



A Level History Summer Independent Learning 2026

What is Summer Independent Learning?

Summer Independent Learning (SIL) is a series of activities designed to introduce to you the context of Russian history in the early 20th century. Russia 1917-1953 is the depth study (paper 2) in A Level History at New College Doncaster. Many students will not have studied Russian history before or studied it less compared to other historical topics. Therefore, learning the context of Russia before you start in September will help you develop the knowledge, research and critical thinking skills that will allow you to 'hit the ground running' with your A Level studies from September.

The A Level History SIL is made up of some compulsory tasks and some optional tasks. You must complete all compulsory tasks. You can complete the optional tasks if you want to as extra research.

How do you complete SIL?

The tasks are designed to take time and make you think. You may want to space them out e.g., plan to do one task a day over 5 separate days during the summer holiday. It should take you a minimum of 8 hours to complete all the tasks the set, but it may take longer than this.

Resources to complete each task are in this document. Websites needed are accessible by clicking the links within this document.

Please complete your SIL by hand (handwritten) if this is your normal way of working in an exam. If your normal way of working in an exam is to type, please type your SIL and print it ready to hand in for your first lesson.

Do not use artificial intelligence (AI) to complete your SIL. We want to see how you think and write as a history student. If we suspect that AI has been used to produce all of some of your SIL, we will follow this up at the start of the academic year.

SIL must be handed in during your first history lesson. It must be completed before the first day of college.

Compulsory task 1: fact files

Tsar Nicholas II

Create a fact file of Tsar Nicholas II using the links below to research the tsar. Answer the following questions in your fact file:

- What do you think were 3 of Nicholas II's key strengths as tsar of Russia? Why do you think these were strengths?
- What do you think were 3 of Nicholas II's key weaknesses as tsar of Russia? Why were these weaknesses?

Links for research:

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nicholas-II-tsar-of-Russia>

https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/nicholas_ii.shtml



Vladimir Lenin



Create a fact file for Lenin that focuses on his background and influence in Russia. Maximum of 6 key facts.

Links for research:

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Vladimir-Lenin>

https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/lenin_vladimir.shtml

Compulsory task 2: key questions

Read the introductory reading on pages 11-15 of this document and use it to answer the following questions.

Also use the following websites to read in more depth around the context of these questions and use this to add more detail to your answers:

- History of Russia <https://alphahistory.com/russianrevolution/introduction-to-russia/>
- Tsarist government <https://alphahistory.com/russianrevolution/tsarist-government/>
- Russian society <https://alphahistory.com/russianrevolution/russian-society/>

1. Why was the geographical size of Russia important?
2. What were the problems with communication in Russia? What types of problems might these communication issues lead to?
3. How diverse was Russia in terms of nationality by the beginning of the 20th century?
4. What was the policy of Russification? Why was it implemented? What were the problems with this policy?
5. What percentage of the population were peasants in Russia in 1900?
6. What is an autocracy?
7. How did the tsars run Russia?
8. What was the role of the Orthodox Church in tsarist Russia?
9. What opposition developed towards the tsars?
10. How did the tsars deal with the opposition towards them?
11. Why was modernisation needed in Russia?
12. Why was modernisation dangerous to the tsar?
13. What were the long-term causes of the 1905 Revolution?
14. What were the short-term causes of the 1905 Revolution?
15. Why was the tsar forced to make concessions during 1905?
16. What were the concessions that the tsar made?
17. What developments between 1906 and 1914 reduced the chance of revolution in the future and why?
18. What developments between 1906 and 1914 increased the chance of revolution in the future and why?

Compulsory task 3: short essay

Using your notes from tasks 2 and 3 and the additional links below, write a short essay (about 500 words) that answers the following question:

To what extent were economic factors the main cause of the 1905 Revolution in Russia?

