Bloody Sunday, 1905

Father Georgei Gapon: ‘There is no God any longer. There is no Tsar.’

Throughout the early stages of the new century three main groups emerged in opposition to the tsarist regime: the reformist middle class, the peasants and the industrial workers. It was the latter group that would play an integral role in the development of revolution in Russia.

Falling wages, coupled with the rising cost of living, increased discontent in the major cities. Between October 1903 and October 1904 real wages had decreased by up to one quarter, while industrial recession, terrible working conditions and poor harvests led to growing worker restlessness. The situation escalated in December 1904 when four workers from the Putilov Steel Works, the largest industrial factory in St Petersburg, were dismissed, leading masses from that plant to strike in support of their fellow workers. By early January 1905 the number of industrial workers on strike had swelled to 120,000, leading to the first chapter of the Russian Revolution, an event that was to become known as ‘Bloody Sunday’.

Father Georgei Gapon, ‘a renegade priest with police connections,’ was the central figure in the 1905 Revolution. Born to a peasant family in rural Russia, Gapon was prohibited from attending university due to minor involvement with revolutionary groups. He trained as a priest and worked with the underprivileged in St Petersburg (mainly with worker and convict groups).

The Tsar’s soldiers shoot strikers during Bloody Sunday, St Petersburg, 22 January 1905 (artist’s impression).
In 1904 Gapon established the Assembly of Russian Factory Workers, a group designed to support local workers and pursue industrial reform. This body was actively encouraged by the Ministry for the Interior, as it was a vehicle for channelling worker discontent away from other politically-motivated organisations emerging in the major cities. At the end of 1904 this group had 6,000 to 8,000 members and its founder had established himself as a prominent member of the St Petersburg workers’ community.

Gapon planned to approach the Tsar on Sunday 9 January 1905, to present him with a petition outlining the grievances of the people of St Petersburg. The workers and their families would march peacefully to the Tsar’s home in St Petersburg, the Winter Palace, and present him with their petition begging for political, economic and social reform. In preparation, Gapon is reported to have sent letters to the Tsar and the Minister for the Interior, Mirskii, informing them of the march. Even though the Tsar had left St Petersburg for his country home, there is a suggestion that Gapon believed the Tsar would return to meet his people.

On Saturday 8 January, Gapon met with the Justice Minister, Muraviev, who in turn met with Mirskii, the police department and the Chief of Staff of the troops to consider what action the government would take. The Tsar is said to have learnt of the proposed march by nightfall. Troops were sent in to reinforce the garrison.

At approximately 10.00 the following morning workers and their families began to gather at four meeting points on the outskirts of St Petersburg. Up to 150,000 peaceful people marched in columns towards the Winter Palace, a procession which, according to Figes, ‘formed something more like a religious procession than a workers’ demonstration.’ Led by Father Gapon, the crowd carried religious icons and sang hymns. The gathering hoped to present the Tsar with a petition for improved conditions for workers.

Leading one of the columns, Gapon carried a crucifix and behind him travelled a portrait of the Tsar and a banner proclaiming, ‘Soldiers do not shoot at the people!’ The crowd, however, never made it to the Winter Palace. There was panic in police ranks and the peaceful protestors were fired on and charged at as they approached their destination. It is reported that a few warning shots were fired, followed by direct shots at the crowd. Soon, forty people lay dead.

Similar scenes were played out in other areas of the city, most violently at Nevsky Prospekt, where cavalry and cannons blocked the entrance to Palace Square, leading to further deaths and casualties. Journalists at the time wrote of up to 4600 people being either killed or wounded by Tsarist troops and Cossack cavalry. More recent estimates suggest up to 200 killed and 800 injured.

Although Tsar Nicholas II was not present at the time, and did not directly order the troops to fire on civilians, he was held responsible for Bloody Sunday. The official history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) says, ‘On that day the workers received a bloody lesson. It was their faith in the tsar that was riddled by bullets on that day.’ Instead of ‘Little Father’, the Tsar came to be known as ‘Nicholas the Bloody’.

11. O. Figes, A People’s Tragedy, 193.
12. O. Figes, A People’s Tragedy, 196.
ACTIVITY 2

DOCUMENT:
Petition Prepared for Presentation to Nicholas II (January 9, 1905)

Sovereign!
We, workers and inhabitants of the city of St. Petersburg, members of various sostovia (estates of the realm), our wives, children, and helpless old parents, have come to you, Sovereign, to seek justice and protection. We are impoverished and oppressed, we are burdened with work, and insulted. We are treated not like humans [but] like slaves who must suffer a bitter fate and keep silent. And we have suffered, but we only get pushed deeper and deeper into a gulf of misery, ignorance, and lack of rights. Despotism and arbitrariness are suffocating us, we are gasping for breath. Sovereign, we have no strength left. We have reached the limit of our patience. We have come to that terrible moment when it is better to die than to continue unbearable sufferings.

