

Major grievances of
the russian people in
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The early twentieth century in Russia saw people from many different levels of society experience grievances due to the poor leadership and decision making of Nicholas II. Nicholas failed to see the problems his people were dealing with and was too caught up in keeping Russia under autocratic rule. The grievances the Russian people experienced ranged from political, social and economic. Each social class had different criticisms and issues with the Russian government but the dissatisfaction with the government was a shared feeling all over Russia. The social classes that experienced major grievances included the peasants, industrial workers and the nobility. The peasants were probably the worst off in Russia in the early twentieth century. Although the peasants had been emancipated by Alexander II back in 1861, they still had little freedom while Nicholas was leading. Peasants had to pay redemption payments for land the government had given or lent them but they found it difficult to keep up and often got into debt. The village communities owned and paid for the land together, not as a single person. Peasants had to pay much higher taxes than the landlords and the officials would flog the peasants who didn't pay their taxes.

There were so many pressures in day to day life that many peasants could not support themselves and had to move to cities for work. Peasants had to be granted permission by their fellow commune members to leave the farm. Even once they had left, they were still expected to assist with the redemption payments (Proctor, 1995). The living standards the peasants and their families had to endure were terrible. Russian peasants were still forced into using traditional farming techniques which involved manual labour instead of machine labour. Entire families occupied one room huts and

sometimes the living quarters were shared with their livestock. This meant epidemic diseases were prevalent. Peasant's diets were insufficient and unvaried, mostly consisting of potatoes and rye-bread. When there were bad harvests and food shortages, peasant violence and strikes often followed. Only one in five peasants could read or write which meant they would be very restricted for the rest of their life.

The peasants had to endure such a tough life so it is not surprising they became unsupportive of the Tsar. The Tsar failed to improve the living conditions, freedom and lifestyle of the peasants. It was only when the Tsar realised he needed the peasants support that, he made reforms. By then it was too late for the peasants because they had become too accustomed to their communal system (Warnes, 1984). In the 1880's Nicholas II encouraged industrial growth in Russia. Many peasants left the countryside, hoping for work and a better life in town and cities. In St Petersburg, this urbanisation meant that the population grew by 55 per cent in the 20 years between 1880 and 1900. In 1900, 2 500 500 urban workers lived in Russia. For these urban workers, conditions were simply dreadful. Workers lived in dirty and overcrowded barracks and often had to share a bed with another worker because of the two shift system. If worker's families lived with them, they had deal with unsanitary, cramped and badly constructed living quarters (Anderson, Low, & Keese, 2008). A factory worker living in Moscow in 1902 described living in the working class slums of Moscow.

The worker described the homes always being over inhabited, stuffy, unbelievably damp and dirty. He described the low ceiling, the crumbling walls and the huge amounts of cockroaches and bugs. The toilet was so

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dilapidated the children were told not to go near it (Warnes, 1984). The industrial growth patterns were a recipe for trouble in the early twentieth century. The factories were large, and they were generally concentrated in a small number of cities and regions, which made it easy to revolutionise the workers. As many enterprises were owned by the state, when workers complained they found themselves in direct conflict with the government. The army was often called out because of strikes and riots. The terrible working conditions these industrial workers had to endure are the reason why they became so fed up with the government. The industrial workers made up such a large amount of the Russian population in the nineteenth century which meant their grievances were very significant and widely experienced (Warnes, 1984).

The Russian nobility, which only included about 1 per cent of the population, had their own set of criticisms against the government in the early 1900's. Although the nobility's issues were not as life threatening as the peasants and industrial workers, the nobles were beginning to lose power and faith in Russia. Many of the noble people failed to adjust to the changes Russia was experiencing such as Industrialisation and the Duma. They began to lose confidence in the autocracy and experienced many feelings of isolation. The nobles controlled 25 per cent of Russia's land and had the most power in agriculture. Agriculture was declining as the economic structure of Russia changed so this meant nobles were not making as much money. Economic importance began to move towards heavy industry. Over 90 per cent of the Nobility's land was being stripped of traditional authority (Anderson, Low, & Keese, 2008).

The nobles were also stripped of their traditional judicial and police powers. The last problem the nobles faced was that the government was starting to rely greatly on bureaucracy instead of the Nobility's ideas. In some ways, the nobles brought it upon themselves because they abused their positions and spent more money than they earned in the first place. The grievances the nobles experienced may seem petty compared to what others in Russia went through but they still faced their own set of difficulties (iStudy Australia, 2006). The grievances of the Russian people in the early twentieth century occurred because Nicholas II was a poor ruler who failed to solve the issues of his people. He refused to give his people a choice when it came to the decisions of the country.

The peasants had the most grievances in the early 1900's including being forced into traditional farming methods, lack of power and most importantly their poor living standards. The industrial workers of Russia had many criticisms of the Russian government for fair reasons. They had to live in horrible conditions, work long, hard jobs and their rights were never recognised. The nobility of Russia experienced feelings of isolation, they lost power and failed to adapt to the changes Russia was going through. These were the major grievances of the Russian people in the early twentieth century. The grievances each class faced give evidence of Nicholas II's poor leadership skills and the need for a revolution to occur in Russia.