Advice for writing your essay:

- Pick three causes to use as the factors for your three main paragraphs.
- For each cause, identify three pieces of evidence that show this factor was a cause of the 1905 Revolution.
- Explain why this was a cause of the 1905 revolution.
- Rank your causes from most to least important and make links between them to explain why one cause was more important compared to another.
- Outline your main argument in your introduction – what is your rank order of causes?
- Summarise your argument in your conclusion.

Draw out and complete the following planning grid to help you write the essay:

Cause (factor)	3 x evidence that shows this was a cause of revolution	Explanation	Evaluation (judgement)
Cause 1: most important cause	1 2 3	This was a cause of the 1905 Revolution because...	This was more a more important cause compared to cause 2 and 3 because...
Cause 2: second most important cause	1 2 3	This was a cause of the 1905 Revolution because...	However, this was a less important cause compared to cause 1 because... It was still a more important cause compared to cause 3 because...
Cause 3: third most important cause	1 2 3	This was a cause of the 1905 Revolution because...	Whilst this was an important cause, it was less important compared to cause 1 and 2 because...

Additional links to use in research for your essay:

- <https://explaininghistory.org/2025/05/11/the-causes-of-the-1905-russian-revolution-a-structural-analysis/>
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zwxv34j/revision/1> - use the 'pages' section on the left-hand side of this website to look at the different long term and short-term causes of the revolution.

Compulsory task 4: political parties

Use the information below to answer the following questions

1. Who were the social democrats and what did they believe?
2. Who were the Bolsheviks and what did they believe?
3. Who were the Mensheviks and what did they believe?
4. Why did the Bolsheviks remain less influential in Russia between 1900 and 1914?

Social Democrats, Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in Russia 1900–1914

To understand why revolution eventually broke out in Russia in 1917, it is essential to understand the different revolutionary socialist groups that developed in the decades before. The most important of these were the Social Democrats, who later split into the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. Although they shared a common ideological root in Marxism, they disagreed fundamentally about how revolution should be achieved and what form it should take in Russia's unique political conditions under Tsarist rule.

The Social Democrats

The Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP), or Social Democrats, were founded in 1898. They were influenced by the ideas of Karl Marx, whose theory of Marxism argued that history was driven by class struggle between the bourgeoisie (middle class owners of industry and capital) and the proletariat (industrial working class). Marx believed that capitalism would eventually collapse and be replaced by a classless communist society.

Russian Social Democrats accepted this framework but faced a major practical problem. Russia in 1900 was still overwhelmingly rural and economically underdeveloped compared to industrialised Western Europe. Classical Marxism suggested that revolution would emerge first in advanced industrial societies, yet Russia was ruled by an autocratic tsar and had only pockets of industrial development in cities such as St Petersburg and Moscow.

Because of this, early Social Democrats believed their task was to organise and educate the urban working class so that, when capitalism had developed sufficiently, a revolution could occur. They did not believe immediate revolution was possible. Instead, they focused on building party structures, spreading propaganda, and supporting strikes and trade union activity. However, this shared foundation soon fractured into two rival interpretations of how Marxism should be applied in Russia.

Bolsheviks

The Bolsheviks emerged as the more radical faction of the RSDLP after the party split in 1903. Their leader was Vladimir Lenin, who developed a distinctive interpretation of Marxism adapted to Russian conditions.

The Bolsheviks believed that a revolution did not need to wait for capitalism to fully develop in Russia. Instead, they argued that a small, highly disciplined party of professional revolutionaries could lead the working class to power. Lenin believed that ordinary workers, left on their own, would only develop “trade union consciousness” meaning they might fight for better wages and conditions but would not overthrow the system entirely. Therefore, a tightly organised party was needed to guide them and seize power on their behalf.

This approach made the Bolsheviks highly centralised and strict in organisation. Membership was limited to committed revolutionaries who followed party discipline. They were prepared to use illegal methods, operate underground, and reject cooperation with liberal or moderate political groups.