And so we left our work and declared to our employers that we will not return to work until they meet our demands. We do not ask much; we only want that without which life is hard labor and eternal suffering. Our first request was that our employers discuss our needs together with us. But they refused to do this; they denied us the right to speak about our needs, on the grounds that the law does not provide us with such a right. Also unlawful were our other requests: to reduce the working day to eight hours; for them to set wages together with us and by agreement with us; to examine our disputes with lower-level factory administrators; to increase the wages of unskilled workers and women to one ruble per day; to abolish overtime work; to provide medical care attentively and without insults; to build shops so that it is possible to work there and not face death from the awful drafts, rain and snow.27

Document Analysis
Read the 'Petition Prepared for Presentation to Nicholas II (January 9, 1905)'.

1 Draw up, and complete, a table similar to the one below. List as many grievances as you can find in the document.
2 To complete the final column, refer to at least TWO other sources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General grievances</th>
<th>Specific examples of injustice</th>
<th>Persuasive language used</th>
<th>Historical evidence to support claims</th>
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</tbody>
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27 Documents in Russian History: http://terry.slu.edu/teep/DOCUMENTS/BLOODY/SUNDAY.htm
ACTIVITY 3

'Death as Czar of all the Russias', 1905.

Visual Analysis
Look carefully at the cartoon on Bloody Sunday, Death as Czar of all the Russias.

1. Describe the main visual elements of the representation.
2. What message does the image convey to you about the 1905 Revolution? How does it suggest / express this message?
3. Using this book and at least TWO other sources, explain the circumstances leading to the revolutionary situation in Russia in 1905.
4. In 400-600 words, explain what this image contributes to an understanding of the causes and effects of the 1905 Revolution.
ACTIVITY 4

DOCUMENTS: ACCOUNTS OF BLOODY SUNDAY


...I turned rapidly to the crowd and shouted to them to lie down, and I also stretched myself on the ground. As we lay thus another volley was fired, and another, and yet another, till it seemed as though the shooting was continuous...A little boy of ten years, who was carrying a church lantern, fell pierced by a bullet, but still held the lantern tightly and tried to rise again, when another struck him down.

...At last the firing ceased...Horror crept into my heart. The thought flashed through my mind, 'And this is the work of our Little Father, the Tsar.' Perhaps this anger saved me...a new chapter was opened in the book of the history of our people... 'There is no longer any fear for us!' I exclaimed.18

Extract 2: St Petersburg correspondent of Le Matin (Paris newspaper).

The soldiers of the Preobrazhensky regiment, without any summons to disperse, shoot down the unfortunate people as if they were playing at bloodshed. Several hundred fall; more than a hundred and fifty are killed. They are almost all children, women, and young people. It is terrible. Blood flows on all sides. At 5 o'clock the crowd is driven back, cut down and repelled on all sides. The people, terror-stricken, fly in every direction. Scared women and children slip, fall, rise to their feet, only to fall again farther on. At this moment a sharp word of command is heard and the victims fall en masse.

There had been no disturbances to speak of. The whole crowd is unarmed and has not uttered a single threat.

As I proceeded, there were everywhere troops and Cossacks. Successive discharges of musketry shoot down on all sides the terrorised mob. The soldiers aim at the people's heads and the victims are frightfully disfigured. A woman falls almost at my side. A little further on I slip on a piece of human brain. Before me is a child of eight years whose face is no longer human. Its mother is kneeling in tears over its corpse. The wounded, as they drag themselves along, leave streams of blood on the snow.19

Extract 3: Government report on events of 8–9 January 1905

...On the morning of January 8...the priest Gapon prepared and distributed a petition from the workers addressed to the sovereign, in which rude demands of a political nature were expressed along with wishes for changes in working conditions...the majority of workers were led astray concerning the purpose of the summons to Palace Square.

The fanatical preaching of the priest Gapon, forgetful of the sanctity of his calling, and the criminal agitation of persons of evil intent excited the workers to such an extent that on January 9 they began heading in great throngs toward the centre of the city. In some places bloody clashes took place between them and the troops, in consequence of the stubborn refusal of the crowd to obey the command to disperse, and sometimes even in consequence of attacks upon the troops.20

Debate

Using this book and at least THREE other sources, research the background and events of Bloody Sunday, 1905.

