In 1899, not long before this photograph was taken, a twenty-nine year old Russian wrote:

'The Russian working class is burdened by a double yoke; it is ... robbed by the capitalists and landlords, and to prevent it from fighting them, the police bind it hand and foot, gag it, and persecute every attempt to defend the rights of the people.'

The writer, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, was not at that moment watching these women hauling a barge on the river Volga. He was thousands of miles away in Siberia, the eastern part of Russia, where he had been sent as a punishment for helping workers to organise a strike. But it was exactly the kind of scene Lenin might have had in mind when he wrote these words about the workers of Russia. And the thought of workers having to put up with conditions like these made Lenin determined to overthrow the Russian government and to provide the Russian people with a new way of life.

Part One of this book shows why conditions for many Russian people were so bad at the start of this century, and why the Russian government did little to improve them. Part Two shows how Lenin, twenty years after he wrote the words above, succeeded in overthrowing the government. Part Three describes how he became the ruler of Russia and invites you to decide whether he provided a better system than the one he overthrew.
Russia is very, very big. You could fit all of the British Isles into Russia ninety times over. It takes over a week in an express train, travelling day and night, to get from Moscow in the west to Vladivostok in the east. Russia is so big that the sun rises in the far east of the country at the same time as it sets in the west.

The land and the climate

Much of Russia is covered by thick pine forest called 'taiga'. This scene in the taiga was photographed in 1880

Although Russia is vast, much of the land is quite useless. Study the map opposite and you will quickly see why. Look first at the southern border. The high mountains there are a good defence against foreign invaders, but they also keep out warm air trying to spread from the south. This leaves Russia open to cold air sweeping down from the Arctic Ocean. For this reason Russia is mostly useless for farming. In the Arctic Circle the land is 'tundra' where nothing grows except moss and small shrubs. For more than 1000 kilometres south of the tundra stretches the 'taiga', cold land covered in forests of pine trees. It is only in the warmer regions of the south-west that the soil can be used for farming. In 1900 only 5 per cent of all Russian land was used for farming: the rest lay waste.

The cold climate affected Russia's industry and commerce as well as her farming. Look on the map at Russia's long coastline. Much of it is inside the Arctic circle and is therefore frozen over with thick ice for much of the year. So too are the great rivers of Siberia - the Ob, the Yenisey and the Lena. Today, massive ice-breaking ships smash channels through the ice for other ships to use, but until 1900 the ice-breakers were not so powerful. The coast and the rivers stayed locked in ice throughout the long winter, so sea and river trade were impossible until spring arrived. A new railway, the Trans-Siberian, was being built to allow trade between east and west all year round, but in 1900 it was still only half-built.

An empire of many peoples

In 1900 Russia was a great empire ruled by a Tsar, or Emperor - Nicholas II. About 125 million people lived in Tsar Nicholas's empire. As you can see from the table below less than half were Russians.

Population of the Russian Empire, according to a census in 1897

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russians</td>
<td>55,650,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainians</td>
<td>22,400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poles</td>
<td>7,900,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byelorussians</td>
<td>5,900,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews</td>
<td>5,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirghiz</td>
<td>4,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tatars</td>
<td>3,700,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finns</td>
<td>2,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germans</td>
<td>1,800,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuanians</td>
<td>1,650,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letts</td>
<td>1,400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgians</td>
<td>1,350,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenians</td>
<td>1,150,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romanians</td>
<td>1,110,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasians</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonians</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iranians</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Asiatic peoples</td>
<td>5,750,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mongols</td>
<td>500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>200,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The majority were peoples such as the Poles and the Ukrainians who had been conquered by the ancestors of Tsar Nicholas II. These peoples each had their own language, their own customs and their own way of life. So for six out of ten of the Tsar's subjects Russian was a foreign language and Russian people were foreigners.

The many peoples of the Russian Empire were not spread evenly throughout the country. Most lived on the 5 per cent of land that was good for farming. The cold lands of Siberia, east of the Ural mountains, were therefore thinly populated, while the fertile land of the south-west and the streets of the cities were often overcrowded.

### Work section

A. Make a table like the one below. Then use the information in the map above to fill each column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries neighbouring Russia</th>
<th>Seas and oceans around Russia</th>
<th>Major rivers in Russia</th>
<th>Mountain ranges in Russia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Total = 12)</td>
<td>(Total = 5)</td>
<td>(Total = 7)</td>
<td>(Total = 2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. Make a list of the advantages that you think a country like Russia has in being big. What do you think are the disadvantages in a country being as big as Russia? Consider such factors as transport, defence, natural resources etc.