Ideologically, they remained committed to Marxism and the long-term goal of socialism, but they were far more pragmatic about how to achieve it. Lenin’s version of Marxism became increasingly revolutionary in tone, particularly after the failure of the 1905 Revolution, which convinced him that the tsarist regime would not reform itself.

Mensheviks

The Mensheviks also emerged from the split within the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party in 1903. Their name, meaning “minority,” reflected their initial position within the party vote, although they were often more numerous in broader support than the Bolsheviks during the early 1900s.

The Mensheviks believed that Russia needed to follow a more orthodox Marxist path. In their view, Russia had not yet developed the industrial capitalism necessary for a socialist revolution. They therefore argued that the first stage of change must be a bourgeois revolution, led by middle-class liberals, which would establish a democratic political system and allow capitalism to develop further.

Only after this stage, once the working class had grown significantly in size and organisation, would a socialist revolution become possible. This meant the Mensheviks were willing to cooperate with liberal parties and even participate in legal political institutions if possible.

Their organisation was more open and democratic than that of the Bolsheviks. Membership was broader, and they favoured debate and internal discussion rather than strict discipline. This made them more flexible but also less cohesive in moments of crisis.

Why were the Bolsheviks less influential between 1900 and 1914?

Despite their later historical importance, the Bolsheviks were relatively weak in Russia before the First World War. There were several key reasons for this.

The Mensheviks and other socialist groups often appeared more moderate and practical. Many workers and intellectuals preferred the Menshevik approach because it seemed more realistic in the context of Russia’s political and economic conditions. The idea of working alongside liberals and

building a democratic system first was appealing to those who feared the risks of immediate revolution.

Furthermore, Tsarist repression significantly limited all revolutionary activity, but it particularly hindered the Bolsheviks because of their reliance on underground organisation. Police surveillance, arrests, exile, and censorship made it extremely difficult to build a stable network. Lenin himself spent much of this period in exile in Europe, which further reduced the Bolsheviks' direct influence inside Russia.

The 1905 Revolution, although ultimately unsuccessful, created opportunities for legal political activity through the Duma (parliament). The Mensheviks were more willing to engage with these institutions, while the Bolsheviks were more suspicious of them. As a result, the Mensheviks had greater visibility in legal politics, trade unions, and public debates.

Ideological disagreements weakened the broader socialist movement. The split between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks meant that energy and resources were divided rather than united against the Tsarist regime. This fragmentation reduced the overall effectiveness of revolutionary socialism before 1914.

Compulsory task 5: Marxism and ideology

Read the following and use it to answer the questions below:

1. What are the key ideas of Marxism?
2. How did Lenin adapt Marxist ideas to fit the context of Russia in the early 20th century?

Marxism and Lenin's Adaptation in Early 20th Century Russia

Understanding the relationship between Marxism and Leninism is essential for explaining why revolution succeeded in Russia in 1917. Marxism provided the theoretical foundation, but Lenin adapted it significantly to fit Russia's unique political, economic, and social conditions. While both ideas shared a common goal, the overthrow of capitalism and the creation of a classless society. However, they differed in how that goal would be achieved in practice.

What are the key ideas of Marxism?

Marxism is based on the ideas of the 19th-century economist and philosopher Karl Marx, who argued that history is driven by economic forces and class conflict. At the centre of Marxist theory is the idea of historical materialism, which suggests that all major historical change is caused by the struggle between different social classes over control of wealth and production.

In capitalist societies, Marx identified two main classes. The bourgeoisie are the owners of industry, land, and capital. They make profits by controlling the means of production. The proletariat are the working class, who sell their labour in return for wages but do not own the means of production. Marx argued that this relationship is inherently exploitative because workers produce more value than they receive in wages, with the surplus taken as profit by the bourgeoisie.

Marx believed that capitalism contained the seeds of its own destruction. As industrialisation developed, wealth would become concentrated in fewer hands, while the working class would grow larger, more organised, and increasingly aware of their exploitation. This rising class consciousness would eventually lead to revolution, in which the proletariat would overthrow the bourgeoisie.

