The decline and fall of the Romanov dynasty

The areas of focus of this case study are:

- Nicholas II as autocrat
- Political, social and economic grievances in early twentieth-century Russia
- The Tsar's failure to address the problems of Russia
- The role of World War I in the fall of the tsarist regime

Source 3.1
Photograph c. 1905 showing Tsar Nicholas II, his wife, Alexandra, their daughters (from left to right, Tatiana, Maria, Anastasia and Olga) and baby son, Alexei
Introduction

The army formed by Russia’s Bolshevik party in January 1918 to protect the gains of the October 1917 Bolshevik revolution that had brought it to government.

In May 1918, Red Army guards imprisoned the Russian royal family at Yekaterinburg in the Ural Mountains. Tsar Nicholas II, his wife, the Tsarina Alexandra, and their five children lived in what their captors called the ‘House of Special Purpose’. The windows of the house were painted white. Guards and barricades surrounded the property. Rescue and escape were virtually impossible. On 17 July 1918, the family disappeared. Many people believed that the soldiers had executed them.

Officials, representatives of foreign governments, journalists, amateur detectives and the general public investigated, discussed, debated and speculated on the ultimate fate of the Romanovs for much of the twentieth century. The family was last definitely seen alive on 16 July 1918. Judge Ivan Sergeyev, conducted the first investigation into the disappearance in late 1918. He concluded that the Tsar, the family doctor and some servants had been murdered in the ‘House of Special Purpose’. Another investigator, Nicolai Sokolov, reported a few weeks later that the Bolsheviks shot the whole family, the family doctor and the family’s remaining servants. Neither investigation found any bodies to support its findings.

From the 1920s onwards, people came forward claiming to be one or other of the Tsar’s children. The most famous of these, Anna Anderson, fought a number of court cases to try and prove that she was the youngest daughter, Anastasia. DNA testing has now proved this claim to be false.

This chapter uses Russia’s Julian calendar for dates until February 1918. In the twentieth century, this calendar was 13 days behind the Gregorian calendar used throughout the western world and used in Russia from February 1918.

Members of the Bolshevik party which created the revolution of October 1917 that brought it to power. An earlier revolution in February 1917 had resulted in the Tsar’s loss of power.

Source 3.2

A photograph showing Nicholas Romanov and his family in captivity following his loss of power in February–March 1917

Source Questions

1. What do sources 3.1 and 3.2 indicate about how the lives of Tsar Nicholas II and his family changed from 1905 to 1918?
2. What questions would you ask to gain a better understanding of why the family’s circumstances changed during this period?
Nicholas II as autocrat

Nicholas becomes Tsar

When Nicholas Romanov became Tsar (Emperor) of Russia in 1894, there was no hint of the fate that awaited him in 1918. Romanovs had ruled Russia since 1613. Many among the huge crowds that lined the streets for his coronation celebrations saw him as their ‘little father’. Officially, Nicholas was ‘Tsar of all the Russias’ and Grand Duke of both Poland and Finland. He ruled an empire covering about one-sixth of the Earth’s land area. His empire was at peace, was in the early stages of industrialisation and ranked among the world’s great powers. Nicholas II believed that God had appointed him to rule and that it was his duty to continue the autocracy that he had inherited.

Source 3.3

L. Tuxen’s painting of the coronation of Nicholas II on 14 May 1896 at the Upensky Cathedral of Moscow’s Kremlin

SOURCE QUESTION

What impression of Nicholas II and his court do you think the artist wanted to create in source 3.3?

Nicholas the autocrat

Nicholas II was a conservative leader with few of the skills needed to effectively rule 132 million people. His education had encouraged him to:

- believe that it was his right to have unlimited control over the Russian people
- support anti-Semitism or hostility towards Jews
- be pro-military in outlook.
Nicholas II was politically naive and accepted the advice he wanted to hear rather than that of people who tried to guide him to do what was politically sound and achievable. He ruled Russia as an autocrat and expected his subjects to give him unquestioning obedience. Government propaganda and the teachings of the Russian Orthodox Church encouraged his people to love and respect their Tsar and look on him as the ‘little father’ who could rule them severely in the interests of Russia. The Church supported the use of repression to stamp out ‘human weaknesses’ that could undermine Russia’s power.

As an autocrat, Nicholas II ruled a police state. The secret police, the Okhrana, responded brutally to anyone who dared to question his authority. Military commanders could order Russia’s one million soldiers to any part of the empire to put down revolts. The government imposed strict censorship of the press. Police spies reported any unfavourable comments made at public meetings. Critics, protesters and would-be revolutionaries risked death, prison and exile for any activities they organised against the government.

Tsar Nicholas had absolute power. He declared the law and could overrule any existing law. Political parties were illegal until 1905. There was no parliament until 1906 and even then the Tsar did everything he could to deprive it of real power. Russia did not have a constitution to limit the Tsar’s power or control the methods for choosing ministers. Nicholas II was free to appoint and dismiss his advisers without giving reasons.

