

# What caused the romanov dynasty to fall? essay sample

War



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The Romanovs had ruled Russia since 1613. When the last tsar of all, Nicholas II, was appointed to the throne in 1894, there was no hint of the fate that awaited him. Many among the huge crowds that lined the streets for his coronation celebration saw him as their “ little father.” They believed God had supposedly appointed Nicholas to rule an empire covering about one-sixth of the earth’s land area.

In 1894, Russia was at peace. Foreign investors promoted its industrialization. Russia was ranked among the world’s greatest powers under the autocracy of the Romanovs.

Although well intentioned, Nicholas was a weak ruler, out of touch with his people, easily dominated by others and a firm believer in the autocratic principles taught him by his father. He ruled Russia as an autocrat.

Propaganda and the teachings of the Russian Orthodox Church encouraged his people to love and respect their tsar and look on him as a father who had the right to rule them.

Nicholas II ruled a police state, called the okhrana, which responded brutally to anyone who dared question his authority. He 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, Russia was hostile to its existence. He was free to appoint and dismiss his advisers without giving reasons.

In 1900, the Russian empire comprised 23 different nationalities; many resented Russian rule. Russians made up 40% of the empire’s 132 million people. 77% of the population were peasants; 10% belonged to the middle

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class, and 1% to the nobility. The remaining 12% included priests, urban workers, officials, Cossacks, and foreigners.

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 at their poor conditions. Russians people demanded the redress of numerous political, social, and economic problems. The Tsar persisted in the belief that to grant reforms would undermine his autocratic power.

Peasant poverty was a long-standing problem. Russians 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 limitations on their freedom. They paid redemption payments (compensation) for the land, which had been 'given' to them. Peasants continued to use old fashioned farming methods and their living standards were poor.

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. By 1900, Russia had about 2 500 000 urban workers. They lived in unhygienic, poorly built, and overcrowded factory dormitories, which did not even have running water or sewerage systems. The workers gained poor wages and had no trade unions to fight for them, as this was illegal.

Revolutionary activist from parties such as the Social Democrats and Socialists Revolutionaries had a willing audience. Workers increasingly went on strike to demand improved working and living conditions.

The Russian nobility controlled 25% of Russia's land and relied on government salaries to maintain their extravagant lifestyle to which they were comfortable.

Russia's middle class consisted of intellectuals and factory and industry owners, who criticised tsarist form of government and resented limits placed on their free expressions.

The decision to go to war with Japan in February 1904 increased the government's weaknesses. The war degenerated into a series of Russian military blunders that demonstrated the inefficiency of the Russian army and navy. The war ended with humiliation of Russia's defeat in August 1905. Evidence of Russia's military weakness increased the people's discontent and demands for reform.

On 9th January of 1905, in St. Petersburg, a procession of peasants and workers came to respectfully present a petition to the tsar outlining the problems that they hoped they could resolve. The tsar's soldieries fired on the protesters when they refused to go home. The day ended with 1000 deaths and many more casualties. The day went down in history as the Bloody Sunday. It began the revolution of 1905 and the image of the tsar as 'little father' gave away to a view of him as 'Bloody Nicholas'.

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, navy, and the formation of organized groups demanding change and reform. 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 destruction of the symbols of tsarist authority.

Nicholas II remained in power in late 1905 largely because he introduced some reforms. In the October manifesto of 17 October 1905, the tsar announced the creation of a duma. The manifesto allowed freedom of speech and made political parties legal. This meant that the tsar could no longer consider himself as an autocrat. In November 1907, the tsar announced the cancellation on the redemption payments i. e. the peasants would finally have the ownership of the land.

However, the manifesto did not address problems of poverty, low wages, and poor working conditions. Workers in Moscow and St. Petersburg continued their strikes.

The October manifesto gained Nicholas support among the liberals, especially among the Octobrists - a new party named in the manifesto's honour. The tsar's position was gradually restored.

