

Russia 1905



The background
 The '1905 revolution' is misnamed. It began long before 1905 and was only effectively ended in July 1907. The long-term causes of the 'revolution' had been in place for decades:

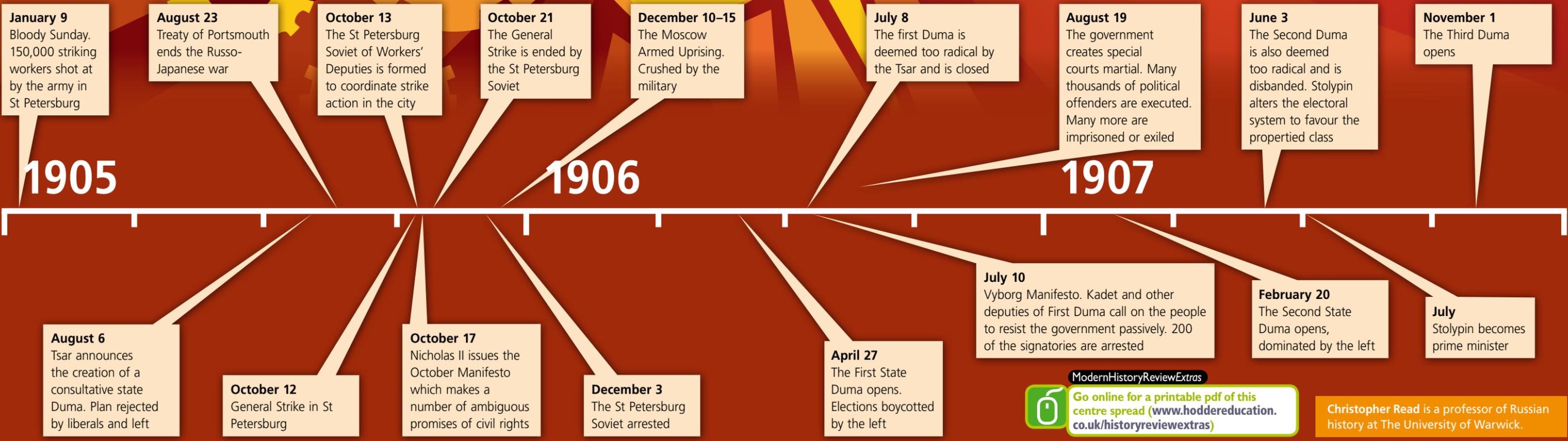
- peasant land hunger
- a sluggish rise in living standards
- an active revolutionary and terrorist movement
- the growth of industry and the seeds of a modernising Russia constrained by an increasingly repressive autocracy

The sparks of mass disturbances began with Russia's first serious strikes in 1895–96, followed by student disturbances in 1899. At that moment, a financial crisis began in western Europe and the Russian economy began to suffer. Its growth rate fell and recession hit hard. The result was a series of major strikes from 1900 on, which were countered by military violence and officially sponsored anti-Semitic mobs which conducted looting attacks (pogroms) in major cities. Defeat in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5 added to the autocracy's woes and undermined its prestige.

Consequences
 Historians have fiercely debated whether the events of 1905 changed the direction of Russian history and particularly that of the autocracy under Nicholas II. One group argued that the autocracy had fundamentally changed and that Russia was starting out on a path to liberal and democratic capitalism. Others argued that the reforms of 1905 were either not seriously implemented or were withdrawn as quickly as possible.

In either case, the fundamental social problems of peasants and workers remained as before and Russia was ruled by a tsar determined to preserve autocracy at all costs and reject Western notions of civil rights and democracy. The collapse of Russia during the First World War and the explosion of social revolution after the February Revolution seem to indicate that if 1905 was a chance for serious reform, it was missed. To add to the inaccuracy of its commonly accepted name, it was not a revolution either.

Dates according to Russian calendar. For Western dates, add 13 days, e.g. 25 October = 7 November.



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