems by eliminating the very groups on which it could have relied to reinvigorate its administration and the people's loyalty.

## II. Foreign and Domestic Policy Mistakes

In foreign policy the government also continued to make mistakes. Many of the restrictive measures in Finland planned under Alexander III were put into effect under Nicholas II. Pobedonostsev and Goremykin were extremely hostile to the Finns. The issued a manifesto in 1899 which turned the Finnish diet into a mere advisory body and made the Russian state council responsible for legislation in Finland. The Finnish army was abolished and Russian became the official language in the government of Finland. This clumsy policy of Russification smacked on 19th century reaction and was strongly resisted and criticized by Russian liberals.

## The Revolution of 1905

None of these things, however, created a revolutionary situation. Actual events were to do that. There was a major famine in 1891 and a series crop failures in 1897, 1898 and 1901. This led to a breakdown of the land arrangement following the liberation of the serfs, and created massive poverty among the peasants. On top of this was the enormous financial yoke put upon the peasants by the land arrangement. This led to the inevitable peasant uprisings and this time also to the awakening of labor. So a "revolutionary situation" finally existed in 1905.

- Strikes

Strikes became a permanent feature of life. In 1894 some 17,000 workers were out on strike. Few of these strikes were very well organized. They occurred largely in St. Petersburg and Moscow in 1897 and 1898. They were led by unions but few of their demands were revolutionary in nature. They demanded shorter work hours and higher pay, like unions everywhere. The government followed a policy of conciliation and reprisals. Count Witte told the manufacturers that the chief cause of the strikes was mismanagement. A law was passed in 1897 which elevated the situation by legislating an eleven-and-a-half hour day. In 1903 factory workers were allowed to elect so-called factory elders to represent their interests. Yet no real improvement in working conditions came in the period of 1894 to 1903. The law of 1897 merely wetted the appetite of the workers.

The government then began a sort of crackdown. Professional agitators and strike leaders were rounded up and sent home. Extra-judicial powers were used to repress unhappy workers. The police decided to coopt the workers by creating labor unions controlled by the police. A network of spies and agents provocateurs were scattered among the workers. Even though the police or "company unions" were little more than mutual aid associations, Prime Minister Witte protested against them sharply.

- Students

No discussion of revolution would be complete if we did not mention students. In the late 19th century students played a large political role. Politics was much more fun than sports, even then. According to the special university charter of 1884, students were denied the right to organize their own corporate representation. Since there was no formal means of expressing the radical and revolutionary doctrines the young always find so appealing, they had no choice but to get into the action directly. So the charter of 1884 which was intended to suppress political radicalism actually gave a monopoly to revolutionary organizations. The students were also angered by the effort of the education ministers Tolstoy and Delianov to make Russian educational institutions the special preserve of the upper classes. The Russian student thus became a vigorous advocate of an equitable social order.

The stormy phase of academic life in Russia came in the 1890s. The schools were frequently closed to dampen down the revolts. In 1899 there was a serious student strike at the St. Petersburg University. Many students were expelled and some professors were sacked. In 1898 a young member of the Social Revolutionary Party, Karpovich, shot the minister of education, Bogolepov. The students demonstrated for Karpovich, not the slain minister. This was the first political murder of Nicholas II's reign. It ushered in a whole era of terror by the Social Revolutionaries. Among the victims were V. K. Plehve, the minister of the interior (1904), whose murder had been planned by Azef and Savinkov personally.

## The Revolution of 1905

- Union of Liberation

When Sipiagin replaced Goremykin as minister of the interior in 1899 he launched a crackdown on zemstvo "autonomy" by claiming that they could no longer provision the populace. The zemstvos replied by demanding a constitutional monarchy. The zemstvo liberals also began to hold conferences and publish newspapers abroad. They created the so-called Union of Liberation in 1903 which called for a constitutional monarchy. Since this was the underground organization of the zemstvos, they had no longer any recognized political organization. When Plehve succeeded Sipiagin, who had been murdered in 1902, he (Plehve) began very repressive measures which angered the liberals, who must have been glad when Plehve himself was assassinated.

Russia was at war with Japan at this time, yet many felt Russian autocracy rather than Japan was the real enemy. The inevitable political explosion was in fact precipitated by the assassination of Plehve and the appointment of Sviatopolk-Mirsky as Plehve's successor in August 1904. For while Mirsky introduced a kind of "political spring." But it did not last long and merely stimulated further revolutionary activity.

In September 1904 a conference of radicals and revolutionaries (with the exception of the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks) convened in Paris to form an alliance against autocracy and issued a call for representative government and recognition of the rights of national minorities. In October 1904 the Union of Liberation came up with a plan of action:

- the zemstvos were to demand a constitutional government;
- a series of banquets were to be held which would promote political agitation;
- professional unions were to coalesce into a Union of Unions to give them more political leverage.

A zemstvo conference was in fact held in November which launched the nationwide campaign for a constitutional monarchy, despite the fact that there was some disagreement about the exact role of legislation and whether to have a consultative or a constituent assembly.

### III. The Russo-Japanese War: 1904-5

Then the war and the domestic unrest came together. In December 1904 Port Arthur in Manchuria fell to the Japanese; In January the sporadic strikes in St. Petersburg began to spread rapidly. Strangely enough these strikes were sponsored by the police union and one of them, the Assembly of Russian Workmen was led by an Orthodox priest, Father Gapon. When these strikers tried to march to the imperial palace to petition the tsar, the tsar sent out the cossacks to cut them down. Famous "Bloody Sunday" (January 1905) was the result. The petitioners actually only wanted to protest minor abuses and call for a constituent assembly. Mirsky and some police officials had to resign after "Bloody Sunday," but the zemstvos and municipal unions resumed their agitation. Then grand duke Serge Alexandrovich was assassinated. This produced another manifesto by the tsar (February 18) which merely condemned political agitation and so doing it seemed to invite and even legalize it in its effect.

