Imperial Russia

The autocracy of Nicholas I's regime was not threatened by the revolutions of 1848. The European revolutionary experience of 1848 to 1849 reinforced the conservative ideology at the heart of the Romanov regime. In 1848 and 1849. Russian troops suppressed disorganized Polish attempts to reassert their nation's power and culture; in 1849, Russian troops brutally suppressed stragglers of the Hungarian revolution.

Russian involvement in the Crimean War met with defeat. France, Britain, and Piedmont emerged as victors. Russian ambitions in the eastern Mediterranean had been thwarted by a coalition of western European states. In 1855, Nicholas I died and was succeeded by Alexander II (reigned 1855-1881), who feared the forces of change and introduced reforms in order to remain in power.

Fearing the transformation of Russian society from below, Alexander II instituted a series of reforms that contributed to radical changes in the social contract in Russia. With the regime in disarray after defeat in the Crimean War. Alexander II, in March 1856, indicated that serfdom had to be eliminated. After years formulating the process for its elimination, Alexander II pronounced in 1861 that serfdom was abolished. Further, he issued the following reforms:

1. The serf (peasant) would no longer be dependent upon the lord.
2. All people were to have freedom of movement and be free to change their means of livelihood.
3. The serf could enter into contracts and own property.

A lingering problem with emancipation, not solved until 1905, was the requirement that freed serfs pay for their freeing in the so-called redemption payments. Theoretically set to end in 1910, these heinous charges had to be collected by the *mir* (commune); Alexander II should have foreseen the resentment and noncompliance that ensued.

In fact, the lives of most peasants were not radically affected by these reforms. Most lived in local communes that regulated the lives of members-thus, the needs of commune life undermined the reforms of Alexander II. Another significant development was the creation of the *zemstvos*, assemblies that administered localities; through the *zemstvos*, the rural nobility retained control. Nevertheless, the elective role of towns, nobles, and peasants in the *zemstvos*, however imperfectly realized introduced notions of democracy to

Russia; also, the power of local taxation enabled some *zemstvos* to provide social services for rural Russia for the first time in its history – fire brigades, repair of bridges and roads, and schools were some of the *zemstvo* reforms. Next, Alexander reformed the judiciary system. The new judiciary was to be based upon such enlightened notions as jury trial, the abolition of arbitrary judicial processes, and the equality of all before the law. In fact, the only substantive change was the improvement in the efficiency of the Russian judiciary; however, the reforms did lead to expectations that were later realized. Finally. Alexander reformed the army (1864-1874) in significant ways: the abolition of harsh corporal punishment (running the gauntlet) was one, the institution of army schools for illiterate peasant conscripts, another.

The reforms of Alexander II did not resolve the problems of Russia. During the 1860s and 1870s, criticism of the regime mounted. Moderates called for Russia to proceed along Western lines in a controlled manner to address political and economic problems; radicals argued that the overthrow of the system was the only solution to the problems confronting the Russian people. Quite naturally, Alexander II and other members of the elite maintained that Russia would solve its own problems within the existing structure and without external intervention. Economic problems that plagued Russia were staggering. Under the three-field system, one-third of agricultural land was not being used: the population was increasing dramatically, but food protection was not keeping pace. Peasants were allowed to buy land and live outside of the communes; however, even with the establishment of the Peasant Land Bank (1883), most peasants were unable to take advantage of this opportunity to become property owners. During years of great hardship, the government did intervene with emergency measures that temporarily reduced, deferred, or suspended taxes and/or payments.

While agriculture appeared to have no direction, nor to have experienced much growth during this period, Russian industry, particularly in textiles and metallurgy, did develop. Between 1870 and 1900, as the result of French loans, Russia expanded its railroad network significantly. In large part, the expansion of Russian industry resulted from direct governmental intervention. In addition to constructing railroads, the government subsidized industrial development through a protective tariff and by awarding major contracts to emerging industries. From 1892 to 1903, Count Sergei Witte served as minister of finance. As a result of his efforts to stimulate the economy. Russian industry prospered during most of the 1890s. During this same period the

government consistently suppressed the development of organized labor. In 1899, a depression broke and the gains of the 1890s quickly were replaced by the increased unemployment and industrial shutdowns; the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war in 1904 further aggravated this already very difficult situation.

