



## History at A Level Summer preparation work for prospective students

In Year 12 you will be studying Communist states in the twentieth century: Russia 1917 – 91 and Mao's China 1949 – 76.

**Read the information on the following page in preparation for a test in the first lesson of the course.**

Here are some films that may help you to understand the time period you will study next year:

### **Russia**

- Animal Farm (directed by Joy Batchelor and released in 1954)
- Child 44 (directed by Daniel Espinosa and released in 2015)
- Doctor Zhivago (directed by David Lean and released in 1965)
- Enemy at the Gates (directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud and released in 2001)

### **China**

- Watch the documentary below. It is 20 minutes long and will give you an overview of Mao's China. Mao's China - One Man's Revolution [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TfJy\\_wduFy4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TfJy_wduFy4)
- Watch the film The Last Emperor (directed by Bernardo Bertolucci and released in 1987)

In the first lesson of the course your teachers will ask you what you thought of these films and what you learnt about Russia and China from watching them. Enjoy!

# Russia up to 1914

Up until this period, the Russian Empire was a European superpower. It was the largest country in the world stretching from the Black Sea in the west to the Bering Sea in the extreme east of the Asian continent. It also had a huge population that included, alongside Russians, large numbers of Germans, Poles, Slavs and Asians. Among this diverse population, just about every major religious faith was represented.

Unlike Western Europe, however, the Russian Empire was politically, economically and socially backwards. There was little industry and the vast majority of the population were peasant farmers working in an agricultural system that had changed little since the Middle-Ages. Furthermore, most of the population were illiterate and many still existed as serfs - effectively slaves under the control of wealthy landowners.

## Autocratic government

This vast, diverse Empire was ruled by a series of Tsars. The Tsars were autocrats. This meant that the Tsar, and only the Tsar, governed Russia. There were no legal or constitutional methods by which Tsarist power could be challenged. The Empire did not have a parliament or elected assembly and there were no elections.

To help him run the vast Russian Empire, the Tsar had a number of ministers who were appointed by him and responsible only to him. In fact, the only way in which Tsarist autocracy could be challenged was by acts of violent rebellion. Freedom of speech was strictly censored and the Tsar's will was enforced by a large police system that would report suspicious behaviour and destroy subversive groups. The only genuine limit to the power and influence of the Tsar was the sheer vastness of the Empire and the scale of corruption and incompetence on the part of his ministers and state officials. The far-flung corners of the Empire, some many thousands of miles away from Moscow, would often prove ungovernable, even for the Tsar.

## The 'Pillars of Autocracy':

The Tsarist state system had developed over a long period. The Tsar's authority was supported by several features, which have become known as the 'Pillars of Autocracy'.

**The Orthodox Church** - The Tsar was the head of the Church. Accordingly, the Church reinforced his authority. Among the huge peasant population, the Church was very influential. Official Church doctrine stated that the Tsar was appointed by God, and that any challenge to the Tsar - the 'Little Father' - was an insult to God. The Church made sure that peasants kept on hearing this message.

**The Civil Service** - The Civil Service was made up of administrators and officials who carried out the instructions of the Tsar and his Ministers. They were appointed and paid by the Tsarist state and were very loyal to it.

**The Police** - In Tsarist Russia, the police had a vital role in keeping watch for enemies of the Tsar, and arresting them as required. Particularly important here was the **Okhrana**, the secret police. Agents of the Okhrana worked undercover, infiltrating organisations and groups which might present a danger to the Tsar.

**Censorship** - All books and newspapers in Russia were censored so that people would not be influenced by liberal or socialist ideas. Any material which was thought to be dangerous was banned. Any person trying to circulate banned books or newspapers ran the risk of being detected by the Okhrana.

**The Law** - The Tsarist legal system was designed to support autocracy and Tsarist authority. A standard punishment for opponents of the Tsar was exile to the remote region of Siberia. Many thousands of people seen to be enemies of the state were sent to Siberia where they were so far away that they had little chance of threatening Tsarist power.

**The Army** - The Tsar had a huge army, and it was a very effective means of enforcing Tsarist power. At times of civil unrest, because of high food prices, for example, the arrival of Cossack cavalry regiments usually meant that things calmed down fairly quickly.

**The size of the Russian empire** - The country itself helped maintain Tsarist authority. The bulk of the population were peasant farmers. Most of them were illiterate and this made it difficult to spread liberal or revolutionary ideas using books or pamphlets.

These peasants lived largely in remote, widely dispersed villages. This made it difficult for them to unite in a challenge to the Tsar. The sheer size of Russia and the poor state of the roads and railways also meant that it was difficult for ideas to spread.

### **Threats to the Tsar's regime:**

From the late 19th century through to the disastrous outbreak of World War I in 1914, a series of threats emerged to the Tsar's authority. At the end of the World War these dark clouds would break in a revolutionary storm that would bring about the end of 300 years of Tsarist rule.

**Peasant unrest** - During the period until 1916, Russia had no form of income tax. As a result the Tsar raised money to maintain his regime by taxing the produce of the peasant farmers. The burden of taxation was so great that periodic riots broke out. Although these riots were put down, it proved that a large number of the Russian population were unhappy with life under the Tsar's regime.

**Revolutionary movements** - From the 1880s, Marxist ideas began to spread through Russia. Based on the theories of the German economist Karl Marx, these ideas put forward the idea that the proletariat - the underclass of society - would rise up in rebellion and seize power from the wealthy ruling class and establish a fairer society.

Groups such as the Socialist Revolutionary Party (S.R.) and the Bolsheviks took these ideas to heart and actively sought to undermine the influence and power of the Tsar, winning the support of the peasants by promising reforms that would make them better off.

**Military defeat** - Russia had fought a short but disastrous war against Japan from 1904 until 1905 for control of strategic territories in China. The humiliation of this defeat brought critical attention to the Tsar's regime.

**The 1905 Revolution** - On the 9 January 1905 a demonstration of factory workers campaigning for better working conditions was brutally put down by Russian soldiers. Up to 200 people were killed and the aftermath brought about a short-lived revolution in which the Tsar lost control of large areas of Russia. Although the revolution failed, it served as a serious warning of what might happen in the future. The lessons were not learned and, after World War I, future revolutions would meet with far greater success.