Run a class debate on one of the following topics:

- Father Gapon, not Tsar Nicholas II, was responsible for the civilian deaths on Bloody Sunday.
- Despite the losses, Bloody Sunday was a victory for the anti-tsarist movement.
- Without Bloody Sunday there would have been no Russian Revolution.

19 Excerpt from Robinson and Beard (44), Readings in Modern European History, vol. 2 (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1908), 375.
The 1905 Revolution

Tsar Nicholas II: ‘Rioting and disturbances in the capitals and in many localities of Our Empire fill Our heart with great and heavy grief.’

Bloody Sunday had a crippling effect on the tsarist government, demonstrating for the first time widespread contempt for the regime. The autocracy was soon on the verge of collapse, as domestic and external events continued to punish an already fragile state. Bloody Sunday sparked further industrial action, seeing 400,000 workers strike in January alone. News of the Russian defeat in the battle of Tsushima filtered home in May 1905, followed by a series of disturbances across the country.

Terrorism soon spread to rural areas, with peasants lashing out against government officials and landlords. Fearing the government would seize the property of peasants unable to repay mortgages, they seized the estates, crops and livestock of landowners, experiencing very little opposition as the lack of troops and isolated locations made it difficult for landlords to retaliate. By October, local government was paralysed. Minority groups throughout the empire took the opportunity to launch campaigns for independence or equality, such as Georgians, Poles and Jews.

Julia Ulyannikova points out an interesting contradiction. The central government, while in some ways enjoying excessive power, was weak and poorly organised at the local level, meaning that crises such as those of 1905 were handled badly – emergency measures had to be found because there was no proper process to guide the authorities. Having operated to a large extent on the arbitrary whims of governors, many local governments were corrupt and ineffectual, meaning that good information did not come their way in time to avert crises. Similarly, because the rights of minority groups had been suppressed for so long, such groups were able to take advantage of the chaos and demand autonomy when the system was at its most vulnerable.

The troops returning from Manchuria mutinied on their arrival home, taking control of the Trans-Siberian railway for some weeks. Despite the Tsar’s troops being able to eventually control the situation, the discontent

DID YOU KNOW?
The 1925 film Battleship Potemkin, directed by Sergei Eisenstein, was named the greatest film of all time at the World’s Fair in Brussels in 1958.

Mutiny on the warship Kniaz-Potemkin, June 1905 (artist’s impression).

21 M. Backlow and G. Russell, Russia, 76.
22 Ulyannikova, ‘Continuity and Change in the Russian Revolution’.
had spread to yet another group. Mutinies continued in the Tsar’s military and navy, no more obvious than on the legendary battleship Potemkin in June. The crew of the Prince Potemkin battleship stationed in Odessa on the Black Sea mutinied on 14 June, murdering their officers and deserting their squadron, sailing out of Russian waters for Rumania. Russian defeat and the end of the Russo-Japanese War had certainly exacerbated the situation.

Robert Service says that at this stage ‘the monarchy’s fate hung by a thread.’13 War defeat had in many ways united the anti-Tsarist forces. Sergey Witte feared the sailors and soldiers would join the revolution, further threatening the government. Luckily for the Tsar, at this point the revolutionaries were far too scattered and disunited in their cause to mount a serious challenge.

The outraged reaction to Bloody Sunday spread through universities around the country. Students went on strike in large numbers, turning campuses into ‘centres of political agitation’; in Moscow University alone over 3,000 students staged a rally,14 burning portraits of the Tsar and hanging red flags from the buildings. The political fervour spread to some secondary schools and theological academies. On 18 March the authorities ordered all institutions of higher learning closed for the remainder of the academic year.

Throughout 1905 industrial strikes spread from the centre in St Petersburg to other major cities and towns. The prominence of opposition groups continued to grow and, spurred on by the Second National Congress of Zemstvos, professional unions organised themselves into a national alliance, the Union of Unions. This body provided the intelligentsia with connections to ordinary working people. Led by liberal politician Pavel Milyukov, the group demanded a Constituent Assembly (previously called for by the zemstvos) and voting rights for all. This paved the way for other organisations, such as the Constitutional Democratic Party, or Kadets (principally made up of middle class liberals), to seek representation in government.

Also emerging during this period were the workers councils, or soviets. These groups developed in the major cities, especially St Petersburg and Moscow, and by the end of 1905 approximately eighty soviets had been formed.15 Despite being originally designed to represent the rights of workers, the soviets were soon recognised by parties such as the Socialist Revolutionaries as a potential power base. Leon Trotsky, a Menshevik (more moderate faction of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party), became the vice chairman of the St Petersburg Soviet, which called for a National General Strike.

