**Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905)**

Although Nicholas II described himself as a man of peace, he favored an expanded Russian Empire. Encouraged the Minister of the Interior, the Tsar expanded into Manchuria and Korea. On 8th February, 1904, the Japanese Navy launched a surprise attack on the Russian fleet at Port Arthur.

The Russian Navy fought two major battles to try and relieve Port Arthur. At both, the Russians were defeated and were forced to withdraw. On 2nd January, 1905, the Japanese finally captured Port Arthur. The Russian Army also suffered 90,000 causalities in its failed attempt to take Mukden in Manchuria (February, 1905).

In May, 1905, the Russian Navy was attacked again. Twenty Russian ships were sunk and another five were captured. Only four Russian ships managed to reach safety.

These defeats led to criticism of the Russian government. Bloody Sunday was partly caused by the unpopularity of the war. The increase in revolutionary activity in Russia convinced Nicholas II that he needed to bring an end to the conflict and accepted the offer of President Theodore Roosevelt to mediate between the two countries.
Bloody Sunday (1905)

At the beginning of the 20th century the Russian industrial employee worked on average an 11 hour day (10 hours on Saturday). Conditions in the factories were extremely harsh and little concern was shown for the workers' health and safety. Attempts by workers to form trade unions were resisted by the factory owners and in 1903, a priest, Father George Gapon, formed the Assembly of Russian Workers. Within a year it had over 9,000 members.

1904 was a bad year for Russian workers. The cost of living so quickly that real wages declined by 20 percent. When four members of the Assembly of Russian Workers were fired from their jobs, Gapon called for industrial action. Over the next few days over 110,000 workers in St. Petersburg went out on strike.

In an attempt to settle the dispute, George Gapon decided to make a personal appeal to Nicholas II. He drew up a petition outlining the workers' sufferings and demands. This included calling for a reduction in the working day to eight hours, an increase in wages and an improvement in working conditions. Gapon also called for the establishment of universal suffrage (voting for all) and an end to the Russo-Japanese War.

Over 150,000 people signed the petition and on 22nd January, 1905, Gapon led a large procession of workers to the Winter Palace in order to present the petition to Nicholas II. When the procession of workers reached the Winter Palace it was attacked by the police and the Cossacks. Over 100 workers were killed and some 300 wounded. The incident, known as Bloody Sunday, signalled the start of the 1905 Revolution.
1905 Russian Revolution (1905)

Industrial workers all over Russia went on strike and in October, 1905, the railwaymen went on strike which paralyzed the whole Russian railway network. Later that month, Leon Trotsky established the St. Petersburg Soviet (a soviet is a "worker's council"). Over the next few weeks over 50 of these soviets were formed all over Russia.

Nicholas II made concessions to these groups and published the October Manifesto. This granted freedom of conscience, speech, meeting and association. He also promised that in future people would not be imprisoned without trial. Finally he announced that no law would become operative without the approval of a new organization called the Duma.

As this was only a counseling body, many Russians felt that this reform did not go far enough. Leon Trotsky and other revolutionaries denounced the plan. In December, 1905, Trotsky and the rest of the executive committee of the St. Petersburg Soviet were arrested.

The Tsar had a say in who filled many of the positions within the Duma. Tsar Nicholas II also retained for himself the right to declare war, to control the Orthodox Church and to dissolve the Duma.

At their first meeting (in May 1906), members of the Duma put forward a series of demands including the release of political prisoners, trade union rights and land reform for peasants. Nicholas II rejected all these proposals and dissolved the Duma. The next Duma convened in February, 1907. This time it lasted three months before the Tsar closed it down.
**WWI (begins in 1914)**

Industrial unrest in Russia continued throughout this period and in 1912 hundreds of striking miners were massacred at the Lena goldfields. During the first six months of 1914, almost half of the total industrial workforce in Russia took part in strikes.

In 1914 the Russian Army was the largest army in the world. However, Russia's poor roads and railways made the effective deployment of these soldiers difficult.

On the outbreak of the First World War Russia attempted invasion of East Prussia. However, by 29th August 1914, much of Russia's army was surrounded by German forces. They attempted to retreat but many of those troops were slaughtered or captured. The Battle of Tannenberg lasted three days. Only 10,000 of the 150,000 Russian soldiers managed to escape. The Germans, who lost 20,000 men in the battle, were able to take over 92,000 Russian prisoners.

By December, 1914, the Russian Army had 6,553,000 men. However, they only had 4,652,000 rifles. Untrained troops were ordered into battle without adequate arms or ammunition. In 1915 Russia suffered over 2 million casualties and lost many pieces of territory. Agricultural production slumped and civilians had to endure serious food shortages.

The Tsar, though he had no military experience, decided to leave St. Petersburg in the middle of all the industrial unrest and, instead, travel to the war front to be with his soldiers.