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Revision

Russia 1905

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In Christopher Read's timeline of the 1905 revolution he refers to the debate over whether the events of 1905 changed the direction of Russian history (he also asserts that it was not a revolution) and suggests that 1905 was a missed opportunity for serious reform.

The exercises below are designed to help you analyse the extent to which 1905 could be considered a 'turning point' in Russian history.

Exercise 1

For each statement below decide whether you think it suggests 1905 was a 'turning point' or not (where a 'turning point' is something which brings about great change):

- 1905 marked a new era of mass protest and this feeling was far-reaching.
- Peasants became less respectful and deferential towards their landowners.
- The Fundamental Laws of 1906 re-affirmed the powers of the Tsar.
- Although the regime was forced to make concessions in the form of the October Manifesto, a close reading of the wording shows that Nicholas II's autocratic powers remained intact.
- The army and the navy showed serious signs of mutiny, such as the Kronstadt naval base, Sebastopol and Vladivostok.
- The liberal left-wing (Kadets) were determined to continue the constitutional struggle but accepted Nicholas' concessions as a starting point to further reforms.
- The number of peasant disturbances rose with a peak in November and December but then declined as Stolypin's agricultural reforms kicked in.
- By November 1905 the mutinies in the army led to a situation where the government did not have control of ten of the empire's 19 largest cities, including Moscow.
- The St Petersburg Soviet's call for a strike was met with little response and was called off by November.
- The mass protests were more outbreaks of rage rather than revolutionary cries and soon dissipated when concessions were made.
- The loyal army units successfully used violence and summary executions to put down unrest in the towns.
- Now a constitutional monarchy, large sections of liberal thinkers still wanted to see the promises of the October Manifesto put into practice.

- Nicholas' handling of the Duma in subsequent years alienated the liberals and pushed Russia closer to the 1917 revolution.
- The various groups opposing the Tsar did not unite and failed to create an effective opposition.
- The Russian people had experienced new political freedoms such as free speech and the formation of political parties, which could not be 'put back in the box'.
- Attitudes of workers and peasants had changed towards social revolution having felt let down by the liberals.
- After 1905 pre-existing problems like poor living conditions no longer seemed tolerable and demand for change became more urgent.
- The legislative changes created a more democratic government with elected Dumas and political parties.
- The utterance of statements such as 'there is no Tsar' shows a shift in attitudes towards the paternalistic Tsar figure.
- Nicholas had restored order and could have continued to rule, albeit with fragile confidence, if it weren't for the devastating effects of the First World War.

Exercise 2

Write paragraph answers to these questions to help you analyse the significance of 1905:

- 1 How important was the October Manifesto in helping Nicholas II restore order?
- 2 How far did the October Manifesto reduce the regime's autocratic powers?
- 3 How important was the role of the revolutionary parties?
- 4 To what extent was the loyalty of the army and the navy called into question? Why is this important?
- 5 How did Nicholas restore order?
- 6 How successfully did Nicholas handle the events of 1905?
- 7 To what extent was the role of Stolypin essential in bringing about stability after 1905?
- 8 Why was Tsarism able to survive events of 1905?
- 9 How strong was the regime on the eve of the First World War?
- 10 To what extent do you agree that 1905 was a 'dress rehearsal' for 1917?

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