

Explain the role of the first world war in the decline and fall of the romanov dy...

War



Explain the role of the First World War in the decline and fall of the Romanov Dynasty The role of the first world in the decline and fall of the Romanov Dynasty has been contended debated. Russia's lack of resources and preparation can be seen to attribute to the fall of the dynasty as lack of items such as bread and coal led to contention amongst Russia's people. Also contributing was Tsar Nicholas II's lack of military experience and ability to use military force to crush the civilian protests that were occurring in Petrograd, Russia's capital city. The generals of the military along with the Duma used the protests to their advantage to force the abdication of the Tsar and strengthen Russia's war effort. However, Russia's turbulent past of political and social turmoil also contributed to the decline and fall of the Romanov Dynasty.

The lack of preparation on Russia's behalf before the First World War began was an integral factor leading to the decline and fall of the Romanov Dynasty. For a war on a large scale, that being the First World War Russia's lack of preparation severely crippled its efforts in the war with as many of 1 million of its soldiers departing for the eastern front without necessities such as Rifles or boots.

In the circumstances when soldiers were equipped with weapons they were often stuck without the necessary ammunition to fire them, this would foreshadow the humiliating losses Russia would suffer in the months to come with battles such as Tannenburg costing the Russian army as many as 230,000 dead soldiers and many more captured by the forces of the Kaiser.

Russia's second army under the command of General Rennenkampf

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executed a retreat after the demise of the other half of Russian forces and whilst this was skilful 1. million men met death on the eastern front, if not from the enemy then the crippling lack of food and starvation that faced most soldiers of the Russian army. The news of these defeats did not fall on deaf ears back in the cities of Russia causing great discontent amongst the proletariat and intelligentsia alike, Russia already had a poor war records with a humiliation during the Crimean war at the hands of the Turkish and the recent Russo-Japanese war in 1905 both disgraceful defeats on Russia's behalf.

With news now that these losses were being bettered on the eastern front it caused a questioning of Russia's autocracy, the Dynasty of the Romanov family. The liberal school of thought on the fall of the Romanovs greatly highlights the significance of the First World War on the fall of the autocracy and believe if the war was averted so to would be the fall of the Romanovs. Therefore it can be safely asserted that the liberal school of thought elucidates that the lack of preparation by Russia in response to the First World War contributed greatly to the eclectic nature of the Romanov Dynasty and its eventual decline and fall.

The lack of military experience by Tsar Nicholas II as well as the disobedience of the Russian military is more or less of significant importance to the decline and fall of the Romanov Dynasty. From an early age Nikolay Alexandrovich Romanov was not groomed to be a traditional Tsar, his father Alexander III saw his son as a weak link to the Dynasty and unfit to rule because of his weak personality and mind, those of the liberal school of

thought agree entirely with this stating " the weakness in the character of Nicholas... ontributing to the fall of the Romanov Dynasty. " With little to no training in being the supreme autocrat of Russia it is a wonder that Tsar Nicholas thought it wise to personally take the role of the commader in chief with no military experience as well, for the Russian people this was a risky move seeing as how the last war Nicholas had spear-headed led to a loss of hundreds of kilometres of trans-siberian railway and the colony of Korea in the Russo-Japanese war.

Thus upon the start of the First World War despite a surge of patriotism from the Russian people when the Russian Army performed consistently badly Tsar Nicholas was seen to be the cause. Already being investigated as a potential spy due to his marriage to the tsarina who hailed from Germany , the poor performance of Russia during the World War which was under Tsar Nicholas' command is seen by the Liberal School as crippling to the intergrity and upkeep of Russias' Autocracy and the Dynasty of the Romanov Family.

Worse still was Nicholas' leadership of Russia during the time of the war, being unable to disband civilian riots in the capital of Petrograd and by refusing offers from the Duma at first during the February/March revolution secured his abdication which was forced upon him by the military and the Duma cementing the lack of loyalty Nicholas' cabinet had to him as a result of his poor leadership and military inexperience, which can be attributed to the decline and fall of the Romanov Dynasty.

Furthermore the civilian protests in Russia as a reaction to the catalyst of the First World War were yet another reason as to the fall of the Romanov Family

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and their dynasty. Russias history of disgruntled peasants and proletariat provides a bleak foreshadow to the reaction the general public had towards the poor performance Russia turned in during the First World War and the lack of necessities such as food and coal that they had to fore-go due to poor preparation.

