

Chp. 14 Russian Revolution

Main Idea: Long term social unrest in Russia erupted in revolution, ushering in the first Communist government.

Why it matters now: The communist Party controlled the Soviet Union until the country's breakup in 1991.

The oppressive rule of most 19th-century czars caused widespread social unrest for decades. Anger over social inequalities & the ruthless treatment of peasants grew. The czar's unfair governing sparked many violent reactions.



In 1881, Alexander III succeeded his father, Alexander II, to the throne & halted all reforms in Russia. He clung to the principles of autocracy, a government in which he had total power.

Anyone who questioned the absolute authority of the czar or worshiped outside the Russian Orthodox Church or spoke a language other than Russian was tagged as dangerous.

[Romanovs video clip](#)



To wipe out revolutionaries, Alexander III used harsh measures:

- He imposed strict censorship codes on published materials & writing documents, including private letters.
- His secret police carefully watched both secondary schools & universities.
- Teachers had to send detailed reports on every student.
- Political prisoners were exiled to Siberia, a region of eastern & central Russia



To establish a uniform Russian culture, he oppressed other national groups within Russia:

- He made Russian the official language & he forbade the use of minority languages, such as Polish in schools.
- He made Jews the target of persecution. He subjected them to new laws that encouraged prejudice.
- Jews could not buy land or live among other Russians.
- Universities set strict quotas for Jewish students.
- Organized violence against Jews broke out in many parts of Russia called **pogroms**.
- Police & soldiers stood by & watched Russian citizens loot & destroy Jewish homes, stores & synagogues.

Pogroms:

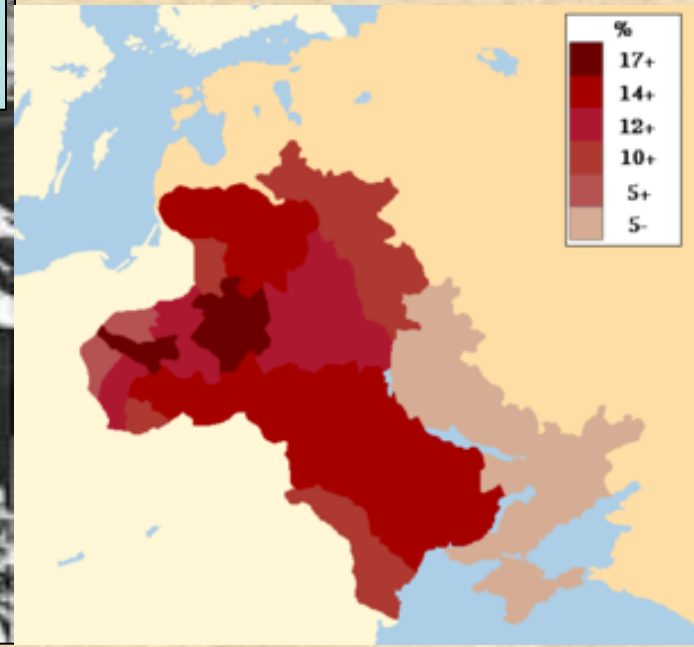
Pogroms were a form of race riots, most commonly Russia & Eastern Europe, aimed specifically at Jews & often government sponsored. Pogroms became endemic during a large-scale wave of anti-Jewish riots that swept southern Russia in 1881, after Jews were wrongly blamed for the assassination of Czar Alexander II.

In the 1881 outbreak, thousands of Jewish homes were destroyed, many families reduced to extremes of poverty; women sexually assaulted, & large numbers of men, women, & children killed or injured in 166 Russian towns.

The new czar, Alexander III, blamed the Jews for the riots & issued a series of harsh restrictions on Jews. Large numbers of pogroms continued until 1884, with at least tacit inactivity by the authorities.

An even bloodier wave of pogroms broke out in 1903-1906, leaving an estimated 2,000 Jews dead, and many more wounded. A final large wave of 887 pogroms in Russia and the Ukraine occurred during the Russian Revolution of 1917, in which between 70,000 to 250,000 civilian Jews were killed by riots led by various sides.

The victims, mostly Jewish children, of a 1905 pogrom in Dnipropetrovsk



Jews had long felt insecure within the Russian Empire &, after the assassination of Alexander II, they were driven from the countryside & forced to live in the towns along the Pale of Settlement, excluded from education & from public service. As a result, most Jews belonged to the lowest stratum of the unemployed or worked as artisans & small masters. Many fled the Russian Empire, mainly without passports, largely to escape poverty, military service & personal violence.



In 1894, when Nicholas II became czar, he announced, "The principle of autocracy will be maintained by me as firmly & unswervingly as by my father (Alexander III)"

He Refused to surrender any of his power.



At the beginning of Nicholas II's reign, Russia lagged behind the industrial nations of western Europe.

In the late 1890's Sergey Witte (VYEET-tyih), the czars minister, launched a program to move the country forward or to get them up to speed with the other industrial nations.

Through higher taxes & foreign investments, Witte helped finance the buildup of Russian industries.

The number of factories doubled between 1863 & 1900 & by 1900, Russia had become the world's fourth largest producer of steel behind the U.S., Britain, & Germany.



He also pushed for the building of the Trans-Siberian Railway-the world's longest continuous rail line. With the help of British & French investors, work began in 1891 & was completed in 1904.

It connected European Russia in the west with Russian ports on the Pacific ocean in the east



The growth of factories brought new problems among the people of Russia:

- Grueling working conditions
- Low wages
- Child labor
- Trade unions were outlawed

However, laborers who worked on the railways & in factories & who were unhappy with their low standard of living & lack of political power, still organized strikes.

The gap between rich & poor was enormous.

Amidst all the widespread industrial changes and unhappy workers, a revolutionary movement began to grow. They competed for power and eventually succeeded. They established a new government based on the views of Karl Marx. These revolutionaries believed that the industrial class of workers would overthrow the czar.

The industrial class would then form “a dictatorship of the proletariat.” In such a state, the workers would rule.

Note: The revolution had not started at this point. It only began to pick up steam due to the poor labor conditions that were taking place.