To placate the populace the government handed out tidbits, like the proclamation which promised religious toleration. The government, however, was also sending signals which appeared to approve the formation of a consultative assembly. This happened at a time when what we might call the loyal opposition was also moving in that direction. The Union of Unions, the Union of Liberation, the Peasants Union, and the Zemstvo Conference all agreed to call for a "fundamental law" based on the principles of western political democracy. So the loyal opposition

## The Revolution of 1905

was slipping into revolutionary action.

Then in February came the defeat at Mukden in Manchuria, after a horrendous battle of attrition. And in May came the great naval defeat at Tsushima Strait. President Theodore Roosevelt of the United States soon made an offer of mediation which was accepted by both sides. In June the sailors of the battleship Potemkin mutinied in the Black Sea. You could not have had a more disastrous series of calamities. It would have brought down any other government. But not the Russian.

Meanwhile, the reactionary right was also organizing in Russia. The "Russian Assembly," founded in 1901, was engaged in nationalistic, monarchical counter-propaganda. The Union of the Russian People," more recently established in 1905, was promoting militant nationalism and hatred of Finns, Poles, and Jews. This was approved by Nicholas II, Plehve and other government officials. Most of the members of the Union of the Russian People came from the middle class, were minor government officials or members of the clergy. Ultra-nationalism became the order of the day and with it came pogroms. In 1903 there had been a wholesale massacre of Jews in Kishenev, Bessarabia. It was soon followed by a wave of pogroms throughout the south and southwest of Russia between 1903 and 1905.

### A. Creation of the Duma

When the tsar's government finally issued a law about the election to a State Duma in August 1905 it was met by derision. The franchise provision clearly favored the peasants and disenfranchised the bulk of the urban population, especially the intellectuals and the industrial workers. When the universities were granted autonomy a flood of revolutionary oratory was emitted from the campuses. A by-product of this oratory was the creation of the St. Petersburg Soviet of Workers Deputies.

In September the bakers and printers called for a general strike in St. Petersburg. In October the railway workers in Moscow start a strike which soon spread to the entire network of the railroad. The demands of the strikers are more radical now too. They call for a democratic republic and are willing to do away with monarchy entirely. They also want political amnesty and demand the workers be armed. The professional unions, mainly liberals support these new demands. The Banks, shops, hospitals and other institutions closed their doors. The Russian economy came to a standstill.

### B. The St. Petersburg Soviet

On October 13 the St. Petersburg Soviet convened with 30-40 delegates. By the end of November it had 562 delegates. Since the Mensheviks were the strongest group in the Soviet, their leader, Trotsky, became the leader of the Soviet. Lenin is behind the scenes since he did not return to St. Petersburg until November. On October 17 two important things happened: the first issue of a now famous newspaper appeared, *Isvestia*; and Nicholas II issued his so-called October Manifesto which turned Russia into a constitutional monarchy.

Count Witte was called back into the government to save the dynasty with a liberal program. The Manifesto, as a matter of fact was written by him. It promised

- civil liberties;
- extension of the franchise, thus revising the law of August;
- no law was to be promulgated without the Duma which was also promised the right to approve and control officials of the crown.

## The Revolution of 1905

The response to the October Manifesto was mixed. Trotsky said: "Witte has come but Trepov remains." Trepov was the chief of police. Nevertheless, there was a lot of excitement on both the left and the right. The Hundreds, loosely organized groups of thugs which perpetrated the pogroms, are especially on the rampage in Kiev and Odessa which had large Jewish populations. So increased racial persecution and terror was one of the first consequences of the October Manifesto which granted civil liberties to all Russian subjects! The flames of revolt were also stirred in the borderlands. Finland had its liberties restored by Witte, but in Poland he declared a "state of emergency." Russian sailors at Kronstadt and Vladivostok mutinied but suppressed. The center of revolutionary activity, however, was the St. Petersburg Soviet and other soviets. But since there were no immediate economic benefits, the Soviet was forced to call off a general strike by a spontaneous back-to-work movement which began on October 21.

Yet, the St. Petersburg Soviet made an impact and became a model for the soviet of 1917. The Soviet made some detailed plans for an armed uprising should the occasion demand it. Since the government was in a state of confusion, the Soviet achieved a kind of quasi-official status by simply acting as if it knew what it was doing. The countryside meanwhile was ablaze with disturbances and widespread looting of manor houses. The Manifesto had opened the country to the agitation and propaganda of the liberal zemstvos and the Social Revolutionaries.

But the tsarist government had not disappeared from the scene. It declared a state of emergency in some areas and began to suppress riots and arrest agitators. The Moscow Bureau of the Peasants Union was arrested en masse on November 14.

Eventually the St. Petersburg Soviet lost its hold on the workers and the call for a general strike issued in November was a complete failure. Witte ordered the arrest of the president of the Soviet, Nosar, a Menshevik. A new committee is quickly formed, including Trotsky, which appeals to the armed forces and urges non-payment of taxes. Witte's response is to arrest the committee. The Soviet of Soldiers in Moscow does manage to start an uprising, but is quickly crushed by government troops. Insubordination in the army and the navy is also crushed. The strike on the Trans-Siberian Railway is brought under control. So the economic and social order remained unscathed. Trotsky cried:

*"The revolution is dead, long live the revolution!"*