Each of the Tsar’s ministers was individually responsible to him. They rarely met as a group to discuss policies. Nicholas could decide the extent to which a particular law could be imposed — thus rewarding some and destroying others. Government officials put his decisions into practice and collected taxes for him.

I am informed that recently in some zemstvo assemblies, voices have made themselves heard from people carried away by senseless dreams about participation by members of the zemstvo in the affairs of internal government; let all know that I, devoting all my strength to the welfare of the people, will uphold the principle of autocracy as firmly and as unflinchingly as my late unforgettable father.


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**Source Question**

What information do sources 3.3 and 3.4 provide about Nicholas’s power?

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**Political, social and economic grievances in early twentieth-century Russia**

In 1900, the Russian empire comprised 23 different nationalities, many of which resented Russian rule. Russians made up 40 per cent of the empire’s 132 million people. Seventy-seven per cent of the population were peasants; 10 per cent belonged to the middle class, 1 per cent to the nobility. The remaining 12 per cent included priests, urban workers, officials, Cossacks and foreigners. Only about 1.5 per cent of the total belonged to the world outside agriculture — compared with 12 per cent in the United States.
An early twentieth-century cartoon depicting Russia’s social structure and the roles of the various groups within it. It was published in Switzerland by the ‘Union of Russian Socialists’.

**SOURCE QUESTIONS**

1. Explain how each level of the cartoon in source 3.5 provides criticism of the Tsar’s government. Why wasn’t it published in Russia?
2. Use source 3.5 and re-read the paragraph at the foot of page 44, to create a mind map of potential problems Nicholas II might have to deal with as a result of:
   (a) Russia’s many different nationalities
   (b) the large number of people involved in agriculture
   (c) Russia’s social system.

Every social class had grievances against the government. Discontent became organised through illegal political parties and other groups, each with its own illegal newspaper. For example:

- Middle and upper class **liberals** supported the Union of Liberation. They wanted Russia to become a democracy with a constitution and a parliament to limit the Tsar’s powers.
- Socialist intellectuals, influenced by the teachings of the German philosopher, Karl Marx, formed the Social Democratic Party (later to split into the Bolshevik and Menshevik parties). They believed in socialism and thought that revolution was the only way of ending tsarist rule. They sought support from urban workers.
- The Socialist Revolutionary Party also aimed to overthrow tsarist rule. Its goal was to achieve land redistribution in favour of its mainly peasant supporters. It used terrorism as one of its methods and was responsible for the assassination of hundreds of political figures.

In the early 1900s, Russia was on the brink of crisis. Failed harvests, inflation and economic depression saw Russia’s peasants and urban workers increasingly resort to riots, demonstrations and strikes to protest their poor conditions. Russia’s people demanded the redress of numerous political, social and economic problems. Tsar Nicholas II persisted in the belief that to grant reforms would undermine his autocratic power.
Peasant poverty was a long-standing problem. Russian peasants gained their 
emancipation in 1861 in the form of a decree from Tsar Alexander II. They 
then received pay for their work and were freed from ownership. However, 
there were significant limits to their freedom. They paid compensation (known 
as redemption payments) for the land they had been ‘given’ and they 
needed permission from the commune if they wanted to leave the 
village. The land was owned and paid for by the village community, not the 
individual, so ex-peasants still had to send back regular payments to offset the 
communal debt. Peasants continued to use old-fashioned farming methods, 
involving manual rather than machine labour. Living standards were poor 
with a whole family often sharing a single room.

emancipation: the 1861 decree from Tsar Alexander II announcing that Russia’s peasants would be granted their freedom from ownership and some land to assist them in their new lives.

commune: the main system for organising farming between 1861 and 1905. Each Russian commune owned the land its peasants worked and its village council organised the farming tasks.
Industrialisation helps the organisation of discontent

From 1880 onwards, the Russian government encouraged industrial growth. Many peasants began to leave the countryside in the hope of a better life in towns and cities. In Russia’s capital, St Petersburg, this urbanisation saw the population increase by 55 per cent between 1881 and 1900. Cities and towns grew rapidly and concentrated within them large numbers of an increasingly rebellious working class.

By 1900, Russia had about 2500000 urban workers. They lived in unhygienic and overcrowded factory dormitories where the two-shift system often meant that two workers shared rights to a bunk bed. In smaller factories, families lived next to their workbenches. Others had rooms in poorly built, cramped and unsanitary housing. Less than half those who lived in houses had running water or sewerage systems. They worked a 12-hour day for poor wages and had no trade unions to fight for them, as these were illegal. Some laws encouraged worker protection but the provision of it depended mainly on the goodwill of the individual employer.

Revolutionary activists from (illegal) parties such as the Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries had a willing audience. Workers increasingly went on strike to demand improved working and living conditions.

The Russian nobility comprised just over 1 per cent of the population and controlled 25 per cent of Russia’s land. By the early twentieth century, the nobility’s poor economic management had led to a decline in its landholdings. Nobles increasingly relied on government salaries to maintain their extravagant lifestyles. Many nobles served as officials in Russia’s bureaucracy and abused their positions by taking bribes and misappropriating government funds. The nobility generally spent more than it earned and blamed the government for its declining wealth and influence.

