

Warding off immediate revolution by lower class in russia through alexander ii's ...

[History](#), [Revolution](#)



Russia's Great Reform

Throughout the course of history, countries and nations have been forced to change and develop internally. Every civilization encounters a period of time where it is clear that reformation must take place and plans actually become action. In the mid to late 1800s during the reign of Alexander II as tsar of Russia, the nation encountered a need to change. Attempting to better and further develop the country, he established numerous Great Reforms in order to fix Russia internally. The most important and substantial reform during the reign of Alexander II was the emancipation of the serfs, which was put in place in attempts to unify the nation and pacify the peasantry in order to ward off imminent revolution from the lower class.

Before elaborating on the emancipation of the serfs, it is imperative to understand why their emancipation came to be in the first place. It is difficult for any state to ever end cheap or sometimes free labor because it is just that: cheap or free. Therefore, in order for something so fruitful to cease to exist then there must be a serious problem. In the 1800s, Russia encountered some of these issues first hand when “ the serfs kept rising against their masters” . Some of the early estimates by Vasili Semevsky showed that Russia endured 550 peasant uprisings through the 1800s leading up to the emancipation of the serfs; however as time went on, a Soviet historian named Inna Ignatovich changed this number to 1, 467 total revolts. Ignatovich went on to break down the uprisings into different time periods: from 1801 to 1825 there were 281 rebellions, 19 percent of the total; from 1826 to 1854, 712 revolts occurred, accumulating 49 percent of

the total; and starting in 1855 at the beginning of Alexander II's reign until the emancipation of the serfs six years and two months later, there were 474 uprisings, totaling 32 percent of the total . The serfs were becoming increasingly irritated and tired of the positions they were forced to take in society and they believed that enough was enough. On top of all the rebellions it was discovered that serfdom had become less of an economic solution and instead more of a liability: " Many landlords, especially those with small holdings, could barely feed their serfs; and the gentry accumulated an enormous debt" . Now not only were the poor serfs an issue that Russia was dealing with, but also the gentry were now in economic turmoil; however it is important to note that " the fear of peasant rebellion has often been identified as a key reason the stat finally acted to end serfdom" . Alexander II turned to the abolishment of serfdom in order to maintain peace in his nation and halt the incredibly high number of revolts.

In February of 1861, Alexander II signed the Emancipation Manifesto in order to pacify the peasantry and eliminate a domestic issue that was threatening to turn into a full-blown revolution. Leading directly up to the signing, the rebellions had " increased in length, in bitterness, in the human and material losses involved, and in the military effort necessary to restore order" . Russia was on the verge of maximum civil unrest and conflict leading to Alexander II making the decision he did. The manifesto he signed allowed for the country to sort things out while also giving the serfs what they wanted, but with a twist. The manifesto abolished the rights of bondage over serfs, which is the main thing that the serfs wanted; however there were also other clauses that

appeared to help the serfs as well while in reality helping the gentry and the government. Peasants who had farmed land received land while the household serfs received none; however, most of the land went to peasant communes rather than individuals. Additionally, peasants were to repay the government for the land they received by means of annual redemption payments over the course of 49 years. The catch here was that if the peasant died before the payments had been completed in full, which happened in every case because nobody lived that long during this time, then the land would revert back to the government instead of to the family of the original serf who received the land. This was an unfair clause for the serfs, but there was nothing they could do about it at the time. They took what they could which mainly was their freedom. While they did receive land, they received far less than they should've and also paid much more than what it was worth. Alexander II used the idea of "better from above than from below" and it worked out decently for the time being. He realized that if he didn't act soon and free the serfs then there would surely be a full-fledged revolution that would lead to the overthrow of the government. Therefore, he took the matter into his own hands and freed the serfs while also helping the government. One main issue with the manifesto though was that the serfs were still a separate group from the whole. They were still viewed as peasants, but just free ones instead. The manifesto wasn't perfect and that shined through when Alexander II was assassinated in 1881 by the People's Will, a revolutionary group in Russia.

The Emancipation of the serfs was a crucial step forward for Russia in their development as a nation. Alexander II stopped a massive revolution from happening while also maintaining somewhat of an order amongst the population by not giving the serfs much of anything besides freedom. The reforms of Russia were put in place to pacify the peasantry and that is what happened. There were nearly 1, 500 rebellions before the freedom of the serfs and Alexander II was able to stop all that internal conflict with one manifesto even though it ultimately lead to his assassination. It just goes to show that no matter what happens, it is impossible to make the whole country happy in any given situation or time period, but for the time he was tsar, Alexander II did a wonderful job of halting revolution and keeping the peace amongst the people