The Tsar’s October Manifesto

Empress Marie Fedorovna Romanov (wife of Alexander III): ‘I’m sure that the only man who can help you now and be useful is Witte.’

October 1905 saw widespread industrial action as printers and bakers downed tools, supported by factory, railway, post, telegraph and bank workers, civil servants, teachers and even the Imperial Ballet dancers. By 14 October the economies of both Moscow and St Petersburg were paralysed and the cities ground to a halt. A spontaneous action by the masses had forced Tsar Nicholas II into a position where he needed to act swiftly. The Tsar, facing the potential collapse of his regime, needed to make concessions

14 O. Piges, A People’s Tragedy, 81.
15 M. Bucklow and G. Russell, Russia, 76.
and he looked to his advisor, the former Finance Minister, Count Sergei Witte, for the solution. Witte, recently returned from negotiating peace with the Japanese, reported to the Tsar that significant reform was required in order to bring peace to the nation. He suggested that the State Council must be considerably improved and above all, the Tsar must provide the right for the people to elect members of government. Severe repression must be ended in all matters, excluding those that significantly threatened the state and the Tsar must adopt a policy of sincerity and ‘freedom’.\textsuperscript{46} Witte drafted the October Manifesto with Minister for Education Alexei Obolensky, which outlined these key reforms. He persuaded the Tsar to accept these terms and the document was issued on 17 October 1905.

\textbf{ACTIVITY 5}

\textbf{Document Analysis}

Read the October Manifesto, issued by Tsar Nicholas II in 1905.

1. Explain what Nicholas means by ‘riotings and disturbances’.
2. List the reforms outlined in the document.
3. In your own words, explain what measure no. 1 means.
4. Identify the obligations of the Russian people outlined in the document.
5. On the face of it, does the Manifesto sound fair? Explain.
6. Using this book and at least TWO other sources, explain the impact of this manifesto on Russia at the time.

\textbf{DOCUMENT:}

\textbf{October Manifesto 1905.}

\textit{We, Nicholas II, By the Grace of God Emperor and Autocrat of all Russia, King of Poland, Grand Duke of Finland, etc., proclaim to all Our loyal subjects:}

\textit{Rioting and disturbances in the capitals [i.e. St. Petersburg and the old capital, Moscow] and in many localities of Our Empire fill Our heart with great and heavy grief: The well-being of the Russian Sovereign is inseparable from the well-being of the nation, and the nation’s sorrow is Our sorrow. The disturbances that have taken place may cause grave tension in the nation and may threaten the integrity and unity of Our state.}

\textit{By the great vow of service as Tsar We are obliged to use every resource of wisdom and of Our authority to bring a speedy end to unrest that is dangerous to Our state. We have ordered the responsible authorities to take measures to terminate direct manifestations of disorder, lawlessness, and violence and to protect peaceful people who quietly seek to fulfill their duties. To carry out successfully the general measures that we have conceived to restore peace to the life of the state, We believe that it is essential to coordinate activities at the highest level of government. We require the government dutifully to execute our unshakeable will:}

\textit{(1.) To grant to the population the essential foundations of civil freedom, based on the principles of genuine inviolability of the person, freedom of conscience, speech, assembly and association.}

\textit{(2.) Without postponing the scheduled elections to the State Duma, to admit to participation in the duma (insofar as possible in the short time that remains before it is scheduled to convene) of all those classes of the population that now are completely deprived of voting rights; and to leave the further development of a general statute on elections to the future legislative order.}

\textit{(3.) To establish as an unbreakable rule that no law shall take effect without confirmation by the State Duma and that the elected representatives of the people shall be guaranteed the opportunity to participate in the supervision of the legality of the actions of Our appointed officials.}

\textit{We summon all loyal sons of Russia to remember their duties toward their country, to assist in terminating the unprecedented unrest now prevailing, and together with Us to make every effort to restore peace and tranquility to Our native land.}

\textit{Given at Peterhof the 17th of October in the 1905th year of Our Lord and of Our reign the eleventh.}

\textit{Nicholas}\textsuperscript{47}


\textsuperscript{47} Documents in Russian History: http://artclu.shu.edu/esp/documents/october20 manifesto.htm
Responses to the October Manifesto

Leon Trotsky: 'We have been given a constitution, but absolutism remains...everything is given and nothing is given.'