Russia’s middle class was small and divided. Intellectuals looked down on those who controlled trade and industry. The middle class and Russia’s educated aristocracy criticised the Tsar’s system of government and resented the limits placed on their freedom of expression and on their involvement in the decision-making process.

War against Japan

The decision to go to war against Japan in February 1904 highlighted the government’s weaknesses. The war degenerated into a series of Russian military blunders that demonstrated the inefficiency of the Russian army and navy.

In October 1904, the Russian navy left the Baltic area to assist in the protection of Port Arthur in Manchuria. Japan’s ally, Britain, refused to allow the Russian navy through the Suez Canal. By the time the navy had sailed virtually around the world to reach Port Arthur, the battle had been lost. The war ended with the humiliation of Russian defeat in August 1905. It was the first victory of an Asian power over a European power. Evidence of Russia’s military weakness increased the people’s discontent and demands for reform.
Bloody Sunday begins the revolution of 1905

In 1905, the image of the Tsar as the ‘little father’ gave way to a view of him as ‘Bloody Nicholas’. On 9 January, in St Petersburg, a procession of peasants and workers came to respectfully present a petition to the Tsar outlining the problems they hoped he could resolve. The Tsar’s soldiers, ordered not to allow the procession to continue, fired on the protesters when they refused to go home. It ended as a bloodbath, with up to 1000 deaths and many more casualties. The day went down in history as Bloody Sunday. It began the revolution of 1905.

Source 3.8
A photograph showing part of the procession of peasants in St Petersburg on 9 January 1905

Source 3.9
Extract from the report of Sir Charles Hardinge, the British ambassador in St Petersburg, on the events of 9 January 1905

Every effort has been made to obliterate . . . the incidents on Sunday . . . masons have been busy in removing the shot-marks on . . . the houses in Nevsky Prospect . . . the dead have been secretly buried at night . . .

What could not fail to strike a disinterested onlooker . . . was . . . the absence of any Government at all, events being allowed to drift without any co-operation between . . . the Ministry of the Interior . . . the police . . . and the military authorities . . . The Government were well aware of the demands of the strikers and of their intention to assemble . . . to present their grievances to the Emperor . . . no police nor military measures were taken to prevent the massing of the strikers during Sunday morning in the near vicinity of the Winter Palace. It was only at about 1 o’clock . . . that some companies of the Pavlovsky Regiment closed the furthest extremity of the Troitzka Bridge over the Neva, which is exactly opposite to His Majesty’s Embassy, and as a crowd gradually collected and refused to disperse, the troops fired volleys into them, killing and wounding a considerable number . . . It was there that the first blood was shed.
...[T]he entrances [to the Palace Square] were closed by the troops, who were assembled in large numbers of both cavalry and infantry in the square itself. It was about 3 o’clock that endeavours were made to effect the dispersal of the crowds ... packed with their women and children ... in the streets. They offered no provocation beyond jeering at the officers and men, asking them why they were not fighting the Japanese, &c., when suddenly, according to the evidence of two trustworthy eyewitnesses, a company of the Preobajensky Regiment was brought up ... and, after three rapidly given warnings to the crowd to go, the order to fire was given. The fact that the troops were at the distance of only 20 yards from the crowd, who could hardly move whether they wished to do so or not, made the fire doubly and even trebly effective, and the results were appalling. Amongst the killed were several women and children, who ... had tried to turn and flee, and who were shot in the back. Here there were between 80 and 100 killed and many wounded. From that time till midnight the Cossacks continued to charge the crowd, and firing went on at five or six points in the town ... 

As to the necessity for such draconian measures as cavalry charges and volleys into an unarmed and peaceful crowd, there can be but a negative verdict, and I am firmly convinced that, had the police been as efficient as that of London, three or four hundred policemen would have been amply sufficient to deal with the crowds without resort to such extreme measures ...

It is rumoured that the 14th Regiment of Marines ... refused to fire on the crowd ... this may be true, since they were apparently withdrawn from duty although I saw them posted on the quay on Sunday morning. It is, moreover, quite certain that a good many soldiers fired intentionally over the heads of the crowds ...

...[T]he Emperor has played into the hands of the revolutionaries, who have not been slow to broadcast throughout the country the news that the workmen of St Petersburgh, having peacefully approached the Emperor with the object of laying their grievances before the ‘Little Father’, have been mowed down by His Majesty’s troops. This incident will have created a deep gulf, which will not be easily bridged, between the Emperor and the working classes who have hitherto been the most loyal subjects of the throne, and a blow will have been struck at the autocracy from which it will be difficult to recover. ... [A]lthough order may to all outward appearance be restored by repressive measures, the public unrest can only be allayed by large measures of reform ...


