

1 Key words

Vocabulary

Skim the two texts below to find words or phrases that fit these definitions

1. getting smaller _____
2. farming _____
3. appear, come out _____
4. a type of land that people live on in return for working on it _____
5. unable to read or write _____
6. the way things are, what exists now _____
7. cunning, making things happen by underhand means _____
8. the system of total political control by one person _____
9. laws saying what people may or may not write, say, film, etc _____
10. making people do what you want them to do _____

The Russian Revolution

In the early 20th century, Russia was a country of alarming contrasts. It covered almost one-sixth of the Earth's land area, and its aristocrats and royals led lives of constant ease and luxury, while peasants and factory workers worked long hours for declining wages which often did not cover rising food prices.

Despite the building of many large factories in the 1890s, at the beginning of the 20th century Russia was still largely an agrarian state with around three-quarters of the population living in villages. The country had not begun to emerge from its feudal traditions until 1861, when Russian peasants were declared to be no longer the possession of their masters. The vast majority of these peasants had no access to education; they were illiterate and knew very little about developments in farming, still undertaking most tasks by hand.

Power and money rested in the hands of a few aristocrats, who lived on huge estates. Their position and the status quo were keenly supported by the rich Russian Orthodox Church.

Tsar Nicholas II



Tsar Nicholas II with his wife Tsaritsa Alexandra Feodorovna and their five children, from left; Maria, Alexei (seated on floor), Olga, Tatiana and Anastasia.

Nicholas became Tsar in 1894. He was a good husband and a devoted father. The Tsar was often referred to as 'the Little Father of all the Russians'. Unfortunately, he had difficulty making decisions of state and he could be weak and devious. Unlike the British monarch, Nicholas had no parliament that took decisions or was available to give him advice. This autocracy reinforced its control by enforcing censorship laws and developing a strong, manipulative secret police.

2 Long-term causes of the Revolution

Reading

Read and order these sentences to make a paragraph.

Long-term causes of the Revolution.

- Yet more opponents to Tsarist rule complained that the peasants were poor and were usually restricted to small, inefficient plots of land on which they toiled at subsistence farming.
- Other groups voiced their opposition to poor wages and conditions in towns and factories.
- One of the reasons for opposition was that many resented the fact that Nicholas was an unelected despot.

3 Opposing the Tsarist Regime

Reading

Label each paragraph of the text below with the appropriate heading.

'Marxist revolutionaries'

'Lenin's group'

'Democratic reform'

Opposition to Nicholas



Soldiers and workers rioting in Petrograd.

1. _____

There were many different groups opposed to the way Russia was governed, and each one had its own solution. The reformers did not seek to do away with the monarchy, but to change the systems and methods of governing Russia. They advocated a democratic parliament, the abolition of censorship, and the introduction of programmes to educate the poor in towns and villages.

2. _____

Some people no longer believed in the monarchy. They wanted to get rid of the Tsar and establish a new system. One group of revolutionaries followed the ideas of Karl Marx, a German who had written about how he thought societies developed. He believed that as the gap in wealth between workers and owners widened there would inevitably be a violent revolt by the workers, allowing them to take control of the country and the 'means of production'.

3. _____

These revolutionaries called themselves Bolsheviks. Because they feared Tsar Nicholas' secret police, many of the leaders were in exile abroad. One such leader, Vladimir, continued to publish a newspaper from abroad while also organizing the structure of the Bolshevik Party itself. He waited for the right moment to return to Russia.

Work in pairs. Read one of the texts below and write five questions about it to ask your partner, while your partner reads the other text. Then allow your partner enough time to read your passage while you ask your questions.

Text A

The war against Germany, which began in 1914, showed how badly led and equipped the Russian Army was. After early defeats Tsar Nicholas himself took control, leaving his wife and her advisor, the monk Grigory Rasputin, to run the country.

As war disasters continued, both peasants and factory workers grew more desperate. The sense of a country collapsing was amplified by the reports of soldiers returning from the war. They told tales of battles lost by incompetent leaders, of soldiers with no boots or guns, and the wounded denied medical treatment. The response from the Russian rulers to strikes and demonstrations was to order the soldiers to break them up.

Text B

In March 1917, protests and 'bread riots' erupted in many cities. When the army was ordered to break up the riots, the troops refused and joined the demonstrations. In both Petrograd (St Petersburg) and Moscow support grew and on 17 March Nicholas abdicated. A provisional government led by Alexandr Kerensky was set up.

Vladimir Lenin, who was living in Switzerland, soon returned to Russia. He denounced Kerensky and promised 'Peace, Land and Bread'. In July the Bolsheviks attempted to take over the government but were defeated. Following an almost complete breakdown of law and order, on the night of 24–25 October (according to the old-style calendar: 6–7 November by the modern calendar) the Bolsheviks seized power. Kerensky was exiled and through the 'October Revolution' Lenin became ruler of Russia.

4 Russia in Turmoil 1914

Reading, Speaking

Put these sentences in the right order and find the missing word for each one from the box.

easy took good Tsar a control read was father war protests

1. peasants most not the could of

2. life the had aristocrats an

3. the known Tsar little was as the

4. not the ruler Tsar was a

5. organizer was Lenin good

6. many in lost the the Russians battles

7. army the of Tsar the took

8. place riots in bread cities took and many

9. March abdicated in Nicholas

10. peace slogan bread Lenin's land and

ANSWER KEY

1 Key words**Vocabulary**

1. declining
2. agrarian
3. emerge
4. feudal
5. illiterate
6. status quo
7. devious
8. autocracy
9. censorship
10. manipulative

2 Long-term causes of the Revolution**Reading**

3, 2, 1

3 Opposing the Tsarist Regime**Reading**

1. Democratic Reform
2. Marxist Revolutionaries
3. Lenin's Group

5 Points to Remember**Reading and Writing**

1. Most of the peasants could not read.
2. The aristocrats had an easy life.
3. The Tsar was known as the little father.
4. The Tsar was not a good ruler.
5. Lenin was a good organizer.
6. The Russians lost many battles in the war.
7. The Tsar took control of the army.
8. Protests and bread riots took place in many cities.
9. In March Tsar Nicholas abdicated.
10. Lenin's slogan was peace, land and bread.