

Russia experienced great change in all facets history essay

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The Emancipation of the Serfs is arguably one of the more substantial liberalist changes of the 19th century. As the first step towards liberalised society, there are understandably a myriad of reasons for the Emancipation. Chief among these is war. The loss of the Crimean War was a considerable blow to the hubris of Tsarist Russia, a country characterised by its power and prestige. The loss of the war had challenged the old Russia; therefore, change had to occur. The losses of this war demonstrated the backwardness of Russia, and would have been an embarrassing shock to the autocratic system. As many of the supplies for the war were serf based, it made sense to free them and so increase the effectiveness of the Russian war machine. Additionally, the fact that some soldiers had to be re-allocated to quell protesting serfs would mean that Russia could project its image of solidarity as a nation. While the war was a key drive for the emancipation, other factors undoubtedly played a part in the emancipation. The personal attitudes of the tsar were significant, Alexander II was described as a humane ruler by Leo Tolstoy, "... in reality we owe Emancipation to the Emperor alone.[1]" Indeed, Alexander II is described as the Tsar Liberator, and instigated further reforms in education and the established of the Zemstva; these changes in education do not fit into the theory of reform driven by war, but can be seen as the aims of an autocrat moving towards a constitutional monarch. Additionally, economic strain added significant weight to decision to emancipate. In Siberia, the benefits of free peasant labour were being realised, and this coupled with the building criticism of serfdom in terms of stunting enterprise made it logical to provide freedom. Also, Russia realised the necessity for railways, and these could not be

initiated whilst serf immobility remained, therefore it can be seen that, Russia needed to industrialise and modernise. The fact that emancipation was contemplated by previous Russian monarchs reveals that war was indeed the catalyst for this change, though the other factors are important as well; it can be seen that Russia rulers are only galvanised to change the system when their outward reputation is in jeopardy. The revolution of 1905 effectively demonstrates how the snowballing desire for change can result in a break from a traditional form of government. Nicholas II's declaration that he would, "... maintain the principle of autocracy as strongly and firmly as my late father.[2]" had clashed with the social desire to see a more democratic form of government, potentially Zemstva led. This can be seen in the agricultural debates to address Russia's pressing rural problems, where Zemstvo members were selected, not elected. The divided government would prove problematic for the tsar, who felt they were, "intoxicated by senseless dreamings.[3]" A cocktail of long term problems contributed to the discontent in 1905, these appear to span from a poor harvest in 1902 and continued heavy taxes on the peasantry which in turn jeopardised Russia's desire for industrialisation, as the growing industry could not be supported with failing agriculture. This, in turn led to striking on the part of the industrial workers and thus the discontent spread. As these factors preceded the events of the Russo-Japanese war, it can clearly be seen that war has not brought about this revolution and therefore the response of the Tsar to the revolution was not directly shaped by war. Liberal and autocratic reforms had clashed with each other previous to 1905, the removal of free trade unions to be replaced by police run ones would cause later embarrassment

for the government when the police led unions would protest and riot. Independent of the war, a number of changes took place within Russia as a result of the Revolution. Changes such as the Bulygin Proposals on 1905 had a knock on effect for policy in Russian government, leading to the makings of a constitution. However, by trying to protect his autocracy by clipping the wings of the Duma, he established a gulf between his two sections of government; this led to the power and respect of the tsar being eroded. The appointment of nonentities to government roles, such as Goremykin, alienated the people. The lack of support he gave real changers like Witte and Stolypin portrayed the Tsar as ceremonial and ineffectual, a weak link in the chain that would eventually be cut out. Hence, the Revolution of 1905 was a pivotal moment in revolutionary history; it brought the Russian people closer to a democracy as never before. These changes were independent of war and were arguably not as radical because of the lack of pressure of war. The Revolution of 1917 constituted a major watershed in Russian politics and society. It signified the end of autocracy and the beginning of the country's transition into another totalitarian regime, that of the Communists. Here, war can be considered the main factor for the reason that it, among other factors, exploited the final cracks in the tsarist regime. It drew Nicholas II away from Petrograd to the front, allowing military failure to fall on his shoulders. He also left Russia under the power of Alexandra and Rasputin; a German and a scandalous addition to the household; who would alienate both the people and the autocracy, who were the traditional supporters of tsardom. The fact that the Tsar was influenced by practically everyone closer to him would have been a serious blow to the 'divinely' selected ruler; the

fact that one of Alexandra was German would alienate the people and generate an air of suspicion around the monarchy. Compounding further military embarrassment, Nicholas II supported nepotism within the military, favouring loyalty to competence. However, the war also brought about social change, the scorched earth policy caused an influx of refugees, and this would increase the urban proletariat threefold. This caused growing tension within cities, as the increased population would become more volatile, poor wages and food shortages lead to an increase in strikes. By displeasing the peasants, and yet basing his army on the massive peasant population, Nicholas II was leading a potentially radical and disaffected army. Again, policy before the war can explain the revolution, the watering down of the 1906 constitution and the failure of Stolypin's agrarian reforms go some way in explaining Russia's poor preparation for World War One. While lack of adherence to the promises that resulted from the 1905 Revolution and a 'too little, too late' attitude to the reforms permeated the people, war is undoubtedly the main cause of this massive change in Russian society. The weak willed Tsar, easily influenced by undesirables; alienated the traditional supporters of autocracy (Church, Nobility and Army) as well as the people, and with an army of angry peasants going through defeat after defeat with no noticeable benefit, the weak link would have to be removed. Stalinisation was Stalin's mark on history; it enabled Stalin to consolidate his power and to advance his ideals on Russia. Stalinisation enabled the acceleration of Russia to compete with the rest of the industrialised world. It brought about the optimisation of agriculture, a thorn in Russia's side for many years. Through this, Russia could industrialise and improve without the increasingly