C. Study the table opposite of the population of the Russian Empire, then answer these questions:
1. a) How many Russians lived in the Empire?
   b) How many non-Russian people lived in the Empire?
2. What difficulties do you think Tsar Nicholas might have faced in governing so many different nationalities?
3. What problems do you think faced the non-Russian people of the Empire in being governed by a Russian Tsar?
The autocracy

Tsar Nicholas II, the Emperor of Russia, was an autocrat – a monarch who does not have to share power. Nicholas could make new laws, increase taxes, do exactly what he liked, without consulting anyone. There was no parliament to limit his power, and he could sack any minister or adviser who disagreed with him.

In practice Nicholas could not govern 125 million Russians all by himself. To run the affairs of his vast empire the Tsar employed many thousands of civil servants. They were organised like an army into fourteen ranks. At the top of the ‘Table of Ranks’ were ministers in charge of government departments. At the bottom were minor officials, such as post office clerks and customs inspectors. The Tsar’s civil service collected taxes from the Russian people and made sure that his decisions were carried out. And because they were underpaid for their work, many civil servants made ends meet by taking bribes.

The Tsar did not allow people to question his authority or challenge his power. To make sure that nobody opposed him, Nicholas had a secret police force, the Okhrana, or ‘Protective Section’. The Okhrana censored all books and newspapers. Its agents spied on political groups and arrested people who criticised the government. Political prisoners were tried by special courts without juries, and usually ended up in exile. This means that they, like Lenin (whom you met on page 1) were punished by being sent to live in the cold lands of Siberia.

Sometimes, especially when there was famine, the Okhrana could not cope with all the opponents of the Tsar, and riots broke out. Workers in factories went on strike and peasants in the country attacked their landlords or the tax collectors. When this happened it was the Cossacks who came to the Tsar’s rescue. Cossacks were fierce mounted soldiers armed with sabres who specialised in breaking up mobs by butchering anyone not able to run away fast enough.

In a different way the church in Russia also helped to maintain the authority of the Tsar. The priests of the Russian Orthodox Church taught people to respect the autocracy and to be loyal to the Tsar. The head of the church was a government minister. Bishops took their orders from him and priests took their orders from the bishops. In this way the government had control over the minds and souls of many Russian churchgoers.

Nicholas and Alexandra

So what kind of man was Nicholas II, the ‘Tsar and Autocrat of all the Russians’, as his official title described him? These extracts should give you some idea of his character:

A. Nicholas had this to say in October 1894, the day after the death of his father, Alexander III:

‘What is going to happen to me, to all Russia? I am not ready to be the Tsar. I never wanted to become one. I know nothing of the business of ruling. I have no idea of even how to talk to ministers.’

B. In January 1895 Nicholas said:

‘I shall preserve the principle of autocracy just as firmly . . . as my late unforgettable father preserved it.’

C. Count Witte, Russia’s first Prime Minister, was sacked by Nicholas in 1906. This is how it happened:

‘We talked for two solid hours. He shook my hand. He wished me all the luck in the world. I went home beside myself with happiness and found a written order for my dismissal lying on my desk.’
Sir Arthur Nicholson was the British Ambassador to Russia in 1906. Here he describes Nicholas II:

'The gentle but uneducated Emperor . . . is weak on every point except his own autocracy.'

Alexander Kerensky, Russian politician and Prime Minister in 1917, wrote about Nicholas in his memoirs in 1966:

'The daily work of a ruler he found terribly boring. He could not stand listening long or seriously to ministers’ reports, or reading them. He liked such ministers as could tell an amusing story and did not weary his attention with too much business.'

Nicholas's German wife, Alexandra, was confident and strong willed. From the start of his reign she encouraged Nicholas to rule as an autocrat and to ignore new ideas about sharing power with the people.

Nicholas and Alexandra were very happily married, and had five children during the first ten years of their marriage. The first four were girls and the fifth was a boy, Alexis, the heir to the throne. But the happiness of Nicholas and Alexandra was ruined when they found out shortly after he was born that Alexis had a blood disease, haemophilia, which prevented his blood from clotting. There was no cure for haemophilia, and even a small cut could cause Alexis to bleed to death. A slight bump could lead to massive internal swellings and agonising pain.

Both Nicholas and Alexandra were deeply religious. Alexandra had a chapel specially built in the grounds of the royal palace and every day she prayed there for hours, begging for the recovery of her son. In the meantime she ordered her daughters never to talk about Alexis's illness and made everyone else who knew about it swear an oath of secrecy.

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**Work section**

**A.** Test your understanding of this chapter by explaining the meanings of the following words: autocrat, Tsar, Okhrana, Cossacks, haemophilia.

**B.** Study the photograph of Tsar Nicholas II and his son Alexis on the opposite page. Using the information you have read in this chapter, answer these questions:
1. What disease was Alexis suffering from, and what were its effects?
2. Why do you think Alexis was being carried by a Cossack officer?
3. Why do you think Alexandra made her son’s illness into a state secret?

