

3 Opposition to Tsardom 1881–1914

POINTS TO CONSIDER

This chapter takes as its main theme the growth of resistance to the tsarist regime. It looks at the range of movements, from those which advocated moderate reform through to those which believed in destroying tsardom altogether. There is an understandable tendency among historians to concentrate on those forces which were eventually to take power in the revolution of 1917. But it is important to remember that the victory of the Bolsheviks in 1917 was not inevitable. To gain a balanced view of the period covered by this chapter you need to be familiar with the other groups and parties that offered alternative solutions to the problem of how Russia could modernise itself.

KEY DATES

- 1870** Birth of Vladimir Ulyanov (Lenin).
- 1870s** Populist (Narodnik) peasant revolutionary movement developed.
- 1871** Populist terrorist group, 'The People's Will', was founded.
- 1881** Alexander II assassinated by 'The People's Will'.
- 1887** Lenin's elder brother executed for his involvement in a plot to murder Alexander III.
- 1897** Revolutionary Jewish Bund formed.
- 1898** All Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party (the SDs) of Marxist revolutionaries formed.
- 1901** Social Revolutionary Party (SRs), a development of Populism, formed under Victor Chernov
- 1902** Lenin published his pamphlet, *What Is To Be Done*, setting out his revolutionary programme.
- 1903** SDs split into Mensheviks (under Plekhanov) and Bolsheviks (under Lenin).
- 1905** Constitutional Democratic Party (Kadets) formed under Paul Milyukov.
Moderate reforming party, the Octobrists, led by Alexander Guchkov formed after the issuing of tsar's October Manifesto.
Soviets formed in St. Petersburg and Moscow.
- 1906** First Duma sat between April and June.
- 1907** Second Duma sat between February and June.
Third Duma began in November.
- 1911** Stolypin assassinated.
- 1912** Serious disturbances occurred in the Lena goldfields, Siberia.
Third Duma dissolved in June.
Fourth Duma began in November.

- How far is the claim by Witte that Russia was an economic colony of the more advanced states supported by the statistics on pages 20–21? (12 marks)
- 4. Source evaluation questions**, the type that asks you to judge the usefulness and/or reliability of one or two primary sources. A typical question might be:
How valuable are these sources to the historian who is studying the strength of the tsarist economy in 1914? (12 marks)
- 5. Lead-out questions**, the type that asks you to use one or two of the sources and your own knowledge to provide a historical explanation. A typical question might be:
Explain how these sources help to explain why Witte and Stolypin met resistance to their policies from the tsarist government. (15 marks)

1912 First edition of the Bolshevik newspaper, *Pravda*, published.
1914 Fourth Duma suspended on the outbreak of war in August.

I Introductory Survey

'The Reaction' that began under Alexander III and continued in the reign of Nicholas II (1894-1917) oppressed, but did not destroy, opposition to the tsarist regime. Indeed, despite greater police surveillance, opposition became more organised. A number of political parties, ranging from moderate reformers to violent revolutionaries, came into being. The government's policies of reaction and Russification combined to produce a situation in which many political and national groups were becoming increasingly frustrated by the mixture of coercion and incompetence that characterised the tsarist system. The rapid industrial growth in the 1890s had created a special problem. It had brought to the cities large numbers of peasants, who were attracted by the prospect of relatively well-paid factory work. When a depression followed in the first decade of the twentieth century it left many of these new industrial workers unemployed and angry. Their bitterness made them a serious threat to public order.

The government attempted to meet the problem by diverting attention away from domestic issues with a war against Japan in the Far East (see page 28). The aim was to unite the nation, but the reverse happened. Russia's humiliating military defeat in 1905 was blamed directly on the government's inept handling of the war. It was no coincidence that workers, peasants and middle-class liberals joined together in the year of Russia's defeat in a series of anti-government protests, which were serious enough to merit the description 'the 1905 Revolution'.

The disturbances obliged Nicholas II to make a number of political concessions. In his October Manifesto, he reluctantly gave in to the demand for the formation of a *duma*. But this did not mark a liberalising of the regime, as was soon illustrated by the ferocity of the political repression that followed once the disorder had been ended. The government, led by Stolypin as chief minister from 1906 to 1911, was ruthless in crushing opposition. But the strikes and disturbances continued despite the repression. By 1914, many reformists had become so disillusioned with the failure of the 1905 Revolution to lead to real advance that they had begun to consider violence as the only means by which to change the oppressive yet incapable tsarist regime.

Until the issuing of the October Manifesto in 1905, political parties were illegal in Russia. This had not actually prevented their formation but it had stifled their development as genuinely democratic bodies. Denied legal recognition, they often resorted to extreme methods in

order to spread their ideas. As a result, during the brief period of their permitted existence from 1905 to 1921, the Russian political parties proved generally to be highly suspicious and intolerant of each other. This made co-operation and collective action difficult to organise and sustain. Four main groups opposed to tsardom can be identified: the Populists, the Social Revolutionaries, the Social Democrats, and the liberals.

2 The Populists (*Narodniks*)

KEY ISSUE How did populism help to stimulate a revolutionary atmosphere in late imperial Russia?

Populism as a revolutionary movement dated from the 1870s. It regarded the future of Russia as being in the hands of the peasants who made up the overwhelming mass of the population. The Populists or *Narodniks* (from the Russian word for 'the people') looked to the peasants to take the lead in the transforming of Russia, beginning with the overthrow of the tsarist system itself. As with all the significant political movements that came into being in this period, the Populist leaders were drawn, not from the peasants, but from the middle and upper classes. The Populists regarded it as their duty to educate the uninformed peasantry into an awareness of its revolutionary potential. This involved 'going to the people', a policy by which the educated Populists went from the universities into the countryside to live for a period with the peasants in an attempt to incite them to revolution.

The scheme met with little success. The peasants were largely unmoved by the revolutionary socialist message preached to them. In desperation, some Populists turned to terrorism, which they defined euphemistically as 'the propaganda of the deed', as the only way of achieving their aims. In 1879, a group calling itself 'The People's Will' was founded with the declared intention of murdering members of the ruling class. This group, which was reckoned to be no more than 400 strong, gained notoriety two years later with its assassination of Alexander II. However, this act weakened rather than strengthened the Populist movement. The murder of a tsar who had initiated many reforms seemed to discredit the idea of reform itself and so justified the repression imposed in the aftermath of the assassination.

The importance of Populism lay in its methods rather than in its ideas. Its concept of a peasant-based revolution appeared unrealistic, given the political inertia of the Russian peasantry. What was lasting about Populism was the part it played in establishing a revolutionary tradition. All the revolutionaries in Russia after 1870 were influ-

enced, if not inspired, by the example of the Populist challenge to tsardom.

