

# The october manifesto



In June, 1905, the Potemkin Mutiny took place and industrial workers all over Russia went on strike. In October, 1905, the railwaymen went on strike which paralyzed the whole Russian railway network. Later that month, Leon Trotsky and other Mensheviks established the St. Petersburg Soviet. Over the next few weeks over 50 of these soviets were formed all over Russia. Witte, the new Chief Minister, advised Nicholas II to make concessions. He eventually agreed and published the October Manifesto. This granted freedom of conscience, speech, meeting and association. He also promised that in future people would not be imprisoned without trial. Finally he announced that no law would become operative without the approval of the State Duma. As the Duma was only a consultative body, many Russians felt that this reform did not go far enough. Leon Trotsky and other revolutionaries denounced the plan. In December, 1905, Trotsky and the rest of the executive committee of the St. Petersburg Soviet were arrested. Others followed and gradually Nicholas II and his government regained control of the situation. 'Bloody Sunday' in 1905 had severely weakened any hope Nicholas II had of calling himself the 'father of his people'. By the end of the year, St Petersburg had been affected by many strikes and political agitation in the factories was rife. On the first Sunday in March, an estimated 300, 000 people had taken to the streets of the capital shouting out a variety of slogans. The most worrying for the authorities must have been " All power to the Soviets" while " God save the tsar and open his eyes to our wants" would have given the glimmer of hope that some of the people still demonstrated loyalty to Nicholas II. Even more worrying for the government was the fact that the demonstrations were spontaneous and not pre-planned and involved a curious mix of political aspirants. They called for a general change in how Russia should be

governed but were not specific with details of what they actually wanted. A year of arbitrary arrests, strikes and political agitation did not bode well for the government. By the end of 1905, Nicholas could not even depend on the loyalty of his military. In June 1905, the crew of the battleship 'Potemkin' mutinied and the disaster that was the Russo-Japanese War compounded all the problems that the military was suffering. There is evidence that men in the army refused to move out to the east to fight the Japanese, fearing that any such move would result in their death. The fact that men in the army had not been paid for three months hardly helped matters. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, Nicholas II was adamant that the autocracy would not surrender any of its authority. Therefore, as far as Nicholas was concerned any form of constituent assembly to represent the views of the people was considered to be a non-starter. However, such was the weakness of his position that he, characteristically, caved in. In March 1905, Nicholas promised that he would authorise the convening of a duma. This was exactly what Nicholas had promised would not happen.