**Source 3.10**

A comment from Aleksandra Kollantai, member of the Bolshevik faction of the Social Democrats, who took part in the Bloody Sunday march

I noticed that mounted troops stood drawn up in front of the Winter Palace itself, but everyone thought that it did not mean anything ... All the workers were peaceful and expectant. They wanted the Tsar or one of his highest, gold-braided ministers to come ... and take the humble petition ...

At first I saw the children who were hit [by rifle fire] and dragged down from the trees ... We heard the clatter of hooves. The Cossacks rode right into the crowd and slashed with their sabres like madmen. A terrible confusion arose.

The 1905 revolution

Hostility to the events of Bloody Sunday reverberated throughout the empire. The people responded with nine months of strikes, peasant revolts, mutinies in the army and navy and the formation of organised groups demanding change and reform.

Liberals demanded a constitution. Workers began to form soviets where they would meet to express grievances and plan action. Peasants seized land and property and launched attacks against upper-class landowners. Non-Russians participated in violent demonstrations against the government’s Russification policies, which had denied them the free expression of their languages, traditions and religious beliefs.

Events reached a crisis in October 1905 when the different opposition groups united in a general strike. Transport, communications, factories, shops, schools, universities and government offices — all stopped functioning. Workers participated in street demonstrations, riots, looting and the destruction of symbols of tsarist authority. The police could not maintain law and order. Soldiers either could not be trusted or could not be transported quickly enough to particular trouble spots. It seemed that Nicholas II and his government would be overthrown by the revolutionary force of opponents from all levels of Russian society.

The October Manifesto and the Tsar’s survival

Nicholas II remained in power in late 1905 largely because he introduced some reforms. In the October Manifesto of 17 October 1905, he announced the creation of a duma — a national assembly which would be elected on the basis of universal male suffrage and be given power to make laws. This meant that the Tsar could no longer consider himself an autocrat. The Manifesto also allowed freedom of speech and made political parties legal.

The October Manifesto gained Nicholas support among liberals, especially the Octobrists — a new party named in the Manifesto’s honour. Liberals were willing to see the Manifesto as an opportunity to at least begin a process of reforming the government. They began to withdraw the support they had previously given to the strike movement. In November 1905, the Tsar issued a law announcing the cancellation of the unpopular redemption payments from 1907 onwards. The peasants would finally have ownership of the land they had been repaying since the 1860s.

The Manifesto did not address problems of poverty, low wages and poor working conditions. Workers in St Petersburg and Moscow continued their strikes in the hope of gaining an 8-hour working day. In December 1905, the police arrested the leaders of the powerful St Petersburg Soviet and, in Moscow, loyal troops ruthlessly crushed an uprising that had paralysed the city for more than two weeks.

French bank loans and the return of troops from Manchuria helped the Tsar to re-establish his authority. In reality, the revolution lasted until mid 1907. In the countryside, peasants seized land and Socialist Revolutionaries undertook a campaign of terror against tsarist officials. The Tsar’s position was gradually restored — helped by the holding of trials, the use of troops to crush revolts and the use of the hangman’s noose, known as ‘Stolypin’s necktie’, to execute terrorists.
The Tsar’s failure to address the problems of Russia

To ensure his long-term survival, the Tsar needed to address the problems that had caused the 1905 revolution. His survival was pinned on the hopes of pleasing some groups in Russian society and ignoring the demands of others. The two main attempts at long-term reform were:

- the introduction of a duma
- Prime Minister Stolypin’s efforts to create a more prosperous peasantry whose improved conditions would encourage loyalty to the Tsar.

Failure to make the duma work

The creation of a duma should have ended Nicholas’ autocratic power. The Fundamental Laws, issued in April 1906, demonstrated the Tsar’s reluctance to do this. They still described the Tsar’s authority as ‘autocratic’ although it had ceased to be ‘unlimited’. They went on to proclaim his rights to:

- dismiss the duma and announce new elections whenever he wished
- continue to personally choose and dismiss his ministers rather than allow the duma this power. This meant government ministers would continue to be responsible to the Tsar rather than to the duma.
- declare new laws alone at any time that he announced a state of emergency or whenever the duma was not in session.

The Fundamental Laws also outlined the role of the State Council. The Tsar would appoint half of its members and it would have to approve all laws. Thus, it would act like an upper house but one strongly influenced by the Tsar.

state of emergency
a situation in which a government is under threat in its attempts to assert its authority and control over events and the actions of particular groups

Source 3.11
A cartoon entitled ‘Via Appia’ from Sprut (Octopus), No. 5, 1906
Thus, before the first duma had met in July 1906, the Tsar had demonstrated his unwillingness to allow it any real power. Nicholas II dismissed it after only two and a half months. He had been angered by its discussion of proposals for land redistribution — proposals which, if adopted, would threaten his own landholdings and those of most of Russia’s upper class.

**Creation of a more conservative duma**

Between the periods of the first and second dumas, the Tsar used his emergency powers to declare a number of new laws, including Stolypin’s agrarian reforms (see below). In June 1907, he ordered the closure of the second duma. Even more radical than the first, it had lasted only three and a half months. On 3 June 1907, using the emergency powers, Prime Minister Stolypin illegally changed the electoral law to ensure that the third duma would be dominated by landowners and businessmen and have limited chances of working-class membership.