3 The Social Revolutionaries (SRs)

KEY ISSUE What range of opinion in Russia did the SRs represent?

The Social Revolutionary Party grew directly out of the Populist movement. The quickening of interest in political and social issues which accompanied the economic spurt of the 1890s was viewed by Populists as an opportunity to gain recruits for their revolutionary cause. They attempted to broaden their basis of appeal in order to attract the rapidly growing urban workforce to their revolutionary programme. The intention was to widen the concept of the 'people', so that it encompassed all those who wanted the destruction of the tsarist system. An important figure in this reshaping of Populist strategy was Victor Chernov, who played a major part in the formation of the Social Revolutionary Party in 1901 and became its leader. He was a member of the intelligentsia, and sought to provide a firmer theoretical base for Populism than its previous passionate but vague ideas had produced. However, as with all the revolutionary groups in tsarist Russia, the SRs were weakened by disagreements among themselves. Lev Trotsky described them in these terms:

- 1 [They were] formed at the beginning of the century from a fusion of several tendencies of the *Narodniks*. Representing the wavering interests of the small peasant proprietor, the party soon split into a group of Left Social Revolutionaries, anarchist in their leanings, and the
5 Right Social Revolutionaries.¹

In distinguishing between the left and the right elements, Trotsky was referring to the division of the SR Party into anarchists and revolutionaries. The former were the faction who wanted to continue the policy of terrorism inherited from 'The People's Will'. The latter were the more moderate element, who, while believing in revolution as their ultimate goal, were prepared to co-operate with other parties in working for an immediate improvement in the conditions of the workers and peasants. Between 1901 and 1905, it was the terrorist faction that dominated. During those years the SRs were responsible for over 2,000 political assassinations, including Plehve, the interior minister, and the tsar's uncle, the Grand Duke Sergei. These were spectacular successes but they did little to forge the desired link with the urban workers.

The 1905 Revolution brought more gains to the liberals than to the revolutionaries (see page 49). One effect of this on the SRs was that the more moderate element gained greater influence over party policy. This began to show dividends. From 1906, the SRs experi-

enced a growing support from the professional classes, from the trade unions (which had been legalised under the October Manifesto), and from the All-Russian Union of Peasants, which had been set up in 1905. At its first congress in 1906, the SR Party committed itself to 'revolutionary socialism' and gave a special pledge to the peasants that it would end 'the bourgeois principle of private ownership by returning the land to those who worked it'. It was their land policy which largely explains why the SRs remained the most popular party with the peasants. However, at the time, the congress decisions brought disruption rather than unity. The left wing broke away on the grounds that the party's programme ignored the industrial proletariat, while the right wing complained that congress policy was unworkable in current Russian conditions. Chernov tried to hold the factions together, but from 1906 onwards the SRs constituted a collection of radical groups rather than a genuinely co-ordinated party. Nevertheless, until they were outlawed by the Bolsheviks (see page 109) the SRs remained the party with largest popular following in Russia.

4 The Social Democrats (the SDs)

KEY ISSUE Why did Lenin develop a separate Bolshevik party within the SDs?

The All-Russian Social Democratic Labour Party was formed in 1898 as a Marxist party.

Marxism

Karl Marx (1818–83), the German revolutionary, had advanced the idea that human society operated according to in-built mechanisms which could be scientifically studied and then applied. He asserted that history was a continuous series of class struggles between those who possessed economic and political power and those who did not. The form of the conflict changed according to the historical period, but the essential struggle between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' was constant. He referred to this process of continuous class struggle as the dialectic. For revolutionaries in the nineteenth century, the most exciting aspect of Marx's analysis was his conviction that the contemporary industrial era marked the final stage of the dialectical class struggle. Human history was about to reach its culmination in the revolutionary victory of the proletariat (the industrial working class) over the bourgeoisie (the exploiting, capitalist, class).

The attraction of Marx for Russian revolutionaries is easy to understand. His ideas had been known in Russia for some time, but what gave them particular relevance was the 'great spurt' of the 1890s. This promised to create the industrial conditions in Russia which would make a successful revolution possible. The previously unfocused hopes for revolution could now be directed on the industrial working class. The first Marxist revolutionary of note in Russia was George Plekhanov. He had translated Marx's writings into Russian, and in 1883 had helped to found the first Marxist organisation in the country, the 'Group for the Emancipation of Labour'. His efforts to promote the idea of proletarian revolution had earned him the title 'the father of Russian Marxism'. Despite this, a number of the revolutionaries who had formed the SD Party in 1898 soon became impatient with Plekhanov's leadership. They found him too theoretical in his approach, and urged the adoption of more active revolutionary policies. The outstanding spokesman for this viewpoint was Vladimir Ulyanov, better known by his revolutionary pseudonym as Lenin.

V.I. LENIN

- 1870 Lenin born as Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov to a minor aristocratic family of Jewish ancestry
- 1887 his brother's execution intensified Lenin's revolutionary attitude
- 1897 exiled to Siberia, took the name Lenin (the most famous of the 160 aliases he used as a revolutionary)
- 1900 joined SD party
- 1902 wrote *What is to be Done?*
- 1903 led the Bolshevik breakaway movement in the SD
- 1905 returned to Russia in December but played no part in the Revolution
- 1906–17 in exile abroad for much of this period
- 1917 returned to Petrograd following the February Revolution and led the Bolsheviks in a successful coup in October
- 1917–20 led the Bolsheviks in consolidating their hold on Russia
- 1918 injured in an SR attempt on his life
- 1921 introduced NEP to save Russia from starvation

-Profile-



1922–23 suffered a number of severe strokes which left him speechless

1924 died

Lenin had been on the tsarist authorities' list of 'dangerous persons' since he was 17. The execution of his elder brother in 1887 for his part in an attempted assassination of Alexander III had made Lenin himself politically suspect. He lived up to his reputation. By the age of 20, his voracious reading of Marx's writings had turned him into a committed Marxist for whom revolution was a way of life. By the age of 30, his dedication to the cause of revolution in Russia had led to his arrest, imprisonment, and internal exile. Indeed, he was in exile in Siberia when the SD Party was formed in 1898. When he returned to western Russia two years later he set about turning the SD into a genuinely revolutionary party. With an SD colleague, Julius Martov, he founded a party newspaper, *Iskra* (the Spark), which he used as the chief means of putting his case to the party members. Lenin was concerned that Plekhanov was more interested in reform than in revolution. He was worried that the SDs were attempting to improve the conditions of the workers (a policy referred to as 'economism'), instead of pursuing their true goal, the transformation of the workers into a revolutionary force for the overthrow of capitalism. Lenin wanted conditions to get worse, not better. In that way the bitterness of the industrial proletariat would increase, and so bring revolution nearer.