stringent investment of foreign powers, whilst also bringing about Stalin's Cult of Personality and bringing his vision of Socialism to fruition. There were a number of causes for this accelerated industrialisation. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, war scares were common; European Facism leading to Imperialistic aims and a series of revolutions in countries such as Spain would strike fear in Stalin, which would fuel a desire to increase military strength and self sufficiency. Stalinisation brought about not only massive progress in terms of the economy, but also brought about change in Russian society; it enabled Stalin to project his view of communism on the Russian people, the massive purges from 1936-1939 removed vast swathes of potential opposition and ensured Stalin's regime was cemented. Stalinisation also ensured the peasants loyalty, collectivisation and the policy of kulaks enabled him to both optimise agriculture and ensure his regime would experience no change from below, "... centralisation had the same decisive advantage for Stalin of allowing him to keep control, to intervene... and to get a grip on situations which were out of control[4]." He was also determined to overcome the challenges that galled previous rulers of Russia. It can be seen that while war didn't directly influence the events of Stalinisation, fear of war certainly did. Additionally, Stalin's hubris and determination to have a place in history would drive policy in Russia; his masterstroke at eliminating opposition would leave his opinion the decider in changes for Russia. Conversely, destalinisation also marked large scale change in the fabric of Russia. The abandonment of Stalin's oppressive and yet successful regime was, similar to Stalin, a defining moment in Khrushchev's political career. As Stalin had distanced himself from Lenin, so

Khrushchev distanced himself from Stalin. Khrushchev thought it important to establish a new beginning for his vision of the communist party, he pardoned the people who were 'victims' of Stalin's regime up until 1934 as well as decrying many of the Unions mistakes. However, members such as Trotsky were not pardoned, as Khrushchev's Secret Speech was an attack on one man, not on the Communist Party. Khrushchev denounced Stalin for a number of reasons; he needed to bring about more progressive economic measures, he wanted easier coexistence with the West and he wanted absolution for the USSR's mistakes during the war and before. This led to a form of faux-liberalisation in the USSR, large numbers of political prisoners were released from the Gulag. Additionally, some measures were taken to lift State censorship. However, this provided a thin veil of change. In reality, Khrushchev never once denounced Stalin's oppression of the people; his charges were related to his failings within the party, by cutting off Stalin's lingering influence at the source, Khrushchev brought about the collapse of the Cult of Personality. A major change caused by the secret speech was the decentralisation of the USSR, the seemingly impenetrable centre of power had been challenged, this sent shock waves throughout the Soviet system, Soviet satellites believed Khrushchev was calling for a revision of Eastern-bloc communism, which precipitated in demands for independence from countries such as Poland and Hungary, however, these, while initially encouraged, were ruthlessly crushed when Khrushchev decided too much was asked for in Hungary. Thus, the hold over the Soviet Satellites was increased. Despite this, Khrushchev's 'revisionism' alienated the Chinese under Mao who began to compete for leadership of the Soviet World, this

enabled members of the Kremlin to criticise Khrushchev and undermine his leadership. Despite this, war again played its part in Russian history, the Cold War proved massively expensive and seemingly contradicted Khrushchev's commitment to coexistence and undermined Russia's power on the world stage, culminating in the humiliating Cuban Missile Crisis. By the end of Khrushchev's rule, Russia was still left with the lingering problem of loneliness in a hostile world. Due to the persistent problems with agriculture as a result of the failed ' virgin lands' policy and the consistent hostility in the wider world, it can be argued that Russia changed little over the period. The attempt to reform Russia further was inhibited by the Kremlin's lingering influence of Stalinism. The problems facing 1924 seemed to linger in 1964, the economy of the USSR still lagged behind other nations, the Soviet Union was locked in a ideological struggle with the West and power within government was still confined to the governing 10% of the population, the Communist Party. In conclusion, war is, as Trotsky said, the locomotive of history. War seems an ever present fact of the 100 year period; throughout the period, loss of war has been symptomatic of problems within Russia and has, to varying levels, contributed to change within Russia. Whether in anticipation of war or when in the thick of combat, war has exacerbated the problems of Russia and contributed to change from below; peasant grievances or increasingly vocal working classes. As well as change from above; in the form of rapid industrialisation and movement towards democracy. In most cases, war has not been the only factor, with other events and long term causes generating the attitude, however, the impact of war cannot be ignored, as it acted as a catalyst for some of the more

substantial changes of the time such as the 1917 revolution and Stalinisation.