After this revolution, Marx predicted a transitional period known as the dictatorship of the proletariat. During this phase, the working class would use state power to suppress resistance from the old ruling classes and reorganise society. Eventually, class divisions would disappear altogether, leading to a communist society in which the state would 'wither away' because it would no longer be needed.

How did Lenin adapt Marxist ideas to fit Russia?

The ideas of Vladimir Lenin developed in response to the specific conditions of Russia under the Tsar, which did not match the assumptions of classical Marxism. Marx had expected revolution to emerge in advanced industrial societies like Britain or Germany, but Russia in the early 1900s was still largely rural, politically repressive, and economically uneven.

One of Lenin's most important adaptations was his belief that revolution did not need to wait for full capitalist development. Classical Marxism suggested that Russia was not yet ready for socialism because the bourgeois stage of development had not fully occurred. Lenin rejected this strict sequencing. He argued that imperialism and global capitalism had changed the nature of revolution, meaning that socialist revolution could begin in the weakest link of the capitalist system even if that society was not fully industrialised.

This led Lenin to develop the idea of a vanguard party. He believed that the working class alone would not naturally develop revolutionary consciousness beyond basic economic demands such as better wages and conditions. Instead, a highly disciplined and professional group of revolutionaries was needed to lead, organise, and educate the proletariat. This was a major departure from Marx's more spontaneous vision of class uprising.

Lenin also placed great emphasis on centralisation and discipline within the revolutionary movement. Unlike more democratic socialist groups, he believed that internal unity and strict control were essential to survive under Tsarist repression. This helped shape the structure of the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, which became increasingly distinct in its organisation and strategy.

Another key adaptation was Lenin's focus on the role of the state. While Marx predicted that the state would eventually wither away, Lenin argued that a strong revolutionary state would be necessary immediately after the revolution to crush opposition and reorganise society. This idea became especially important after the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917, when they faced civil war and widespread resistance.

Lenin also simplified Marxist ideas into a more direct political message that could appeal to Russia's largely illiterate population. Instead of abstract theory, Bolshevik slogans such as "Peace, Bread and Land" reflected immediate concerns of workers, peasants, and soldiers, particularly during the First World War.

Additional optional tasks

Optional task 1:

Read the article from London School of economics on Lenin's theory of socialist revolution and make a set of Cornell notes on the key points from the article

Article:

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2020/04/22/revisiting-lenins-theory-of-socialist-revolution-on-the-150th-anniversary-of-his-birth/>

Instructions on how to make Cornell notes:

<https://www.goodnotes.com/blog/cornell-notes>

Optional task 2:

Read the article by Jonathan Davis and make a set of Cornell notes on the key points from the article:

Article:

<https://daily.jstor.org/the-birth-of-the-soviet-union-and-the-death-of-the-russian-revolution/>

Reading for compulsory task 2:

Russia Before Revolution, c.1900–1914

Russia is the largest country in the world and at the turn of the 20th Century stretched 6400 kilometres across two continents: Europe and Asia, covering about one sixth of the world's land surface. This geographical size had both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, Russia's vast territory made invasion difficult because enemies had to travel huge distances, often through difficult weather conditions. On the other hand, size made Russia extremely difficult to govern. Many regions were isolated and separated by enormous distances, which meant that the government in St Petersburg, which was in the Northwest of Russia, struggled to maintain control over the whole empire.

Communication across Russia was poor, especially compared to countries such as Britain, Germany or France. There were relatively few railways, roads were often in poor condition, and many parts of the empire were remote and difficult to reach. The Trans-Siberian Railway connected Moscow in Western Russia to Vladivostok in Eastern Russia, taking about a week to travel between the two. During harsh winters, travel became even more difficult due to extreme cold, snow and ice. Although telegraph systems existed, communication remained slow in many areas. These weaknesses caused major problems for government. Orders from the tsar could take a long time to reach distant regions and local problems, such as famine, protests or unrest, could develop before the government was able to respond. Economic development was also slowed because goods and resources could not easily be transported around the country.