The third duma lasted its full five-year term and was successful in that its more conservative membership did agree on some reform. In 1908, for example, it announced a 10-year program to introduce compulsory education. By 1911, however, even the Octobrist Party — the most significant party in the third duma — was expressing its frustration with the lack of cooperation from the Tsar and the State Council. With Stolypin’s assassination in the same year, the Tsar lost his most skilled adviser.

The fourth and final duma lasted from 1912 to 1917 but lacked the power to introduce the reforms needed to win the support of the people.

**Failure to increase peasant support for the Tsar**

Peasants disliked the fact that it was the commune, not the individual, that owned land. They resented strip farming that gave them only scattered parcels of land. Stolypin had hoped that his plans for agrarian reform would succeed in ending these major causes of peasant discontent. His reforms included the following:

- Peasants could now demand that their commune allocate land to them as individuals.
- Peasants could also demand this land as a single parcel, rather than the strips in several different areas as was the usual practice.
- Loans from the Peasant Land Bank would help peasants to buy additional land.
- Encouragement of migration to western Siberia would give peasants access to more land than was available in the overcrowded regions of central and southeastern Russia.

Stolypin believed it would take about 20 years for his reforms to work. By 1915, about 30 per cent of households had requested individual ownership but only just over two-thirds of them had received it. Only 10 per cent of households had requested their land in the single parcel that would enable them to establish separate farms. The least change occurred in the central and southeastern areas of the fertile ‘black earth’ provinces where discontent was most threatening to the Tsar’s authority. It seemed that Russia’s poorest peasants preferred the security of the commune to the uncertainty of being responsible for their own livelihoods.
Revival of popular protest, 1912–14

In early 1912, soldiers shot dead 230 striking miners on Siberia’s Lena goldfield (see page 198). As news of the event spread, sympathy strikes and demonstrations occurred throughout the empire. Revolutionaries spoke of workers’ lives sacrificed in the capitalists’ quest for gold. That year, 550,000 workers (compared with 8000 in 1911) went on strike as a form of political protest. In 1913, around 502,000 workers held similar protests. Few workers in that year celebrated the 300-year anniversary of Romanov rule.

In the period from January to July 1914, around 1,059,000 workers went on strike. By July 1914, Russia was in the throes of a general strike that echoed the revolutionary discontent of 1905. Then World War I broke out the following month — perhaps saving the tsarist government from a major revolutionary outburst.

The role of World War I in the fall of the tsarist regime

Historians debate Russia’s involvement in World War I. Did it interrupt a period of peaceful evolution towards a reformed system of tsarist government? Or did it accelerate a revolutionary movement already threatening to overthrow it? Historians agree that Russia’s involvement in World War I played a crucial role in the downfall of Nicholas II and his regime. Even before war began, one of the Tsar’s ministers had advised him of its dangers (see source 3.12).

[Extract from complete letter reproduced at http://stetson.edu/~psteeves/classes/durnovo.html]

SOURCE QUESTIONS

1. In source 3.12, what did Durnovo consider to be the danger of war for the government?

2. What does the source reveal of the perspective from which Durnovo viewed the situation? Support your response with evidence from the source.

World War I began in the early days of August 1914. Russia fought with its allies, France and Britain, against Germany, its ally Austria–Hungary and the Ottoman Empire. In the beginning, most Russian people responded enthusiastically. Fierce expressions of patriotism saw attacks on all things German, from the German embassy to the German-sounding name of the Russian capital, which was changed from St Petersburg to the more Russian-sounding Petrograd.
Increased hardships

In reality, the decision to go to war sounded the death knell of the Romanov government with the hardships of war severely undermining any remaining loyalty people might have felt towards Nicholas II.

By late 1914, dreams of a short victorious war had given way to its realities — high casualty rates, inadequate medical care, shortages of food, guns and bullets, loss of land and lost access to supplies and markets through both the Baltic and Black seas.

Russia’s enemy, Germany, was an industrialised nation with a well-trained, well-equipped army. The Russian army was fighting a twentieth-century war with nineteenth-century training and inadequate equipment. The Russian government could not cope with the economic strains this created. When the Tsar decided to ban alcohol for the duration of the war, the government lost 33 per cent of its tax revenue. By 1916, the war alone was costing nearly five times the 1913 budget allowance.

Russian soldiers suffered because of the Tsar’s poor decision making and poor financial planning. Some infantry units had rifles for only two-thirds of their soldiers. Ammunition was rationed. Many soldiers lacked the boots and warm underwear essential for survival in the bitterly cold conditions of the first winter of war. Morale was low. Russia’s poor railway network meant that it was difficult to transport supplies to either the battlefront or the home front. The loss of men and animals from villages disrupted food production.

Food supply of the armed forces took precedence over food supply of the cities. Peasants saw little benefit in marketing their grain for money of decreasing value. Fuel was expensive and in short supply. Inadequate transport saw the already limited city food supplies left rotting at rural railway stations.