It cannot be denied the crucial role that civilian riots had in the fall of the Romanov Dynasty, these riots can be traced to the 23rd of February 1917 as an English woman named Sybil Grey described the riots start as “ a poor woman entered a bread shop... and asked for bread. She was told there was none. On leaving the shop, seeing bread in the window she broke the window and took it. This simple act of taking bread was the turning point in civilian protests and the birth itself of the Russian Revolution, soon the streets of Petrograd were littered with protestors and the Duma refused the Tsar’s orders to disband the protests via the military, many of whom defected to the protestors to avoid being sent to the Eastern front.

The food supplies in most cities were dire and the Russian economy was inflated to the point that most farmers refused to sell their wares in exchange formoney. Prominent Russian industry such as the Pulitov Steelworks also closed due to a lack offinanceand raw materials meaning 90,000 proletariat now had no jobs and no direction in society, which inevitably leads to protesting.

Therefore it can be easily drawn that the protests that occurred with the civilians in Russia played an integral role in the decline and fall of teh Romanov Dynasty. Moreover Russia’s parliament, the Duma in conjunction

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with the Russian military officials many of whom were related to Tsar Nicholas himself used the First World War as a medium to force the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II and attempt to govern Russia as a democracy.

After the events of bloody Sunday in 1905 Tsar Nicholas II faced a dilemma, millions of Russians crying for change and challenging his power and the power of the autocracy. It was in these circumstances the 'October Manifesto' was issued to the people in hopes of tying down threats of insurrection amongst the people, the manifesto granted Russia a parliament that was so closely linked with the Tsar it had no purpose essentially.

However, during the failures that followed Nicholas in the First World War the Duma was essentially in power in the capital city of Petrograd with the Tsar stranded at a military base in Tsarkoe Selo, finally reaching the peak of insurrection the Duma with the support of the Tsar's trusted generals established a provisional government that attempted to repair the damage the war and Nicholas had caused. To the tsar this was an act of insubordination and military force was demanded to shut the Duma down, this was not the case. The military had lost faith in Nicholas, fearing he was disadvantaging Russia in their efforts against Germany, it was then clear what must be done; under desperation from the war and the people the Duma and the military requested Tsar Nicholas abdicate his power from the throne, in its stead would be a government running on elections in replica of England.

Another role the Duma played was their facilitation in the civilian riots occurring with some Cossacks, guards supposedly loyal to the tsar assuring

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protestors “ don’t worry we won’t shoot you” and the guard of the royal family abandoning their posts. The quintessential role then of the Duma and Military as a result of the first world war in the decline and fall of the Romanov Dynasty cannot be denied.

However, when studying the decline and fall of the Romanov dynasty other schools of thought have differing opinions as to the significance of the War in the fall of the Romanovs. The revisionist school argues that the pre-existing and unresolved issues of Russia’s past greatly contributed to the decline and fall of the Romanov dynasty. Historian Sheila Fitzpatrick believes that even prior to the war Russia was in an unstable place, both socially and politically as she states “ The autocracy’s situation was precarious on the eve of the First World War. Issues such as the massacre of bloody Sunday were still contemporary issues for the Tsar and the autocracy, with labels such as ‘ Bloody Nicholas’ becoming household names, the activities of various revolutionary groups such as Vladimir Lenin’s Bolshevik party and the opposing Mensheviks of Leon Trotsky whilst fore-runners for change in Russian society both set a precarious scene during 20th century Russia, often trying to ignite crowds or events into protests or revolutions.

These often took the form of Assassinations with targets including Prime Minister Petr Stolypin often upsetting the established order and descending society into complete chaos. It can be seen then that the revisionists make a strong argument as to why the Romanovs would have fallen even in the absence of the First World War.

The contention does not rest there though, the living conditions of a vast majority of Russian society was also believed to be a contributing factor as to the decline and fall of the Romanovs, during the industrial revolution the conditions faced by the new class; 'the proletariat' or workers were seen to be inhumane, they were cramped into small living areas, malnourished, exposed to dangerous work, shot at and paid incredibly poor amounts of money to ensure this cycle continued, they also made up over 90% of Russia's population. It is easy to see then that a large amount of society exposed to these conditions for the betterment of others would eventually lead to a revolution en masse which is what revisionists, amongst other things believe would have been equally if not more significant than the First World War in the decline and fall of the Romanov Dynasty.

All in all despite contention the role of the First World War in the decline and fall of the Romanov Dynasty can be seen as pivotal to some as Russia's lack of preparation, poor leadership, riots and leaders were all influenced by the great war but is debated amongst others due to other factors such as; conditions faced by the working class, the autocracy's weakened position and revolutionary groups.