The last years of the reign of Alexander II witnessed increased political opposition that was manifested in demands for reforms from an ever more hostile group of intellectuals, the emergence of a populist movement, and attempts to assassinate the tsar. Some demands for extending reforms came from within the government from such dedicated and talented ministers as D. A. Miliutin, a minister of war, who reorganized the Russian military system during the 1870s. However, reactionary ministers such as Count Dmitri Tolstoy, minister of education, did much to discredit progressive policies emanating from the regime: Tolstoy repudiated academic freedom and advanced an anti science bias. As the regime matured, it placed greater importance on traditional values. This attitude fostered nihilism, a viewpoint that rejected romantic illusions of the past in favor of a rugged realism and that was being advanced by such writers as Ivan Turgenev in his *Fathers and Sons* (1862).

The notion of the inevitability and desirability of a social and economic revolution was promoted through the Russian populists. Originally, populists were interested in an agrarian utopian order in which the lives of peasants would be transformed into an idyllic state, but government persecution of the populists, who had no national base of support, resulted in the radicalization of the movement. In the late 1870s and early 1880s, leaders such as Andrei Zhelyabov and Sophie Perovskaya became obsessed with the need to assassinate Alexander I I. In March 1881, they succeeded, killing Alexander in Saint Petersburg by bombing his carriage.

Alexander III (reigned 1881-1894) then became the tsar, advocating a national policy based on "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and National Unity," Alexander III selected as his primary aides conservatives such as Count Dmitri Tolstoy, now minister of the Interior, Count Delianov, minister of education, and Constantine Pobedonostsev, who headed the Russian Orthodox Church. Alexander III died in 1894, succeeded by the last of the Romanovs to hold power, Nicholas II (reigned 1894-1917). Nicholas II displayed a lack of intelligence, wit, and political acumen, and the absence of a firm will throughout his reign. Nicholas tended to be swayed by stronger personalities,

such as his wife Alexandra's, and her favorite monk. Rasputin's. The crisis confronting imperial Russia required extraordinarily effective and cohesive leadership: with Nicholas II, the situation became more severe and in the end, unacceptable.

The opposition to the tsarist government became more focused and threatening with the emergence of the Russian Social Democrats and the Social Revolutionaries: both were Marxist. Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, known as Lenin, led the Bolsheviks, a splinter group of the Social Democrats. Until the impact of the 1899 depression and the horrors associated with the Russo-Japanese War, groups advocating revolutions commanded little support. Even when the Revolution of 1905 occurred Marxist groups did not enjoy political gains. By winter 1904 to 1905, however, the accumulated consequences of inept management of the economy and in the prosecution of the Russo-Japanese War reached a critical stage. A group under the leadership of the radical priest Gapon marched on the Winter Palace in Saint Petersburg (January 9, 1905) to submit a list of grievances to the tsar; troops fired on the demonstrators on this "Bloody Sunday:' In response to the massacre, a general strike broke out, evidently called by unions and the germs of the first soviets: it was followed by peasant revolts through the spring. During these same months, Russian armed forces were defeated by the Japanese and a lack of confidence in the regime became widespread. In June 1905, naval personnel on the battleship *Potemkin* mutinied while the ship was in Odessa. With this startling development, Nicholas II's government lost its nerve. In October 1905, Nicholas issued the October Manifesto that called for the convocation of a *duma*, or assembly, which would serve as an advisory body to the tsar: extended civil liberties to include freedom of speech, assembly, and press; and announced that Nicholas II would reorganize his government.

The leading revolutionary forces differed in their responses. The monarchist constitutionalists, the Octobrists, indicated that they were satisfied with the arrangements: the more liberal Constitutional Democrats, also known as the Cadets, demanded a more liberal representative system. The Duma convened in 1906 and from its outset to the outbreak of the First World War, was paralyzed by its own internal factionalism, which was exploited by the tsar's ministers. By 1907. Nicholas II's ministers had recovered real power. Russia experienced a general though fragile economic recovery that was evident by 1909 and lasted until the war.

The Habsburgs in Decline: Austria-Hungary

After the disruptions of the revolution of 1848 to 1849, the Austrian government had to address several major issues with which it was confronted: (I) whether a *kleindeutsch* or *grossdeutsch* Germany was best. (2) how to suppress the national aspirations of ethnic groups that resided in the Balkans, and (3) how to manage an empire that was not integrated because of historic tradition and cultural diversification.

During the 1850s, Habsburg leadership deferred any attempt to resolve problems, and in so doing, lost the initiative, To the north, Bismarck was developing the Prussian army in anticipation of a struggle with Austria over the future of Germany; in the Balkans. Hungarians and Czechs, while smarting from the setbacks of 1849, were agitating for national self-determination or, at the least, for a semiautonomous state, In 1863 to 1864, Austria became involved with Prussia in a war with Denmark. This war was a prelude for the German Civil War of 1866 between Austria and Prussia; Prussia prevailed. The impact of these developments on the Austrian government necessitated a reappraisal of its national policies. Without doubt the most significant development was the *Ausgleich*, or Compromise, which transformed Austria into the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Hungarians would have their own assembly, cabinet, and administrative system, and would support and participate in the imperial army and imperial government. Not only did the *Ausgleich*, assimilate the Hungarians and nullify them as a primary opposition group, it also led to a more efficient government.