Revolutionary groups

The October Manifesto paved the way for a future where the power lay not with an autocratic ruler, but in a working relationship between a legislative duma and the tsar. This, coupled with the promise of a liberalisation of censorship and a gradual unlocking of land, gave the 1905 reforms the potential to appeal to many. Despite this, the Manifesto received a mixed reception. While some groups saw it as an important step in the right direction, paving the way for further reform, others doubted it would ever

come into practice. The Manifesto divided the liberals, seeing the Octobrists accept the reform, while the Constitutional Democrats (Kaders) pursued further concessions. To the government it seemed that revolution had been avoided and the divide between the various liberal and revolutionary factions had been widened.

The greatest opposition to the October Manifesto came from the St Petersburg Soviet. The Soviet saw the Manifesto as ‘a fraud on the people, a trick of the tsar to gain some sort of respite in which to lull the credulous and to win time to rally his forces and then to strike at the revolution.’

Having gained considerable influence during the General Strike, the Soviet felt able to encourage further revolutionary action and did this by calling for the General Strike to continue. Workers, however, returned to work, buoyed by the possibility of reform and unable to shoulder the economic burden of being on strike.

Following the arrest of its chairman, Nosar, the St Petersburg Soviet responded with an armed uprising. Two-hundred-and-sixty deputies, approximately half the membership, were arrested on 3 December. The Moscow Soviet called a strike on 6 December that crippled the city. After troops were sent from St Petersburg the strike was ended on 18 December, limiting the influence of the Soviet. Over 1000 people lost their lives in the Moscow uprising. Following this the St Petersburg Soviet headquarters were stormed and key figures were arrested, including Trotsky.

**Industrial workers**

Even though industrial workers were able to bring the central cities and towns to a standstill simply by stopping work, many were disengaged from the push for political reform and revolution, preoccupied with daily social and economic concerns. In general they wanted specific improvements such as an eight-hour working day, an elected workers' council and better
medical services. Despite the work of the Social Democrats and, more
directly, the soviets, workers largely remained focused on immediate
economic reform. Wider political propaganda of the revolutionaries, such as
calls for a 'constituent assembly' or a 'socialist proletarian revolution', did
little to interest them. Many could not afford to answer the call for another
general strike. The St Petersburg and Moscow soviets had lost much of their
influence over the industrial workers, a significant benefit for the Tsar.

Peasants

Like industrial workers, peasants remained largely disengaged from the
push for political reform. They too wished for immediate change, however,
their interest lay, largely, in gaining land and having lower taxes. Although
there were a few radicalised peasants, they were often isolated and poorly
coor-ordinated. While it can be argued that the October Manifesto provided
little for the peasants, it did offer hope for a limited recoup of land. Peasants
pursued the idea of getting landlords to leave the country areas and sell
their holdings, cheaply, to peasants. This led to some violent confrontations,
which the Tsar contained with the use of floggings and firing squads. Despite
these repressive techniques the peasants were, to a certain extent, appeased
by the October Manifesto, with land redemption payments for 1905 halved
and later cancelled altogether. Fewer land seizures occurred, leading the
peasants to pin their hopes on the Duma.

Implications of the 1905 Revolution

Leon Trotsky: 'Although with a few broken ribs, tsarism came
out of the experience of 1905 alive and strong enough.'

The tsarist regime emerged out of 1905 in many ways unscathed in the short
term, despite a significant war loss, the rise of unions, crippling industrial
action and the surfacing of key opposition groups. Fitzpatrick contends that
the political outcome of the 1905 Revolution was 'ambiguous and in some
ways unsatisfactory to all concerned', an argument furtherted by Pipes
who highlights both the achievements and failures of key movements such
as socialists, liberals, conservatives and even the government itself. While
concession was the only option, the government did take a decisive stand, in
many ways reasserting itself as a firm authority. In the process of concession,
the regime managed to divide opposition groups and send a clear message
to those who attempted to undermine the government that all challenges
would be met with repression. The government realised that as long as they
retained the loyalty of the military, which was ensured after initial mutinies
subsidized, protest could be withstood. The government also secured the
allegiance of counter-revolutionary forces, such as wealthy landowners, high
clergymen and many professionals.

Whether the events of 1905 actually constitute a revolution remains a
topic of some debate. While it certainly resulted in reform, the extent
to which this reform actually benefited the people of Russia in the long
term is contentious, especially when subsequent reform passed in 1906 is
explored. In light of these changes, the Duma in actuality did not curb the
Tsar's powers. The revolution of 1905 also lacked the participation of key
revolutionary leaders, most notably Lenin, Martov, Trotsky, Plekhanov and
Chernov, all of whom remained in exile.

31 Sheila Fitzpatrick, The Russian Revolution
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 34.