War increased the pressures on Russia’s industries. New factories brought more labour into the cities. The workforce was four times larger than it had been in 1914 with 33 per cent of this new workforce moving to Petrograd.
Living standards declined. Wage increases averaged 100 per cent. Inflation was a major issue with prices of basic needs being at least double and as much as five times higher than pre-war figures. With price increases averaging 300 per cent and with coal, wood and grain in short supply, city dwellers struggled continually to withstand malnutrition and unsanitary living conditions.

Despite the great increase in wages, the economic condition of the masses is worse than terrible. While the wages of the masses have risen 50 per cent, and only in certain categories 100 to 200 per cent ... the prices on all products have increased 100 to 500 per cent ... wages for a worker before the war were [as follows in comparison with current wages] [in roubles]:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Worker</th>
<th>Prewar Wages</th>
<th>Present Wages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled</td>
<td>1.00 to 1.25</td>
<td>2.50 to 3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metalworker</td>
<td>2.00 to 2.50</td>
<td>4.00 to 5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrician</td>
<td>2.00 to 3.00</td>
<td>5.00 to 6.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the same time, the cost of consumer goods needed by the worker has changed in the following incredible way [in roubles]:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Prewar Cost</th>
<th>Present Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rent for a corner [of a room]</td>
<td>2.00 to 3.00 monthly</td>
<td>8.00 to 12.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinner [in a tearoom]</td>
<td>0.15 to 0.20</td>
<td>1.00 to 1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea [in a tearoom]</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boots</td>
<td>5.00 to 6.00</td>
<td>20.00 to 30.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirt</td>
<td>0.75 to 0.90</td>
<td>2.50 to 3.00, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even if we estimate the rise in earnings at 100 percent, the prices of products have risen, on the average, 300 percent. The impossibility of even buying many food products and necessities, the time wasted standing idle in queues to receive goods, the increasing incidence of disease due to malnutrition and unsanitary living conditions [cold and dampness because of lack of coal and wood], and so forth, have made the workers, as a whole, prepared for the wildest excesses of a 'hunger riot'...

If in the future grain continues to be hidden, the very fact of its disappearance will be sufficient to provoke in the capitals and in the other most populated centers of the empire the greatest disorders, attended by pogroms and endless street rioting. The mood of anxiety, growing daily more intense, is spreading to ever wider sections of the populace. Never have we observed such nervousness as there is now...


**Decline in the Tsar’s authority**

In July 1915, the Tsar took personal command of his troops at the battlefront. From then on, he had to accept personal blame for Russia’s military failures. While Nicholas II was at the front, the German-born Tsarina, Alexandra, took over responsibility for the day-to-day business of government. This had the effect of further isolating him from the demands and mood of his people and increasing the political influence of his wife.
The Tsarina’s poor political ability increased people’s hostility towards her. Many suspected her of being a traitor. Alexandra’s political failings were evident in the succession of incompetent people whom she recommended for appointment as ministers — often on the advice of Rasputin. ‘Rasputin’, a word meaning ‘immoral’, was the nickname given to a monk named Grigori. He was a self-appointed mystic, infamous for his drunkenness and womanising. The Tsarina listened to him because he seemed to be able to relieve the sufferings of her son, Alexei. (Alexei had haemophilia — a rare disease in which a person’s blood does not clot.) Many people feared that Rasputin had become so influential with the Tsarina that he was the real ruler of Russia.

**Source 3.15**
A cartoon from around 1916 depicting a commonly accepted view of Rasputin’s relationship with the royal family. The inscription means ‘The Russian tsars at home’.

**Source Question**
Describe the cartoon in source 3.15, and identify and explain the cartoonist’s message and perspective.
The coordination of the war effort largely resulted from the initiatives of key duma politicians, educated liberals and some industrialists — not from Nicholas II. For example:

- In late 1914, the duma established a committee to organise aid for war victims.
- In May 1915, Russian merchants and industrialists established the War Industries Committee (WIC) to organise the production of war materials.
- In June 1915, zemstvos united with similar organisations in the towns to form ZemGor, an organisation with the goal of assisting the sick and wounded.

The duma challenged the Tsar’s authority. Members of two key parties, the Octobrists and the Kadets, joined with a small number of right-wing duma deputies to form the Progressive Bloc. It demanded a ‘government of public confidence’, meaning a government whose ministers were appointed by the duma rather than the Tsar (or Tsarina). The Tsar refused.

By late 1916, discontent within Russia had reached crisis point. Over two million Russian soldiers were dead. Those who replaced them brought their civilian grievances with them into the army. The duma, ZemGor, the WIC and the majority of Russia’s upper classes no longer supported the Tsar. In December 1916, the Tsar’s cousin and uncle murdered Rasputin. They feared that Rasputin’s close association with the royal family would lead to their own downfall as well as that of the Tsar.