From 1867 to 1914. Austria-Hungary continued to experience difficulties with the subject nationalities and with adjusting to a new power structure in central Europe in which Austria-Hungary was secondary to Germany. At the same time, it enjoyed a cultural revival in which its scholars (Sigmund Freud and Heinrich Friedjung), painters (Gustav Klimt and Hans Makart), dramatists (Hugo von Hofmannsthal), composers (Johannes Brahms and Gustav Mahler), and writers (Rainer Maria Rilke, Adalbert Stifter, and Stefan Zweig) were renowned throughout the world.

Balkan States and Disintegration of the Ottoman Empire

During the period from 1848 to 1914, the influence of the Ottoman Empire eroded steadily due to its internal structure and system, the ineptitude of its leaders, the lack of cohesion within the empire, the development of

nationalist ambitions among many ethnic groups in the region, and the expansionist policies of Austria-Hungary and Russia in the Balkans, and of Great Britain in the eastern Mediterranean.

By 1914, Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Montenegro were established as sovereign states. Austria had annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina, Britain held Cyprus, and Russia had extended its influence over the new Bulgaria.

The Eastern Question to the Congress of Berlin

Another challenge to the Concert of Europe developed in the 1870s with a stream of Balkan crises. Once again, the conflict initially involved Russia and Ottoman Turks, but it quickly became a conflict with Britain and Russia serving as principal protagonists. British concerns over Russian ambitions in the Balkans reached a critical level in 1877 when Russia went to war with the Turks.

In 1876, Turkish forces under the leadership of Osman Pasha defeated the Serbian army. Serbia requested assistance from the great powers and, as a consequence of their political pressure, the Turks agreed to participate in a conference in Constantinople: the meeting resulted in a draft agreement between the Serbs and Turks. However. Britain quietly advised the sultan to scuttle the agreement, which he did. In June 1877, Russia dispatched forces across the Danube. During the next month, Osman Pasha took up a defensive position there. During the siege, sympathy in the West shifted toward the Turks, and Britain and Austria became alarmed over the extent of Russian influence in the region. In March 1878, the Russians and Turks signed the Peace of San Stefano, but implementation of its provisions would have resulted in Russian hegemony in the Balkans, dramatically altering the balance of power in the Mediterranean. Specifically, it provided for the establishment of a large Bulgarian state under Russian influence: the transfer of Dobmdja, Kars, and Batum to Russia; the expansion of Serbia and Montenegro; and the establishment of an autonomous Bosnia-Herzegovina under Russian control.

Britain, under the leadership of Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, denounced the San Stefano Accord, dispatched a naval squadron to Turkish waters, and demanded that San Stefano be scrapped. Otto von Bismarck, now chancellor of Germany, intervened and offered his services as mediator.

Delegates of the major powers convened in Berlin in the summer of 1878 to negotiate a settlement. Prior to the meeting, Disraeli had concluded a series of secret arrangements with Austria, Russia, and Turkey. The combined impact of these accommodations was to restrict Russian expansion, reaffirm

the independence of Turkey, and maintain British control of the Mediterranean. The specific terms of the Treaty of Berlin resulted in the following: (1) recognition of Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro as independent states; (2) the establishment of the autonomous principality of Bulgaria; (3) Austrian acquisition of the right to occupy militarily Bosnia and Herzegovina; and (4) the transfer of Cyprus to Great Britain.

The Russians, who had won the war against Turkey and had imposed the harsh terms of the San Stefano Treaty, found that they left the conference with very little (Kars, Batum, and Dobmdja) for their effort. Although Disraeli was the primary agent of this anti-Russian settlement, the Russians blamed Bismarck for the dismal results. Their hostility toward Germany led Bismarck (1879) to embark upon a new system of alliances that realigned European diplomacy and rendered any additional efforts of the Concert of Europe futile.

In his last hurrah, the Reinsurance Treaty of 1887. Bismarck tried to appease his old Russian allies with assurances that Germany would rally to Russia's side should Austria attack, but anti-Russian sentiment had invaded the highest circles in Berlin and Potsdam, including the heir to the throne, so when Wilhelm II became king of Prussia and German emperor, he took the first opportunity to sack the pro-Russian Bismarck (1890). The path was now clear for the other powers to alienate Germany and Austria, thus precipitating the First World War.