**C.** Read extracts A to E on the character and ideas of Nicholas II.
1. Write a paragraph in your own words, describing the character and ideas of Nicholas II.
2. Which of these extracts do you trust most as historical evidence? Which do you trust least? Explain both your answers.

**D.** Before going any further, make revision notes on what you have read so far in this book. If you are unsure about how to organise your notes, use points A and B of the revision guide on page 14 to help you.
The peasants

In 1900 four out of every five citizens of the Russian Empire were peasants — country people who made their living by farming. Until 1861 the peasants had been serfs, slaves of their landlords with no rights, no freedom and no land of their own.

In 1861, Tsar Alexander II, Nicholas II’s grandfather, freed the peasants from serfdom and allowed them to own the land on which they grew their food. But there were strings attached to this deal. First, the land on which the peasants grew their food was not given to them as individuals: it was given to the village commune, or mir, in which they lived. Second, the peasants had to pay for the land given to the commune in yearly instalments, called redemption payments, over the next forty-nine years. Only when a peasant had paid all forty-nine instalments would the land become his or her personal property.

Being freed from serfdom on these conditions did not improve the lives of the peasants. Each year the mirs divided up the land in the communes and gave it out to each family according to its needs that year: the bigger the family, the bigger the plot of land it was given. But as each year went by, and as the population grew, the plots of land grew smaller and smaller. Between 1861 and 1900 the average size of plots halved. This meant that peasants found it harder each year to support their families. And at the same time they had to keep up with the yearly redemption payments for the land they did not yet own.

For all these reasons life for Russian peasants was hard. Nearly half of all new-born children died before the age of five, while the average life expectancy of those who did reach the age of five was only fifty years. Diseases and malnutrition were very common. The best that peasants could hope for in life was a good harvest. Then they would have enough to eat — mostly bread and root vegetables — and a little extra to sell at market so that they could pay their taxes and redemption payments for the year.

The town workers

Many peasants tried to improve their lives by going to work in the nearest town or city. There they would work in factories or mines until harvest time, when they returned to their communes.
The largest city in Russia in 1900 was the capital, St Petersburg (see map on page 3). Nearly a million people had come there in search of work and the number was still growing. This extract from a book written in 1905 by Father Georgei Gapon, a priest in St Petersburg, gives a clear idea of what life was like for cotton workers in the city.

They receive miserable wages and generally live in an overcrowded state, very commonly in special lodging houses. A woman takes several rooms in her own name, subletting each one; and it is common to see ten or more persons living in one room and four sleeping in one bed.

The normal working day is eleven and a half hours of work, exclusive of meal times. But . . . manufacturers have received permission to work overtime, so that the average day is longer than that nominally allowed by law – fourteen or fifteen hours. I often watched the crowds of poorly clad and emaciated [very thin] figures of men and girls returning from the mills . . . Why do they agree to work overtime? They have to do so because they are paid by the piece and the rate is very low.’

Workers like these were unable to improve their conditions. Trade unions were not allowed by law. Going on strike was illegal. Anyway, employers could easily replace troublesome workers who complained: there were always long queues of unemployed people outside their factory gates looking for work.

The rich

Not all Russians were poor. Russian nobles were, for the most part, fabulously rich. Tsar Nicholas, at the head of the nobility, owned eight different palaces and employed 15,000 servants. When the royal family moved from one palace to another, up to twenty railway carriages were needed just for their luggage.

Although the nobles were only 1 per cent of the Russian population, they owned around 25 per cent of all the land. Those who could be bothered to farm their land efficiently made handsome profits at the expense of the poor peasants. Meanwhile, the poor were unable to make a living at all. Their wages were too low to feed their families. The harsh punishments for any kind of strike only served to keep them in line.

By 1900 a new class of Russians was also becoming rich – the capitalists who made money from banking, industry and trade. The Minister of Finance, Sergei Witte, made it easy for capitalists to make big profits. He gave them government contracts, particularly for building railways. He gave them loans to build new factories. He cut taxes. With easy profits to be made the capitalists did little to improve the conditions of their workers. Hatred of the capitalists steadily grew in the slums and boarding houses of Russia’s cities.

Work section

A. Test your understanding of this chapter by explaining the meanings of the following words: serfdom, mir, redemption payments, capitalists.

B. Study the extract by Father Gapon, then answer these questions:
   1. a) What, according to Father Gapon, was the length of the working day allowed by law?
   b) How long did most workers actually work each day?
   c) For what reason did workers accept such long hours of work?
   2. Compare the photograph of a Moscow boarding house with this extract. In what ways does the photograph agree with Father Gapon’s account of life in St Petersburg?

C. Study the cartoon above. Then, using the information in Chapter 2 as well as this chapter, explain what you think was the point of the cartoon. Judging by what you have read, do you think the cartoonist was being fair? Explain your answer.
Most Russians did not question the Tsar's autocratic system of government. They believed that God had appointed the Tsar to rule over them and that everyone else had their rightful place in society. But some people refused to accept this. They wanted to get rid of the Tsar and make big changes to Russian government and society. Some of them were ready to go to any lengths to achieve this.