The Tsar also lost his authority in the eyes of working-class people. They were no longer willing to meet the expectations of loyalty, respect and patriotism that he had demanded of them. Police feared that the strains resulting from the increased hardships of everyday life would lead to riots and violence.

**Revolution!**

By early 1917, Nicholas II was probably the most hated man in Russia. The people were enduring a particularly severe winter, with temperatures averaging −12ºC. Inflation saw food prices in early 1917 averaging four times their cost in 1914.

In Petrograd in late February 1917, women queued for hours waiting for non-existent bread and then attacked the bakeries. On 22 February, a lockout at the Putilov metalworks brought workers onto the streets in anti-government protest marches. Striking female textile workers joined them the following day. By 25 February, there were nearly 250,000 striking workers demonstrating in the city centre. Revolutionaries called for the government to stand aside. The local military commander, General Khabalov, could not control the situation.

> I report that, as a result of the bread shortage, a strike broke out in many factories on February 23 and 24. On February 24, around 200,000 workers were out on strike and forced others to quit their jobs. Streetcar service was halted by the workers. In the afternoons of February 23 and 24, some of the workers broke through to the Nevskii [the main street], whence they were dispersed. Violence led to broken windows in several shops and streetcars.

Quoted in G. Vernadsky et al., op. cit., p. 878.
Rodzianko, the president of the duma, begged the Tsar to form a ministry of public confidence before it was too late.

Rodzianko: The situation is serious. The capital is in a state of anarchy. The government is paralyzed; the transportation system has broken down; the supply systems for food and fuel are completely disorganized. General discontent is on the increase. There is disorderly shooting in the streets; some of the troops are firing at each other. It is necessary that some person enjoying the confidence of the country be entrusted immediately with the formation of a new government. There can be no delay. Any procrastination is fatal. I pray God that at this hour the responsibility not fall upon the sovereign.

Tsar: That fatty Rodzianko has sent me some nonsense, which I shan’t even answer.


SOURCE QUESTIONS

1. What does General Khabalov’s report (source 3.16) indicate about the mood in Petrograd in late February 1917?
2. What does Rodzianko’s report (source 3.17) indicate?
3. What does the Tsar’s reply (also in source 3.17) indicate about his ability to rule Russia?
4. What is the perspective of each of the authors in relation to the situation in Russia in early 1917?

On 26 February 1917, the Tsar ordered the troops to put down the disturbances. The Volynsky Regiment refused to shoot at rioting strikers, killed the officers who had issued the orders and joined in the demonstrations. One by one, other regiments followed this example. By 1 March, the entire Petrograd garrison had joined the revolution, the Council of Ministers no longer met and workers and soldiers had united to revive the Petrograd Soviet, which had not met since 1905.

The Petrograd Soviet then issued its famous Order No. 1, demanding that all regiments submit to its authority rather than to that of the Tsar’s generals. Even though the duma had been dissolved, leaders of its major parties continued to meet. These parties fell into the role of forming a new tsarless government.

Abdication

The Tsar finally took the situation seriously enough to begin the trip back from military headquarters in Mogilev. Railway workers refused to let him go any further than Pskov. His generals advised abdication as the only means of returning Russian soldiers to the war effort. On 2 March 1917, Nicholas II abdicated for both himself and his son. On 3 March, his brother, the Grand Duke Mikhail, refused the responsibility of the throne.

The abdication and the events that followed it ended over three centuries of Romanov rule. What took its place was a Provisional Government which in reality had to share its power with that of the Petrograd Soviet. By late 1917, the power of soviets throughout Russia was stronger than that of the Provisional Government. In October 1917, the Bolshevik party created another revolution by seizing power in the name of the soviets.
**Source 3.18**

A photograph from May 1917 showing residents of Petrograd burning Romanov coats of arms, two months after Nicholas II’s abdication

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**SOURCE QUESTION**

How useful is the photograph in source 3.18 as evidence of public feeling about the Romanovs in 1917?

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**Events at Yekaterinburg**

The ‘disappearance’ of the Tsar and his family (see page 42) came in the midst of the Russian Civil War of 1918–20 in which the Bolsheviks fought to establish their control of Russia and the power to implement communism.

In 1976, two Russians, Gueli Riabov and Alexander Avdonin, began a systematic attempt to discover the Romanov burial site. They used old maps, testimony from the 1918–19 investigations and from family members of the executioners. They also used the unpublished account of Yakov Yurovsky, a self-confessed member of the execution squad. On 30 May 1979, in the forest near Yekaterinburg, the men discovered bones and three skulls less than a metre below ground. Fearing how the anti-tsarist Russian government might respond to their discovery, they kept their find secret for over ten years.

In April 1989, feeling more secure under the reformist government of Mikhail Gorbachev, Riabov revealed the information to a Russian newspaper. In 1991, forensic scientists assembled nine skeletons from the grave. They used dental records, computer modelling and DNA testing to help identify them. Based on analysis of X and Y chromosomes, they concluded that five were female and four were male. DNA tests then indicated that five of the people had been related to one another and that these five were parents and their three daughters.