Although Lenin despised the moderate, reformist intelligentsia, he argued, nonetheless, that it was only from that intellectual class that the leaders of revolution in Russia could be drawn. He set down his ideas on this theme in his pamphlet, *What is to be Done?*, published in 1902. The following extract is a key passage from it:

- 1 The history of every country teaches us that by its own ability the working class can attain only a trade-unionist self-consciousness, that is to say, an appreciation of the need to fight the bosses, to wrest from the government this or that legislative enactment for
- 5 the benefit of the workers. The Socialist [Communist] doctrine, on the other hand, is the outgrowth of those philosophical, historical and economic theories which had been developed by the representatives of the well to do, the intellectuals. By their social origin, Marx and Engels, the founders of modern scientific social-
- 10 ism, were themselves members of the bourgeois intelligentsia. The blind unfolding of the labour movement can lead only to the permeation of that movement with a bourgeois ideology, because the unconscious growth of the labour movement takes the form of trade unionism, and trade unionism signifies the mental enslave-
- 15 ment of the workers to the bourgeoisie.

Therefore our task as Social Democrats is to oppose this blind process, to divert the labour movement from the unconscious tendency of trade unionism to march under the protective wing of the bourgeoisie and to bring it under the influence of Social
20 Democracy instead.

Such beliefs inspired Lenin throughout his life. Orlando Figes said of him:

- 1 [T]here was no 'private Lenin' behind the public mask. He gave all of himself to politics. He rarely showed emotion, he had few intimates, and everything he ever said or wrote was intended only for the revolutionary cause. This was not a man but a political machine.
5 Lenin's personal life was extraordinarily dull. ... He did not smoke, he did not really drink, and apart from his affair with the beautiful Inessa Armand, he was not even interested in women. Krupskaya [his wife] called him 'Ilich', his nickname in the party, and he called her 'comrade'. She was more like his secretary than
10 his wife, and it was probably not bad luck that their marriage was childless.

Lenin lived for the revolution.

From a review article by Orlando Figes in The Sunday Times, Mar 2000

Lenin wrote *What Is To Be Done?* as an answer to the followers of Plekhanov, who were continuing to assert that success could be gained only by a broad grouping of the progressive, reformist, anti-tsarist elements in Russia. Lenin insisted that the way forward could be effectively organised only by a dedicated group of professional revolutionaries. His reference to the scientific nature of socialism was a crucial part of his argument. Revolution for Lenin was not a haphazard affair; it was part of a natural progression whose laws could be understood by scientific analysis. He considered that Marx had, indeed, already provided this understanding. What remained now was for true Marxist followers to apply the revolutionary message in Russia. This was why the workers could not be left to themselves; only through the leadership of the truly informed could the proletariat of Russia achieve victory in the class war. In the Russian context, this leadership was supplied by the revolutionary intelligentsia, which according to Lenin consisted, in effect, of himself and those Marxists who agreed with him. Only they could rescue the Russian working class and convert it to true socialism.

a) The Bolshevik–Menshevik split

The dispute between Lenin and Plekhanov came to a head during the second congress of the SD Party in 1903. Plekhanov tried to avoid confrontation, but Lenin deliberately made an issue of who had the right

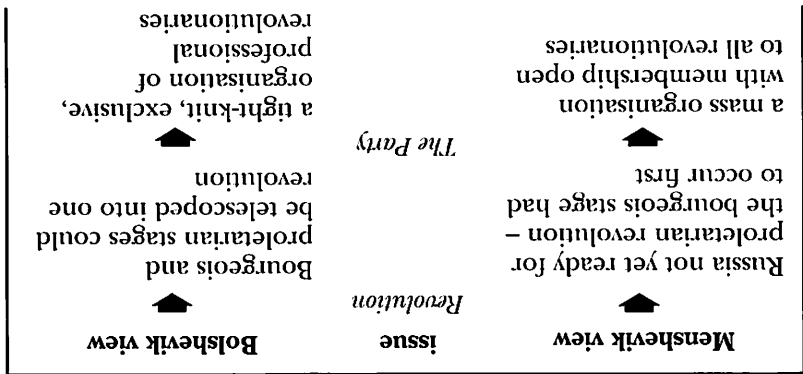
to membership of the Social Democratic Party. His aim was to force the SDs to choose between Plekhanov's idea of a broad-based party, open to all revolutionaries, and his own concept of a small, tightly-knit and exclusive party of professional revolutionaries. The congress was a heated affair, which often broke down into a series of slanging matches over points of procedure. A deep divide developed between Lenin and his *Iskra* co-editor, Martov. Their quarrel had as much to do with personality as with politics. Martov believed that behind Lenin's procedural tactics was a fierce determination to become dictator of the party. The following was typical of their exchanges:

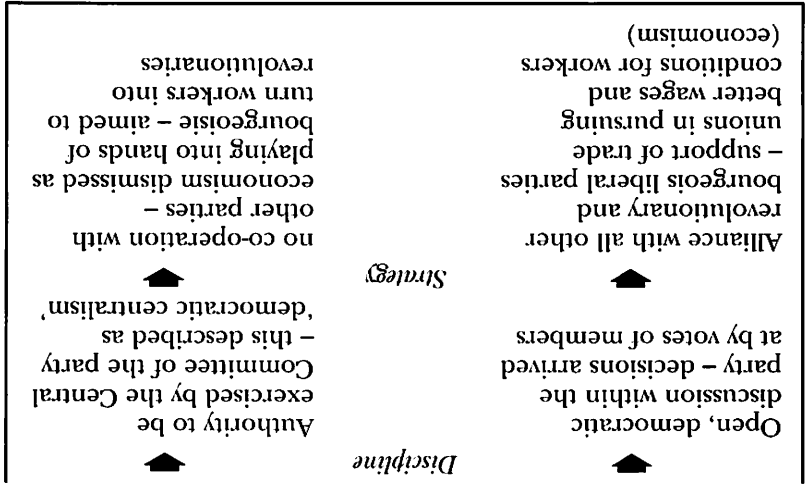
1 *Martov* – The more widely the title of 'member of the party' is spread, the better. We can only rejoice if every striker, every demonstrator, is able to declare himself a party member.