The Russian Empire was not only geographically large but also extremely diverse. By the beginning of the twentieth century, less than half of the population was ethnically Russian. Many different national groups lived within the empire, including Poles, Ukrainians, Finns, Jews, Georgians, Armenians and people from Central Asia. These groups spoke different languages, followed different religions and often had customs very different from those of ethnic Russians. Such diversity made governing Russia even more complicated, especially as some minority groups wanted greater independence or resisted control from the central government.

To strengthen control over the empire, the tsars introduced a policy known as Russification. This policy aimed to force minority groups to speak the Russian language and follow Russian culture and traditions rather than their own traditions. Russian became the official language used in schools and government, while local customs and identities were often discouraged. The tsars believed this policy would strengthen unity and reduce opposition to central authority. However, Russification often had the opposite effect. Many minority groups deeply resented attempts to erase their cultural identity, which increased anger towards the government and encouraged nationalist opposition movements.

Politically, Russia remained very different from many western European countries. Whereas Britain had parliamentary government and elected representatives, Russia was ruled through autocracy. This meant that ultimate power rested in the hands of one ruler: the tsar. Tsar Nicholas II believed firmly in

the principle of absolute rule and saw himself as chosen by God to govern Russia. He was not elected and believed he should not be restricted by constitutions or parliaments. As a result, ordinary Russians had little say in how the country was governed. The tsars ruled Russia through a system of officials, ministers, soldiers and police. Important decisions were made at the top and passed down through a large bureaucracy. There was no prime minister or parliament at this point (Russia did not get either of these until 1905). The army helped maintain order, and newspapers, books and political discussion were controlled by censorship. The secret police, known as the Okhrana, monitored anyone considered a threat to the regime. Political opponents were often arrested, imprisoned or sent into exile in Siberia. This system allowed the tsars to maintain power, but it also created resentment among those who wanted reform.

The Russian Orthodox Church played an important role in supporting tsarist rule. The Church taught people that the tsar had been chosen by God and that obedience was a religious duty. Priests encouraged loyalty and respect for authority, helping to reinforce the idea that challenging the tsar was morally wrong. Religion therefore became an important source of political support for the regime. However, faith in the tsar would weaken significantly during the early twentieth century.

Russian society was dominated by peasants, who made up about 80% of the Russia population. Around four-fifths of the population lived in rural areas and worked on the land. Before 1861, the Russian peasants had been serfs, which meant they were owned by their masters (the nobility). Essentially, a serf was an enslaved person. In 1861, they had been emancipated (freed) and given plots of land taken from the estates of the nobility. However, they had been forced to pay for their land by making yearly payments to the government. Many peasants continued to live in poverty even after serfdom had ended. Farming methods remained old-fashioned, harvests were often poor, and many peasants lacked enough land to survive comfortably. During times of bad harvest, there was often widespread starvation amongst the peasants. In 1891 a bad harvest led to the death of 400,000 peasants. As a result, dissatisfaction towards tsarist rule remained widespread in the countryside.

At the same time, Russia's rulers increasingly recognised that the country needed to modernise. Russia lagged behind industrial powers such as Britain and Germany in both economic and military strength. Earlier defeats in war had exposed Russia's weaknesses, especially the humiliating defeat in the Crimean War during in 1856. To compete with other powers, Russia needed more factories, stronger industry, better transport systems and a modern military. Industrialisation therefore expanded rapidly in some cities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By 1914, Russia was the world's fourth-largest producer of coal, pig iron (a type of raw material used for steelmaking and cast iron) and steel. Because of Russia's late industrial development, many of its factories used up-to-date methods of mass production, although there were also many small workshops with low levels of technology. By 1914, two-fifths of factory workers worked in factories where there were over 1000 workers. This made it much easier to organise strike action.