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**communism** a political ideology and economic system, developed by Karl Marx (1818–1883), in which people share equally the ownership of their society’s resources, contribute to its work according to their abilities, and are provided for according to their needs. Its main ideas include the abolition of private ownership of property; government control of the nation’s resources; and the elimination of classes.
Scientists then looked for mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) which is only passed on by a mother to her children. Four of the female skeletons had this mtDNA. Further testing showed it to be identical in sequence to DNA samples provided by Prince Philip (the Duke of Edinburgh and husband of Queen Elizabeth II). As the Tsarina would have been Prince Philip’s great aunt (through the maternal line), this meant there was a 98.5 per cent likelihood that these bones were those of the Tsarina and three of her daughters. Scientists identified the bones of Nicholas II after comparing them with those of his brother Georgiy, and to two other relatives.

The bones of Alexei and one of the Tsar’s daughters are still missing. According to Yurovsky’s account, he had some of the bones buried elsewhere as there was not enough room in the main grave. Further investigations have failed to find any more remains. This is a puzzle that historians, archaeologists and forensic scientists are still trying to resolve conclusively.

**Postscript**

The Romanov family seems to be undergoing a rehabilitation within post-Communist Russia. On 17 July 1998, the eightieth anniversary of the executions, the family’s remains were buried in the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul in St Petersburg. In August 2000, the Russian Orthodox Church proclaimed Nicholas and his immediate family to be saints.

In September 2006, at the request of Russian President Vladimir Putin, the Tsar’s mother, Danish-born Maria Fiodorovna, was reburied in the Peter and Paul Cathedral. On 15 November 2006, Moscow’s Tverskoi district court granted the appeal of the Grand Duchess Maria Vladimirovna (who claims to be the Tsar’s legal heir) against another court’s ruling that the Romanov family had not been the victims of political repression. This opens the door for the execution of the Romanovs to be legally viewed as a political crime and for the family itself to be legally viewed as victims of Bolshevik repression.
Meeting objectives and outcomes

Key features, issues, individuals and events  P1.1, P1.2

1. Complete the following table to identify the similarities and differences between the revolutions of 1905 and 1917. Use a tick to indicate the features of each revolution. (P1.2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key features</th>
<th>1905 revolution</th>
<th>1917 revolution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strikes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement in war</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groups demanding change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutinies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular protest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure of reform attempts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic hardship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attacks on property</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government repression</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tsar’s tarnished reputation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peasant revolts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement in war</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Change and continuity over time  P2.1

2. Imagine yourself as the editor of a secret anti-tsarist newspaper. Your task is to write an editorial for an issue marking the second anniversary of the October Manifesto. Your focus is on conveying your view of the extent to which the Tsar’s government has fulfilled the reforms promised in October 1905. You should conclude with your summary of the position of the Tsar’s government in October 1907. (P2.1)

3. Discussion issue: Why did the revolution of February 1917 succeed when the revolution of 1905 had failed to overthrow the Tsar’s power? (P2.1, P3.5)

The process of historical inquiry  P3.1–P3.5

4. Compile a dossier of 5–10 different types of sources that you think encapsulate the reasons for the decline and fall of the Romanov dynasty. Arrange the sources into a logical sequence. For each source, provide in your own words:
   (a) a caption identifying the type of source it is (for example, diary extract, graph, photograph, police report)
   (b) a brief description of its contents
   (c) information about its date and where it comes from
   (d) a comment identifying and explaining the perspective of its creator, the value of the information the source provides and your judgement of its usefulness and reliability. (P3.2–P3.5)
5. The following people are to take part in a demonstration in Petrograd in February 1917:
   - a housewife struggling with the problems of inflation and inadequate food supplies
   - a nurse who has been tending the wounded on the railway platform
   - a factory worker
   - a soldier who has deserted the army
   - a member of the aristocracy.

   (a) Design a slogan for each of the protest posters that these people will carry.

   (b) Briefly explain the conditions in Russia that would have contributed to the perspective voiced by each of these people. [P3.4]

**Communicating an understanding of history**  
P 4.1, P 4.2

6. Use a dictionary and/or the glossary to find the meanings of each of the following terms: absolute power; anti-Semitism; autocracy; communism; democracy; liberalism; nationalism; revolution; state of emergency. What examples of these were evident in Russia around 1905–1917? [P4.1]

7. Your task is to write an account for an English-speaking newspaper explaining the Tsar’s downfall. Your account should:
   (a) provide information on the events of February 1917
   (b) explain to your readers the long-term factors that led to the Tsar’s abdication
   (c) explain to your readers short-term factors that led to the Tsar’s abdication.

   Support your article with a range of different types of sources. You may wish to include some visual sources from this chapter or visit the website for this book and access the Romanovs weblink for this chapter for additional ideas. Consider where they might fit into your account, what captions you would give them and what other sources you could use as evidence to support your account. In making these choices, keep in mind the type of audience you envisage for your article. Devise a suitable headline and choose an appropriate date for the article. [P4.2]