Lenin – It is better that ten real workers should not call themselves party members than that one chatterbox should have the right and opportunity to be a member.

In a series of votes, the SD congress showed itself to be evenly divided between Lenin and Martov. However, after a particular set of divisions had gone in his favour, Lenin claimed that he and his supporters were the majority. This led to their being called Bolsheviks (from *bolshevik* Russian for majority) while Martov's group became known as *skists*, Russian for minority) while Martov's group became known as *skists*, Russian for majority) while Martov's group became known as

By 1912 the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks had become two distinct and opposed Marxist parties. Lenin deliberately emphasised the difference between himself and Martov by resigning from the editorial board of *Iskra* and starting his own journal, *Vpered* (Forward), as an instrument for Bolshevik attacks upon the Mensheviks. A Bolshevik daily paper, *Pravda* (the Truth), was first published in 1912. Initially, the main point dividing Bolsheviks and Mensheviks was simply one of procedure. However, following the split in 1903 the differences between them hardened into a set of opposed attitudes. These can be illustrated in tabulated form:





Care should be taken not to allow hindsight to exaggerate the accuracy of Lenin's judgements or the significance of his role during the pre-revolutionary years. The later success of Bolshevism in the October Revolution (see page 95) has tempted writers to overstate the importance of Lenin in the period before 1917. For example, Trotsky, who joined Lenin in 1917 after having been a Menshevik, argued in his later writings that the Bolsheviks had been systematically preparing the ground for revolution since 1903. But the fact was that during the years 1904 to 1917 Lenin was largely absent from Russia; his visits were rare and fleeting. Although he continued from exile to issue a constant stream of instructions to his followers, the Bolsheviks played only a minor role in events in Russia before 1914.

Interestingly, the Bolsheviks were not listed by the police authorities as a major challenge to the tsarist system. In the pre-1914 period the numerical strength of the Bolsheviks varied between 5,000 and 10,000; even in February 1917 it was no more than 25,000. Before 1917, the Mensheviks invariably outnumbered them. Numbers, of course, are not everything. Determination is arguably more important. Whatever the apparent lack of influence of Lenin's Bolsheviks before 1917, the fact is that when a revolutionary situation developed in 1917 it was they who proved the best prepared to seize the opportunity to take over government. That in itself testifies to the real strength of the revolutionary party Lenin had created.

5 The Liberals

KEY ISSUE What had encouraged the growth of a liberal movement in tsarist Russia?

Liberalism

As used in Russia, the term 'liberal' described those who wanted political or social change, but who believed that it could be achieved by reforming rather than destroying the tsarist system.

The land reforms of Alexander II, which had led to the spread of the *zemstva*, had helped to create a progressive middle class in the countryside. This had been matched in the urban areas. The economic boom of the 1890s saw the rapid development of a small but ambitious class of industrialists, lawyers and financiers. It was among such social groups that liberal ideas for the modernising of Russia began to take hold. There was also often a strong national element in Russian liberalism. The national minorities viewed the liberal movement as a means of expressing their wish to be independent of Russian imperial control. Two principal liberal parties came to prominence in the pre-1914 period – the Octobrists and the Kadets.

a) The Octobrists

This group dated from the issuing of the tsar's manifesto of October 1905, which established the *duma*. The Octobrists were moderates who were basically loyal to the tsar and his government. They believed in the maintenance of the Russian Empire and regarded the manifesto and the establishment of the *duma* as major constitutional advances. The Octobrists were mainly drawn from the larger commercial, industrial and landowning interests. Their leading members were Alexander Guchkov, a factory owner, and Mikhail Rodzianko, a large landowner, both of whom were later to play a leading part in the Provisional Government of 1917 (see page 85). How relatively limited the Octobrists were in their aims can be gauged from their programme, issued in November 1905, which called for:

- 1 unity amongst those who sincerely want the peaceful renewal of Russia and the triumph of law and order in the country, who reject both stagnation and revolution and who recognise the need for the establishment of a strong and authoritative regime, which, together with the
- 5 representatives of the people, could bring peace to the country through constructive legislative work.

The limited objectives of the Octobrists led to their being dismissed by revolutionaries as bourgeois reactionaries. This is far from accurate. In the *dumas*, the Octobrists frequently voiced serious criticisms of the short-sightedness or incompetence of the tsarist government.

b) The Constitutional Democrats (Kadets)

The Constitutional Democrats (known alternatively as the Party of the

People's Freedom) also came into being as a party at the time of the 1905 Revolution. The Kadets, the largest of the liberal parties, wanted Russia to develop as a constitutional monarchy, in which the powers of the tsar would be restricted by a democratically-elected constituent (national) assembly. They believed that such a representative body would be able to settle Russia's outstanding social, political and economic problems. Lenin dismissed this as bourgeois political naivety, but there is no doubt that the dream of a constituent assembly remained a source of excitement and inspiration to Russian reformers in the period before the 1917 Revolution.

The Kadet Programme

- an All-Russian Constituent Assembly
- full equality and civil rights for all citizens
- the ending of censorship
- the abolition of redemption payments on land
- the recognition of trade unions and the right to strike
- the introduction of universal, free education.

The Kadets were the party of the liberal *intelligentsia*, containing progressive landlords, the smaller industrial entrepreneurs, and members of the professions. Academics were prominent in the party, as typified by the Kadet leader, Paul Milyukov, who was a professor of history. The Kadets became the major opposition voice in the first duma and were instrumental in forming the Provisional Government following the February Revolution in 1917.

6 The 1905 Revolution

KEY ISSUES What grievances gave rise to the 1905 Revolution? How revolutionary was the 1905 Revolution? Did the 1905 Revolution leave the tsarist system weaker or stronger?

a) Background

The situation created by the government's policy of political repression after 1881 was graphically described by Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910), the great Russian novelist and social reformer:

Russia lives under emergency legislation, and that means without any lawful guarantees. The armies of the secret police are continuously growing in numbers. The prisons and penal colonies are overcrowded with thousands of convicts and political prisoners, among whom the

5 industrial workers are now included. The censorship issues the most
 meaningful interdictions [bans]. At no previous time have the religious
 persecutions been so frequent and so cruel as they are today. In all the
 cities and industrial centres soldiers are employed and equipped with
 live ammunition to be sent out against the people. Yet this strenuous
 10 and terrible activity of the government results only in the growing
 impoverishment of the rural population, of those 100 million souls on
 whom the power of Russia is founded, and who, in spite of ever increas-
 ing budgets, are faced with famine which has become a normal condi-
 tion. A similar normal condition is the general dissatisfaction of all
 15 classes with the government and their open hostility against it.
 Autocracy is a superannuated [hopelessly outdated] form of govern-
 ment that may suit the needs of a Central African tribe, but not those
 of the Russian people, who are increasingly assimilating the culture of
 the rest of the world. That is why it is impossible to maintain this form
 20 of government except by violence.