It soon became apparent that in April 1906, with passing of the fundamental laws that the tsar did not intend to keep the promises that he had made in the October manifesto of 1905. Instead, Nicholas II wishes to regain his power and to reassert his autocracy. The October manifesto was a “con” trick by Nicholas to get the Russian people to call off the general strike. Nicholas’s “strategy” from 1906 to the outbreak of war to 1914 was based on the following strategies:

- \*To introduce laws which would make the дума a weak parliament

- \*To introduce agrarian reforms to win back the support of the peasantry

- \*To instruct Peter Stolypin his prime minister

Peasants resented the strip farming that gave them only scattered parcels of land. Stolypin had hoped that his plans for agrarian reform would succeed in ending the major causes of peasant discontent. But Stolypin believed that it would take about 20 yrs for his reforms to work. This period during 1906-1914 became a period of severe repression in Russia with Stolypin ordering the death of many people. The period was known as the “Stolypin period.” In 1911, Stolypin was assassinated with the Tsar losing his most skilful advisor.

World War I broke out in August 1914 - perhaps saving the tsarist government from a major revolutionary outburst. Russia fought with its allies, France and Britain. In the beginning, most Russian people responded enthusiastically.

In reality, the decision to go to war sounded death knell of the Romanov government. By late 1914, dreams of a short victorious war gave way to the realities of high casualty rates, inadequate medical care, shortages of gun and bullets and loss of land. By 1916, the war alone was costing nearly five times the 1913 budget allowance.

Russian soldiers suffered because of tsar's poor decision-making and poor financial planning. Many soldiers lacked boots and warm clothes for survival in the cold conditions. Living standards declined. Russia's railway network and food production was very poor. War also increased the pressure on Russia's industries.

In July 1915, the tsar took personal command of his troops at the battlefield. It was an unwise decision, because from then on he had to accept personal blame for Russia's military failures.

When Nicholas II was in the battlefield, the tsarina, Alexandra, took personal responsibility for the day-to-day business of government. The tsarina's poor political ability caused distrust and hostility towards her by the Russian. It was rumored that she was, largely under the control of Rasputin (self-appointed mystic, infamous for his drunkenness and womanizing), and he was rumored to have become the chief influence in the empire, controlling even military decisions. His presence at court was so resented, not least as a danger to the survival of the monarchy, that in December 1916, a group of aristocrats, including members of the imperial family, murdered him.

In June 1915, zemtovs (local provincial government) united with similar organizations in the towns to form ZemGor, an organization with the goal of assisting the sick and wounded.

The дума challenged the tsar's authority. The Progressive Bloc (consisted of the members of the key parties e. g. Octobrists) demanded " a government of public confidence" (whose ministers are appointed by the дума). The tsar refused.

By late 1916, discontent within Russia had reached its crisis point. Over two million soldiers were dead. The дума, ZemGor, the War Industries Committee (WIC) and the majority of the upper class no longer supported the tsar. The tsar also lost his authority in the eyes of the working class people. They were no longer willing to meet the expectations of loyalty and respect that he had demanded.

By early 1917, Nicholas II was probably the most hated man in Russia. The condition of Russia on the eve of the 1917 revolution included:

\*A severe winter

\*Inflation

\*No breads and hunger

\*Strikes

\*Anti-government protest

\*Breaking laws

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\*Poor railway/transport systems

\*Military could not control situation.

In February 1917, riots began in St Petersburg (renamed Petrograd in 1914). When troops were ordered to fire upon the rioters, they joined them instead. Demands for changes in the government finally resulted in the abdication of Nicholas II and his son on March 15. Over three centuries of Romanov rule were at an end.

In the summer of 1918, the Russian royal family was imprisoned in Ekaterinburg in the Ural Mountains. On July 1918, soldiers ordered the family down to the cellar to face a firing squad.

In conclusion, even though Nicholas's objectives were different, but his position was greatly affected by lack of care for the people, growth of political and social parties, growth of industrializations, involvement in World War I, increased hardships and poverty and his self obsession, as at times his reforms didn't seem to work. His loss of power could have been ignored if he responded at the right time to the problems that his peoples were facing.