Modernisation created new dangers for the tsarist regime. Industrial growth led to the development of large towns and cities where workers often experienced poor living and working conditions. Factory

workers commonly faced long hours, low wages and overcrowded housing where several families lived in one room of a communal building where the room was divided up by curtains. Because many workers lived close together, they were able to discuss grievances and organise protests more easily. Industrialisation also encouraged education and political awareness, creating new groups of people who increasingly questioned the system of autocratic rule. Even members of the growing middle class began to demand political reform and representation.

As dissatisfaction increased, several opposition groups emerged. Liberals wanted constitutional reform, civil rights and an elected parliament. Revolutionary groups were more radical. The Social Revolutionaries believed that peasants should receive land and often supported violent action against the government. Meanwhile, Marxist groups argued that workers would eventually overthrow capitalism and create a socialist society. These Marxists later divided into two groups: the Bolsheviks, who supported a tightly organised revolutionary party, and the Mensheviks, who believed socialism should develop through a broader movement involving larger numbers of people. Minority national groups also increasingly opposed tsarist rule, particularly because of resentment towards Russification.

Although opposition grew over many years, the 1905 Revolution was a key moment of crisis for the Nicholas II. The 1905 Revolution was triggered by a combination of deep-rooted long-term problems and a series of immediate short-term crises that pushed Russia into open unrest.

In the long term, Russia was already experiencing serious structural weaknesses. Most peasants lived in poverty and suffered from a shortage of land, meaning rural discontent was widespread. In the cities, industrial workers faced long hours, low wages and unsafe working conditions, which encouraged strikes and organisation. Politically, Russia remained an autocracy under Tsar Nicholas II, so there were limited opportunities for people to express dissatisfaction or influence government decisions. In addition, opposition groups such as liberals and revolutionary socialists were growing in strength, and national minority groups resented policies such as Russification. These long-term issues meant that by the early twentieth century, Russian society contained large-scale frustration across multiple social groups, even if this had not yet developed into full-scale revolution.

However, these underlying tensions were brought to the surface by a series of short-term events in 1904–05. The most important was Russia's involvement in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). Many Russians expected a quick and easy victory, but instead the war exposed serious weaknesses in Russia's military and industrial capacity. Defeat by Japan, a much smaller country than Russia on land and sea, damaged the government's reputation, while the economic strain of war contributed to rising prices and worsening living conditions at home. This loss of confidence in the regime helped turn long-standing resentment into active protest.

The immediate trigger came in January 1905 with Bloody Sunday. Thousands of workers and their families, led by Father Georgy Gapon, marched peacefully to the Winter Palace in St Petersburg to present a petition to Tsar Nicholas II, asking for better working conditions and reforms. However, troops fired on the crowd, killing and injuring many people. This event was crucial because it

destroyed the traditional image of the tsar as the “Little Father” who protected his people. Instead, he was now seen as a ruler willing to use violence against peaceful protest. The combination of long-term social and political problems with these short-term shocks turned widespread dissatisfaction into revolutionary unrest in 1905.

Following Bloody Sunday, unrest spread rapidly across Russia. Workers went on strike, peasants attacked landowners and protests grew in major cities. Some members of the armed forces even mutinied, most famously on the battleship Potemkin. By late 1905, a general strike had disrupted transport, industry and communication. The government struggled to restore order and Nicholas II feared losing control completely. Faced with the possibility of revolution, the tsar was forced to make concessions.

In October 1905, Tsar Nicholas II issued the October Manifesto which temporarily divided opposition and satisfied moderate liberals. This promised greater civil liberties, including freedom of speech and assembly, and announced the creation of an elected parliament called the Duma. The tsar also promised that laws would not be passed without the Duma’s approval. For many moderates and liberals, these concessions appeared to represent important progress and temporarily reduced revolutionary pressure. The revolution was eventually crushed by the military in December 1905.