(From Nicolai Tolstoy's 'Open address to Nicholas II', 1902)

The bleak picture that Tolstoy painted did not necessarily mean that confrontation, still less revolution, had to come. After all, if oppression is applied firmly enough it prevents effective challenges to government. What weakened the tsarist regime in the period before 1917 was not its tyranny but its incompetence. It is certainly true that the crisis which occurred in Russia in 1905 was in large measure due to the mishandling of the situation by the tsar and his government. This was to be shown by the speed with which the government reasserted its authority once it had recovered its nerve.

1905 marked the first time the tsarist government had been faced by a combination of the three main opposition classes in Russia – the industrial workers, the peasantry, and the reformist middle class. This was the broad-based revolt that most revolutionaries had been awaiting. Yet when it came it was accidental rather than planned. Despite the efforts of the various revolutionary parties to politicise events, the strikes and demonstrations in the pre-1905 period had been the result of economic rather than political factors. They had been a reaction to industrial recession and bad harvests. It was the tsarist regime's ill-judged policies that turned the disturbances of 1905 into a direct challenge to its own authority.

b) The Course of Events

The 1905 Revolution began with what has become known as Bloody Sunday. On 22 January, Father Gapon, an Orthodox priest and *Okhrana* double-agent, attempted to lead a peaceful march of workers and their families to the Winter Palace in St Petersburg. (The *Okhrana* were the state secret police whose special task was to hunt down subversives who challenged the tsarist regime.) The marchers'

intention was to present a loyal petition to the tsar, begging him to use his royal authority to alleviate their desperate conditions. However, the march induced panic in the police authorities in the capital. The marchers were fired on and charged by cavalry. There are no precise figures of those killed, but the casualties seem to have amounted to hundreds. The killings were depicted by opponents of the tsarist regime as a deliberate massacre of unarmed petitioners. Although Nicholas II was in fact absent from St Petersburg when these events took place, they gravely damaged the traditional image of the tsar as the 'Little Father', the guardian of the Russian people.

The immediate reaction to Bloody Sunday was a nationwide outbreak of disorder, which increased as the year went on. Strikes occurred in all the major cities and towns. Terrorism against government officials and landlords, much of it organised by the SRs, spread to the countryside. The situation was made worse by Russia's humiliation in the war against Japan (see page 28). The government was blamed for Russia's defeat, which led to further outrages, including the assassination of Plehve by SR terrorists. One newspaper reported that:

- 1 Hundreds of buildings, worth several millions of roubles, have been destroyed. All the buildings have been razed to the ground on some enormous estates. Many houses have been burnt down without reference to the relations which had existed between the peasants and the
- 5 landowners or the latter's political views.

An important factor in the dissatisfaction of the peasants was their fear that the government was about to seize the property of those families who had failed to pay off the mortgages taken out in the post-emancipation years (see page 24). The unrest and the government's difficulties in containing it encouraged the national minorities to assert themselves. Georgia declared itself an independent state. Witte remarked:

- 1 [Non-Russians], seeing this great upheaval, lifted their heads and decided that the time was ripe for the realisation of their dreams and desires. The Poles wanted autonomy, the Jews wanted equal rights, and so on. All of them longed for the destruction of the system of deliberate
- 5 oppression which embittered their lives. And on top of everything, the army was in an ugly mood.

In May, the Kadets, led by Milyukov, persuaded the majority of the liberal groups to join them in forming a 'Union of Unions', with the aim of organising a broad-based alliance that would include the peasants and the factory workers. A 'Union of Unions' declaration was issued:

- 1 All means are admissible in the face of the terrible menace contained in the very fact of the continued existence of the present government: and every means must be tried. We appeal to all groups, to all parties, all

organised unions, all private groups, and we say with all our strength, with all the means at our disposal, you must hasten the removal of the gang of robbers that is now in power, and put in its place a constituent assembly.

The summer of 1905 brought the still more disturbing news for the tsarist authorities of mutinies in the army and navy. In June, the crew of the battleship *Prince Potemkin* murdered their officers and deserted their squadron by sailing out of Russian waters. The end of the Russo-Japanese War in August did little to ease the situation. Indeed, Witte feared that the returning troops would join the revolution. If this happened, he said, 'then everything would collapse'. By the autumn, the industrial unrest had grown into a general strike. It was in this atmosphere that a development of particular moment occurred. In a number of cities, most notably in St Petersburg and Moscow, workers formed themselves into an elected soviet (Russian for council). The soviets began as organisations to represent the workers' demands for better conditions, but their potential as bases for political agitation was immediately recognised by revolutionaries. The Menshevik, Lev Trotsky, became chairman of the St Petersburg soviet and organiser of the general strike in the capital.

By October the tsar was faced by the most united opposition in Romanov history. But at this critical juncture the regime began to show the sense of purpose that it had so far lacked. Concession was unavoidable, but by giving ground the government intended to divide the opposition forces which confronted it. The liberals were the first to be placated by the granting of a duma. On Witte's advice, the tsar issued the October Manifesto in which he accepted the creation of a legislative (law-making) duma. Since the manifesto also contained a promise to introduce a range of civil rights, including freedom of speech, assembly and worship, and the legalising of trade unions, the liberals could claim a remarkable success. Their appetite for reform was satisfied, at least temporarily.

The peasants were the next to be bought off by an announcement in November that the mortgage repayments which had so troubled them were to be progressively reduced and then abolished altogether. The response was an immediate drop in the number of land-seizures by the peasants and a decline in the general lawlessness in the countryside.