Terrorism

On a snowy Sunday afternoon in March 1881 a bomb exploded beneath the carriage of Tsar Alexander II, the Tsar who had freed the peasants from serfdom twenty years earlier. He was unhurt, but when he got out of his carriage to inspect the damage, a young man stepped forward and threw what looked like a snowball at his feet. The snowball exploded, tearing off one of Alexander's legs and ripping his belly open. He bled to death shortly after, watched by his son Alexander and his grandson Nicholas.

The assassination of Alexander II was carried out by a terrorist group called the 'People's Will'. It was one of many small terrorist groups determined to destroy the autocracy by any means. But the assassination did not destroy the autocracy. Alexander's successors, his son Alexander III and his grandson Nicholas II, who both watched him die, were determined not to let the same happen to them. Both used the Okhrana to arrest critics and opponents. Many thousands ended up in prison or in exile in Siberia.

Neither Alexander nor Nicholas succeeded in wiping out all their opponents, however. In 1900 there were still three important groups of opponents in existence.

The Socialist Revolutionary Party

The first of these groups was the Socialist Revolutionary Party. The SRs, as its members were known, wanted all land in Russia to be given to the mirs, the village communities, so that peasants could have a bigger share of the land. This would mean taking away land from the Tsar, the nobles and the church, who between them owned most of Russia.

To help achieve their aims the SRs had a 'Fighting Organisation' whose job was to organise terrorist campaigns. Between 1900 and 1905 the 'Fighting Organisation' managed to kill three government ministers and dozens of other government officials.

Not surprisingly the SRs gained support from millions of peasants who wanted their own land but
who had fallen behind with their yearly redemption payments.

The Social Democratic Party

Another important revolutionary group in 1900 was the Social Democratic Party. The Social Democrats followed the ideas of Karl Marx, a German writer who in 1848 had written a book called the Communist Manifesto. In this book Marx predicted that there would be a violent revolution in which the working class overthrew the capitalists who owned the wealth of the country. The workers would take away factories, mines, machinery and raw materials from the capitalists and would share them out equally among themselves. Marx called this sharing of wealth socialism.

In a socialist society, Marx thought, people would learn to work together for the good of everyone, not just for themselves. They would stop being selfish and would take only what they needed as payment for their work. At this stage, a system of communism would come into existence, a society in which people work according to their abilities and are paid according to their needs.

The Social Democratic Party, which followed Marx's ideas, was set up in 1898. However, its leaders quickly began to argue about what was the best way to start a socialist revolution. In 1903 they split into two groups, the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks.

The Bolsheviks believed that the revolution should be organised by a small group of dedicated and skilled revolutionaries. They should lead the party and make all the decisions. The Mensheviks believed that the Party should be a mass party with as many working class members as possible. It should be run democratically, with the members electing the leaders and deciding on its policies.

The leader of the Bolsheviks, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, argued that if the Mensheviks had their way, it would take years to start the revolution: they would waste time on useless discussion and argument. Julius Martov, leader of the Mensheviks, replied that the revolution would fail if it did not have the support of the whole working class.

The Social Democratic Party remained split on this issue. Lenin and his supporters failed to reach agreement with Martov and his supporters. So from 1903 onwards there were three important revolutionary groups in Russia – the Bolsheviks, the Mensheviks, and the Socialist Revolutionaries.

Liberals

Not all the Tsar's opponents were violent revolutionaries. Many law-abiding Russians, particularly those who owned property, were liberals. They supported the Tsar but they wanted him to share his power. They wanted a democratic system of government, like the one in Britain where an elected parliament shared power with the monarch.

Sadly for the liberals, Alexander II had made plans for a Russian parliament the day before he was blown up by the 'People's Will'. The first thing his son Alexander III did when he became Tsar was to tear up those plans.

V. I. Lenin (centre) and J. Martov (sitting on Lenin's left) and members of the Union of Struggle for Liberation of the Working People, a revolutionary group set up in 1895

Work section

A. Study the information in this chapter about the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, then answer these questions:
   1. Which terrorist group assassinated Alexander II? What was its aim in doing so?
   2. In your opinion, was the assassination likely to achieve the aim of the assassins? Explain your answer.
   3. How did the assassination ruin the liberals' chances of achieving their aims?

B. Study the photograph above. Then, using the information you have read in this chapter, answer these questions:
   1. To which party did V.I. Lenin and J. Martov both belong?
   2. On what did the two men agree and on what did they disagree?
   3. V.I. Lenin's name was really V.I. Ulyanov, and J. Martov was really called I.O. Tserbaum. Why do you think both men changed their names?