After 1905, some developments seemed to make the possibility of future revolution less likely. The government regained control through repression, arresting opponents and weakening revolutionary organisations. Pyotr Stolypin’s land reforms, introduced after his appointment as Prime Minister in 1906, represented a significant attempt by the Tsarist regime to stabilise rural Russia in the wake of the 1905 Revolution. The reforms aimed to dismantle the traditional peasant commune (*mir*), in which land was held collectively and periodically redistributed, and instead promote the creation of a class of independent, prosperous farmers. Peasants were given the legal right to withdraw their land from the commune and consolidate scattered strips into a single, privately owned farm, known as a *khutor* or *otrub*. Additionally, the Peasants’ Land Bank was expanded to provide credit, enabling more ambitious farmers to purchase land and invest in modern agricultural techniques. Stolypin believed that by fostering a class of conservative, property-owning peasants, often described as “strong and sober”, the regime could cultivate loyalty to the Tsar and undercut support for radical movements. In the short term, there is evidence that these reforms contributed to greater rural stability: agricultural production rose in some regions, and a minority of peasants benefited materially, becoming more invested in maintaining order. By addressing land hunger which was one of the key grievances that had fuelled unrest in 1905, the reforms temporarily reduced the likelihood of widespread peasant rebellion and future revolution. However, their overall impact was uneven, as many peasants were either unable or unwilling to leave the commune, meaning that while revolutionary pressures were eased for a time, they were by no means permanently resolved.

However, other developments continued to sustain the conditions in which revolution might re-emerge. Nicholas II remained firmly committed to the principles of autocracy and repeatedly acted to limit the authority of the Duma whenever it threatened to challenge his power. In practice, this meant that the Duma’s ability to initiate or pass legislation was severely curtailed, while government

ministers remained accountable to the Tsar alone rather than to any representative institution. Such actions undermined one of the central concessions of the October Manifesto and weakened public confidence in the prospect of meaningful reform. As a result, many Russians came to believe that the Tsar had broken his promises made in 1905, a perception that alienated moderates who might otherwise have supported gradual change. In turn, this disillusionment intensified frustration with the existing political order and strengthened the appeal of more radical groups, as peaceful constitutional development appeared increasingly unattainable.

At the same time, industrial workers in towns and cities continued to experience difficult living and working conditions. Many factory workers faced low wages, long hours and dangerous workplaces, while overcrowded housing and poor sanitation created unhealthy conditions in rapidly growing industrial cities. Because workers lived and worked closely together, it was easier for them to organise protests and strikes. Although unrest had reduced after 1905, anger increased again by the early 1910s. Strike activity rose sharply, especially after incidents such as the Lena Goldfields Massacre of 1912. The incident took place at the Lena goldfields in Siberia, where thousands of miners worked in extremely harsh conditions. Workers complained about long hours, dangerous conditions, poor pay and poor-quality food. After tensions increased, miners organised strikes to demand improvements. Instead of negotiating, the authorities responded with force. Government troops opened fire on striking workers, killing and injuring many people. Reports of the shootings spread quickly across Russia through newspapers and political activists, shocking many Russians and increasing anger towards the government. The massacre was important because it reminded people that, despite the promises of reform after 1905, the tsarist regime still depended on repression and violence to maintain control. For workers, it reinforced the belief that peaceful protest would not bring meaningful change. The event also encouraged renewed strike action across Russia, with worker unrest increasing significantly in the years before 1914. Revolutionary groups used the massacre as evidence that the government could not be trusted and that more dramatic political change might be necessary.

By 1914, Russia appeared more stable than it had been during the crisis of 1905. Economic growth had improved conditions for some people, and the government had restored order. Yet many of the underlying tensions remained unresolved. The tsar still ruled as an autocrat, opposition groups had not disappeared, and millions of peasants and workers remained dissatisfied. As a result, although revolution had been delayed, the problems facing Russia had not been solved. The outbreak of war in 1914 placed even greater pressure on Russia and worsened many of the tensions that had existed before 1914.