Having won over the liberals and peasants, the government was now seriously opposed by only one major group – the industrial workers. Here the policy was one not of concession but of suppression. The government felt strong enough to attempt to crush the soviets. Despite the mutinies earlier in the year, the troops who returned from the Far East at the end of the war proved loyal enough to be used against the strikers. After a five-day siege, the headquarters of the St Petersburg soviet were stormed and the ringleaders, including Trotsky, were arrested. The suppression of the Moscow soviet was

even more violent. Lenin, who had been slow to take advantage of the 1905 Revolution, arrived in Moscow in December, only in time to witness the flames of the gutted soviet buildings.

c) Significance

A notable feature of the 1905 Revolution was how minor a part was played by the revolutionaries. Hardly any of them were in St Petersburg or Moscow when it began. Revolution occurred in spite, rather than because, of them. With the exception of Trotsky, none of the SDs made an impact on the course of events. This throws doubt on the notion of 1905 as a revolution. There is the further fact that in a number of important respects tsardom emerged from the disturbances stronger rather than weaker. Despite its disastrous failure to win the war against Japan, which produced protest throughout Russia and united the classes in opposition, the tsarist regime survived 1905 remarkably unscathed. The mutinies in the armed services did not spread and did not continue after the war. Loyal troops returned to destroy the soviets. The readiness with which the liberals and the peasants accepted the government's political and economic bribes indicated that neither of those groups was genuinely ready for revolution. It is true that the tsar appeared to grant significant concessions in the October Manifesto, but these were expedients rather than real reforms. The Duma was not intended to be, nor did it become, a limitation on the tsar's autocratic powers. This was evident from the Fundamental Laws, which Nicholas II promulgated in 1906:

The Sovereign Emperor possesses the initiative in all legislative matters. The Fundamental Laws may be subject to revision in the State Council and the State Duma only on His initiative. The Sovereign Emperor ratifies the laws. No law can come into force without his approval.

The lesson of 1905 was that as long as the tsarist government kept its nerve and the army remained loyal, the forces of protest would find it very difficult to mount a serious challenge. The events of 1905 also raised questions about the extent to which the liberals wanted change in Russia. Few of them enjoyed their experience of mixing with the workers during the Revolution. They found proletarian coarseness unattractive and were frightened by the primitive forces they had helped to unleash. One middle-class proprietor, who had thrown his house open to the strikers, remarked on the difficulty of sustaining his belief in the goodness of people who abused his hospitality by molesting his daughters and spitting on his carpet. Peter Struve, who had been a Marxist before joining the Kadets in 1905, spoke for all frightened liberals when he said 'Thank God for the tsar, who has saved us from the people'.

Trotsky's later reflections on the character of the 1905 Revolution provides an apt summary of its essential characteristics:

1 The events of 1905 were a prologue to the two revolutions of 1917. The Russo-Japanese War had made tsarism totter. Against the background of a mass movement the liberal bourgeoisie had frightened the monarchy with its opposition. The workers had organised independently of the bourgeoisie in soviets. Peasant uprisings to seize the land occurred throughout the country. Not only the peasants, but also the revolutionary parts of the army tended towards the soviets. However, all the revolutionary forces were then going into action for the first time, lacking experience and confidence. The liberals backed away from the revolution exactly at the moment when it became clear that to shake tsardom would not be enough, it must be overthrown. This sharp break of the bourgeoisie with the people, in which the bourgeoisie carried with it considerable circles of the democratic intelligentsia, made it easier for the monarchy to differentiate within the army, separating out the loyal units, and to make a bloody settlement with the workers and peasants. Although with a few broken ribs, tsarism came out of the experience of 1905 alive and strong enough.²

7 The Dumas 1906–14

KEY ISSUES Were the dumas ever anything more than a talking shop?
Did they represent an opportunity for tsarism to modernise itself?

There were four dumas in the years between the 1905 Revolution and the February Revolution of 1917. The four elections produced the following results:

party or group	1st Duma 1906	2nd Duma 1907	3rd Duma 1907–12	4th Duma 1912–17
SDs (Mensheviks)	18	47	—	—
SDs (Bolsheviks)	—	—	19	15
SRs	—	37	—	—
Labourists *	136	104	13	10
Kadets	182	91	54	53
Octobrists	17	42	154	95
Progressists**	27	28	28	41
Rightists***	8	10	147	154
National parties	60	93	26	22
others	—	50	—	42
total	448	502	441	432

*The SRs as a party officially boycotted the elections to the first duma, but stood as Labourists.

**The Progressists were a party of businessmen who favoured moderate reform.

***The Rightists were not a single party; they represented a range of conservative views from right of centre to extreme reaction.

a) The First Duma, April-June 1906

The high hopes of the liberals that the granting of the duma marked a real constitutional advance were dimmed even before it first met. Having survived the challenge of 1905, the tsarist regime quickly recovered its confidence. Early in 1906, it successfully negotiated a substantial loan from France. This lessened the likelihood of the duma being able to exercise a financial hold over the government. A greater limitation on the duma's influence was the tsar's promulgation of the Fundamental Laws, which was timed to coincide with the opening of the duma. In addition to declaring that 'Supreme Autocratic Power' belonged to the tsar, the Laws announced that the duma would be composed of two chambers; one would be the elected duma, the other would be a state council, the majority of whose members would be appointed by the tsar. The existence of a second chamber with the power of veto deprived the elected duma of any genuine legislative control. Taken together with the declaration that no law could come into being without the tsar's approval, these restrictions made it clear that the tsarist regime had no intention of allowing the concessions it had made in 1905 to diminish its absolute authority.

The result was that the duma met in a mood of bitterness. The elections had returned a duma that was dominated by the liberal and reformist parties. They immediately voiced their anger at what they regarded as the government's renegeing on its promises. They demanded that the rights and powers of the duma be increased. Goremykin, the chief minister, told them that their demands were 'inadmissible' and Nicholas II was reported as saying, 'Curse the duma. It is all Witte's doing'. After two months of acrimonious wrangling, the tsar ordered the duma to be dissolved. In frustration, 200 Kadet and Labourist deputies reassembled at Vyborg in Finland where they drew up an 'Appeal', urging the people of Russia to defy their government by non-payment of taxes and refusal to obey conscription orders.

The Vyborg Appeal was an ill-considered move. The response from the population was not national passive disobedience but scattered violence. This provided the government with a ready excuse for retaliation. The tsar appointed Stolypin as chief minister to act as his strong man. The Vyborg group were arrested and debarred from reelection to the duma. This was the prelude to Stolypin's introduction of a policy of fierce repression, which he sustained until his assassination in 1911. Martial law was proclaimed and a network of courts-martial, with wide-reaching powers, was used to quell disturbances. There were so many executions (over 2,500 between 1906 and 1911) that the hangman's noose became known throughout Russia as 'Stolypin's necktie'.

b) The Second Duma, February-June 1907

The Kadet failure in 1906 had important long-term effects. Although the Kadet Party survived under the leadership of Millyukov, it never really recovered from its humiliation. The liberal cause had discredited itself, thus allowing both the left and the right to argue from their different standpoints that the future of Russia lay either in socialist revolution or extreme reaction.

The immediate result was that in the elections for the second duma the number of Kadet seats was halved. The beneficiaries were the SDs and the SRs, who between them returned 188 deputies. Since the right also had greater numbers than in the previous assembly, there was considerable disagreement within the duma as well as between it and the government. Stolypin, who, despite his stern repression of social disorder, was willing to work with the duma in introducing necessary reforms, found his land programme strenuously opposed. The tsar was particularly incensed to learn of the duma's criticism of the government's administration of the army. Amid scenes of disorder, following government accusations that the SD and SR deputies were engaging in subversion, the second duma was dissolved after barely three months' existence.

c) The Third Duma, November 1907-June 1912

Despite the opposition shown by the first two dumas, the tsar made no attempt to dispense with the duma altogether. There were two main reasons for this. The first related to foreign policy. The tsar was keen to project an image of Russia as a democratic nation. He was advised by his foreign ministers, who at this time were in talks with France and Britain (see page 27), that Russia's new allies were considerably impressed by the existence of an apparently representative national assembly.

The second reason was that the duma had been rendered docile by the government's doctoring of the electoral system, so as to return an assembly from which the critics of tsardom were largely excluded. This had been achieved by Stolypin's introduction of new electoral laws which greatly restricted the right to vote. The new franchise laws effectively limited the vote to the propertied classes. In the election to the third duma, only one in six of the male population was entitled to vote. The peasants and industrial workers were virtually excluded. The consequence was (as the table on page 50 shows) that the third and fourth dumas were heavily dominated by the right-wing parties, a reversal of the position in the first and second dumas in which the radical parties had held a large majority.

With the balance of the parties redressed in this way, Stolypin developed better relations with the third duma, which enabled him to pursue his land reforms without opposition from the deputies.

This is not to say that the *duma* was entirely subservient. It exercised its right to question ministers and to discuss state finances. It also used its committee system to make important proposals for modernising the armed services. Among the 2,571 bills it approved were social reform measures that included a scheme of national insurance for industrial workers.

c) The Fourth Duma, November 1912–August 1914

It was Stolypin's tragedy, as it had been Witte's, that his abilities were never fully appreciated by the regime he tried to serve. Following his murder in 1911, the various ministers the tsar appointed were distinguished only by their incompetence. Since they lacked political imagination, their only course was further repression. Between 1911 and 1914 the regime's terror tactics were part cause, part effect, of a dramatic increase in public disorder, which gradually returned to the proportions of 1905. The number of strikes listed as 'political' by the Ministry of Trade and Industry rose from 24 in 1911 to 2,401 in 1914. The following extract from the report of a Moscow *Okhrana* agent in 1912 was typical of the news reaching the government:

- 1 There has never been so much tension. People can be heard speaking of the government in the sharpest and most unbridled tones. Many say that the 'shooting' of the Lena workers recalls the 'shooting' of the workers at the Winter Palace of January 9 1905. Influenced by questions in the *duma* and the speeches which they called forth there, public tension is increasing still more. It is a long time since even the extreme left has spoken in such a way, since there have been references in the *duma* to 'the necessity of calling a Constituent Assembly and overthrowing the present system by the united strength of the proletariat'.

The reference to the Lena workers recalled the notorious incident that occurred in 1912 in the Lena Goldfields in Siberia. Demands from the miners there for better pay and conditions were resisted by the employers, who appealed to the police to arrest the strikers' leaders as criminals. The issue thus became the much larger one of trade union rights in Russia. When the police moved into Lena the strikers closed ranks and the situation rapidly worsened, resulting in troops firing on and killing or injuring a large number of miners. The *Okhrana* appeared to have acted as *agents provocateurs* in order to identify the ringleaders of the strike.

The agent's report is also significant in its reference to the protests in the fourth *duma*, which although later described by post-1917 revolutionaries as having been a cowed, ineffectual, body was obviously capable of making spirited protest. The truth was that many moderates in the *duma* had begun to despair of the government's responding realistically to the problems that confronted Russia. Alexander Guchkov told the Octobrist Party conference in 1913:

- 1 [The] attempt made by the Russian public, as represented by our party, to effect a peaceful, painless transition from the old condemned system to a new order has failed. Let those in power make no mistake about the temper of the people; let them not take outward indications of
- 5 prosperity as a pretext for lulling themselves into security. Never were the Russian people so profoundly revolutionised by the actions of the government, for day by day faith in the government is steadily waning, and with it is waning faith in the possibility of a peaceful issue of the crisis.

In the following year the *duma* expressed its sense of impending catastrophe in a formal resolution:

- 1 The Ministry of the Interior systematically scorns public opinion and ignores the repeated wishes of the new legislature. The *duma* considers it pointless to express any new wishes in regard to internal policy. The Ministry's activities arouse dissatisfaction among the broad masses
- 5 who have hitherto been peaceful. Such a situation threatens Russia with untold dangers.

After 1917, it was usual for historians to follow the lead of Bolshevik critics in dismissing the later *dumas* as having been merely rubber stamps of government policy. However, modern scholars tend to be less critical. They refer to the *dumas'* frequent criticisms of government policy, their productive work in such areas as education and state insurance, and suggest that it was only the ineptitude of the tsarist government that prevented the *dumas* from making a greater contribution to the development of Russia.

8 Conclusion

KEY ISSUE Was the period 1881–1914 a time of lost opportunity for tsardom?

The economic policies of Witte and Stolypin and the introduction of the *duma* were important advances, but they were not enough to alter the essentially reactionary character of the tsarist system. The government remained hostile towards reform. The industrial spurt of the 1890s had offered an opportunity for Russia to modernise herself, but a sustained policy of modernisation required not simply economic progress but a commitment to political change as well. This the tsar was never willing to give. His resistance to change would have mattered less if the system had operated efficiently. But the tsarist autocracy was both oppressive and inefficient, thereby alienating the progressive elements in society, which could see no possibility of real advance in Russia as long as government and administration remained in the hands of incompetents.

It was this that undermined the work of the few enlightened ministers, such as Witte and Stolypin, within the government. They were reformers but they were also loyalists. Indeed, it was their loyalty to the system that led them to consider reform as a way of lessening the opposition to it. The irony was that they were not trusted by the representatives of the very system they were trying to preserve. It is for this reason that historians have suggested that in failing to recognise the true worth of Witte and Stolypin, the tsarist regime unwittingly threw away its last chance of survival. By 1914, all the signs were that imperial Russia was heading towards a major confrontation between intransigent tsardom and the forces of change. It was to be the war of 1914–17 that would determine what form that conflict would take.

References

- 1 Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution* (Gollancz, 1985) p.239
- 2 Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution* (Gollancz, 1985) p.34

Working on Chapter 3

The groups who came to oppose tsardom during this period covered a wide political spectrum. One of your main aims in studying this chapter should be to gain an understanding of these shades of opinion. The Bolsheviks deserve close attention since they were ultimately to seize power and establish a regime that lasted for nearly three quarters of a century. You are likely to be asked a great deal about them. This is why you need to make sure that you have grasped the main features of Marxism, the theory on which both the SD parties based their politics. There is no need at this stage to go too deeply into the theory but be sure that you understand what is meant by the dialectic and the class war. Lenin is a crucial figure in this respect, and you should aim to familiarise yourself with his thinking. A grasp of the subsequent history of Russia down to 1924 and, indeed, beyond, requires a working knowledge of Lenin's concept of revolution.

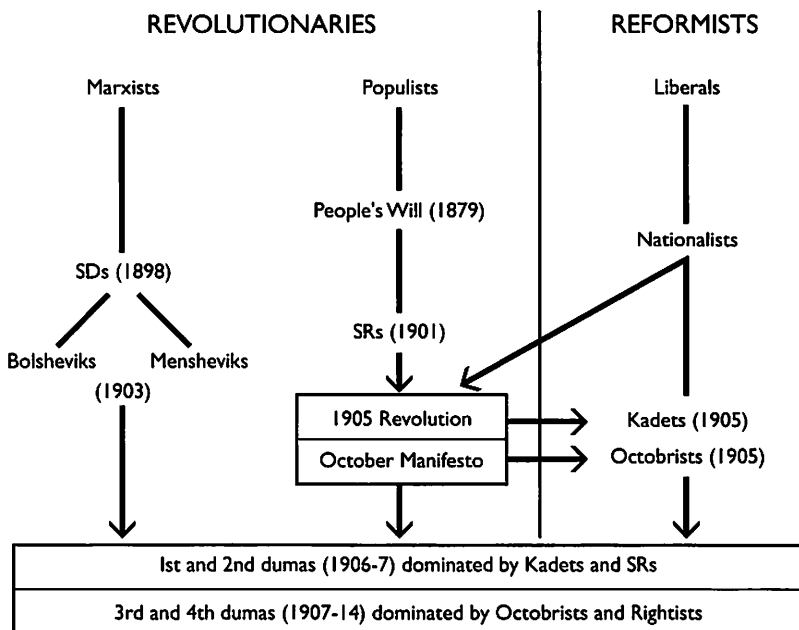
Answering structured and essay questions on Chapter 3

Structured questions are the type that begin with such leads as 'Describe . . .', 'Describe how . . .', 'Show how . . .', 'In what ways did . . .?' and 'Describe the ways in which . . .'. Typical questions based on the material in this chapter might be:

1. Describe how the Populists aimed to bring about change in Russia.
2. Describe the way in which SD Party split into Bolshevik and Menshevik factions in 1903.

Summary Diagram

Opposition to Tsardom 1881–1914



3. In what respects did the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks differ in their views on revolution?
4. In what ways did Lenin adjust Marxist ideas to make them fit the Russian context before 1914?
5. Describe the difficulties encountered by the dumas between 1906 and 1914

The more difficult type of essay question either asks you to explain causation, that is to analyse why things occurred the way they did, or asks you to make a judgment on a historical proposition. The questions on causation are usually in a 'why?' form with such leads as, 'Why was ...?', 'Explain why ...' and 'Account for ...'. Examples might be:

6. Why was the tsarist system faced with such a wide range of opposition in 1905?
7. Account for the inability of the revolutionary parties to gain from the 1905 Revolution.
8. Explain why the tsar was able to survive the 1905 Revolution with his power still intact.

Examples of questions calling for your judgment might be:

9. How far do you agree that the 1905 was a revolution without revolutions?
tionaries?
10. Examine the validity of the claim that the dumas between 1906 and 1914 were only a talking shop.

Consider question 8. The requirement is to explain why the tsar held on to his authority. Draw up a list of the opposition forces in 1905. Rank them according to their relative strength and importance. Then list the resources that the tsarist regime had at its disposal. Now ask yourself the question, 'Was the opposition powerful enough to be a real threat when set against the basic strength of the tsarist regime in 1905?' If you then pose yourself further supplementary questions you will find that an answer to the basic essay question will start to form. 'How significant was the coming together of the three social groups – liberals, peasants and industrial workers?' 'Was their union planned or merely accidental and superficial?' 'How soon did the regime recover its nerve?' 'Did not the events show that tsardom possessed sufficient political and military strength either to buy off or to smash the opposition?' It would be appropriate to refer to Trotsky's observations on 1905. He emphasised the inexperience and lack of confidence of the revolutionaries, stressed how the liberals had been frightened of revolution, and laid particular weight on the government's retention of the loyalty of the armed services. Since these ideas come from someone who was both an opponent of the regime and a prominent participant in the events of 1905, they merit a central place in your answer.

Source-based questions on Chapter 3

1. *Lenin's Revolutionary Ideas*

Study the extract from Lenin's writings on pages 40–1, and then answer the following questions:

- a) What do you understand Lenin to mean by saying (line 2) that 'by its own ability the working class can attain only a trade-unionist self-consciousness'? (6 marks)
- b) Using your own knowledge and the evidence in the extracts, examine Lenin's views on the role of the *intelligentsia* in revolution. (8 marks)

2. *The 1905 Revolution*

Read the extract from Trotsky's address on pages 45–6 and from Trotsky's reflections on page 50. Then answer the following questions:

- a) What features of tsarist repression does Trotsky emphasise in this extract? (8 marks)

58 Opposition to Tsardom 1881–1914

- b) Using your own knowledge, assess the accuracy of Trotsky's explanation of the eventual withdrawal of the liberals from the 1905 Revolution. (10 marks)
- c) How closely do the descriptions given by Tolstoy and Trotsky agree in their analyses of the forces opposing tsardom? (12 marks)

3. *The Dumas*

Study the table on page 50 and the extracts on pages 53–4, and then answer the following questions:

- a) What does the table of election results reveal about the political shifts in the duma between 1906 and 1912? (6 marks)
- b) According to the *Okhrana* agent's report on page 53, what part did the duma play in the creation of social tension in Russia? (8 marks)
- c) To what extent do Guchkov's speech and the duma resolution on page 54 present different pictures of the political situation in Russia before 1914? (10 marks)
- d) Assess the strengths and weaknesses of each of the three extracts as evidence for the role of the dumas between 1906 and 1914. (15 marks)